



NARRATIVES CROSSING BORDERS

THE DYNAMICS OF CULTURAL INTERACTION

Edited by Herbert Jonsson, Lovisa Berg,
Chatarina Edfeldt and Bo G. Jansson



STOCKHOLM
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Narratives Crossing Borders

The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction

*Edited by Herbert Jonsson, Lovisa Berg,
Chatarina Edfeldt & Bo G. Jansson*



STOCKHOLM
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Published by
Stockholm University Press
Stockholm University
SE-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden
www.stockholmuniversitypress.se

Text © The Author(s) 2021 License CC-BY 4.0

Supporting Agency (funding): Dalarna University (Högskolan Dalarna)

First published 2021
Cover Illustration: Life in Shibuya
Cover License: Public domain
Cover designed by Christina Lenz, Stockholm University Press

Stockholm Studies in Culture and Aesthetics (Online) ISSN: 2002-3227

ISBN (PDF): 978-91-7635-140-6
ISBN (EPUB): 978-91-7635-141-3
ISBN (Mobi): 978-91-7635-142-0
ISBN (Paperback): 978-91-7635-143-7

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj>

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA. This license allows for copying any part of the work for personal and commercial use, providing author attribution is clearly stated.

Suggested citation:

Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.). 2021. *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj>. License: CC-BY 4.0.



To read the free, open access version of this book online, visit <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj> or scan this QR code with your mobile device.

Stockholm Studies in Culture and Aesthetics

Stockholm Studies in Culture and Aesthetics (SiCA) (ISSN 2002-3227) is a peer-reviewed series of monographs and edited volumes published by Stockholm University Press. SiCA strives to provide a broad forum for research on culture and aesthetics, including the disciplines of Art History, Heritage Studies, Curating Art, History of Ideas, Literary Studies, Musicology, and Performance and Dance Studies.

In terms of subjects and methods, the orientation is wide: critical theory, cultural studies and historiography, modernism and modernity, materiality and mediality, performativity and visual culture, children's literature and children's theatre, queer and gender studies.

It is the ambition of SiCA to place equally high demands on the academic quality of the manuscripts it accepts as those applied by refereed international journals and academic publishers of a similar orientation. SiCA accepts manuscripts in English, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian.

Editorial Board

Frida Beckman, Professor of Literature at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University

Jaqueline Berndt, Professor of Japanese Language and Culture at the Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies, Stockholm University

Jørgen Bruhn, Professor of Comparative Literature at the Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies at Linnaeus University in Växjö

Anna Cullhed, Professor of Literature at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University

Karin Dirke, Associate Professor of History of Ideas at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University

Johanna Ethnersson Pontara, Associate Professor of Musicology at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University

Jacob Lund, Associate Professor of Aesthetics and Culture at the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University

Catharina Nolin, Associate Professor of Art History at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University

Sonya Petersson (coordination and communication), PhD Art History, Research Officer at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University

Meike Wagner (chairperson), Professor of Theatre Studies at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University

Titles in the series

1. Rosenberg, T. 2016. *Don't Be Quiet, Start a Riot! Essays on Feminism and Performance*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/baf>. License: CC-BY 4.0
2. Lennon, J. & Nilsson, M. (eds.) 2017. *Working-Class Literature(s): Historical and International Perspectives*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bam>. License: CC-BY 4.0
3. Tessing Schneider, M. & Tatlow, R. (eds.) 2018. *Mozart's La clemenza di Tito: A Reappraisal*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/ban>. License: CC-BY 4.0
4. Petersson, S., Johansson, C., Holdar, M. & Callahan, S. (eds.) 2018. *The Power of the In-Between: Intermediality as a Tool for Aesthetic Analysis and Critical Reflection*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/baq>. License: CC-BY 4.0
5. Hayden, H. 2018. *Modernism as Institution: On the Establishment of an Aesthetic and Historiographic Paradigm*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bar>. License: CC-BY 4.0
6. Lennon, J. and Nilsson, M. (eds.) 2020. *Working-Class Literature(s): Historical and International Perspectives. Volume 2*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbf>. License: CC-BY 4.0

7. Petersson, S. (ed.) 2021. *Digital Human Sciences: New Objects—New Approaches*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbk>. License: CC-BY 4.0
8. Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C., and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) 2021. *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj>. License: CC-BY 4.0

Peer Review Policies

Guidelines for peer review

Stockholm University Press ensures that all book publications are peer-reviewed. Each proposal submitted to the Press will be sent to a dedicated Editorial Board of experts in the subject area for evaluation. The full manuscript will be reviewed by chapter or as a whole by two external and independent experts.

A complete description of Stockholm University Press' peer-review policies can be found on the website: <http://www.stockholm.universitypress.se/site/peer-review-policies/>

The Editorial Board of Stockholm Studies in Culture and Aesthetics applied a single-blind review during manuscript assessment. The Board expresses its sincere gratitude towards all researchers involved in this project.

Recognition for reviewers

Stockholm University Press and the Editorial Board would like to extend a special thanks to the reviewers, who contributed to the process of editing this book, for their work and time spent on reviewing the manuscript of this book.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Herbert Jonsson, Lovisa Berg, Chatarina Edfeldt & Bo G. Jansson

IN-BETWEENNESS

Freedom to Know Me: The Conflict between Identity and Mennonite Culture in Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness* 33

Rita Dirks

Migrants and Other Others in *2020* by Javier Moreno 51

Carolina Leon Vegas

Questioning the Border in Yoko Tawada's Poetics of Trans-Formation: *Akzentfrei* (2016) and *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende* (2016) 75

Eriberito Russo

Human Beings after Catastrophe: Poetical Portraits by Primo Levi and Tamiki Hara 99

Veronica De Pieri

CULTURAL TRANSFER

Between Zurich and Romania: A Dada Exchange 123

Amelia Miholca

From the Secular to the Sacred: The Influence of Sufism on the Work of Leila Aboulela 145

Billy Gray

Inscribing Difference: Code-Switching and the Metonymic Gap in Post-Colonial Literatures 169

Katalin Egri Ku-Mesu

"Dangerous" Beauty: Imagining the Other in the *Noh* Play *Sesshōseki* 189

Dunja Jelesijevic

News Narratives across Borders: The Convergence of Interests and Patterns of Meaning in International Media Coverage of Disaster 207

Jamie Matthews

CULTURAL MEDIATION

Images of Italy: Cultural Representations in the Peritext of
Translational National Anthologies in Sweden 229

Cecilia Schwartz

Re-Imported Literature or Double Domestication: *Shizuko's
Daughter* by Kyoko Mori 255

Hiroko Inose

Self-Translation in Transcultural Mode: Francesca Duranti
on how to Put 'a Scent of Basil' into One's Translations 275

Arianna Dagnino

Established and Alternative Literary Criticism: A Study of
Marguerite Duras's Works Reviewed in Sweden 307

Mattias Aronsson

TRAVEL AND MIGRATION

Liminality, Migration and Transgression in *El Metro* by Donato
Ndongo-Bidyogo 339

Carles Magrinyà

"Bestimmt wird alles gut": Journeys and Arrivals in Contemporary
German Children's Books 357

Anneli Fjordevik

Same Urban Legends, Different Bad *Hombres*: The Risk of
Narratives across Borders about Deviant Others 375

Gonzalo Soltero

Travel in Ribi Hideo's Novels or the Search for an Alternative
Writing Style in Japanese 405

Dan Fujiwara

A "Spiritual Journey" Through the "Middle" Kingdom: Travel and
Translation in François Cheng's Translingual Novel 429

Shuangyi Li

About the Authors 455

Introduction

Herbert Jonsson, Lovisa Berg,
Chatarina Edfeldt & Bo G. Jansson

We live in an age of increasing movement of people, their ideas, beliefs and artifacts. Cultural encounters and influences on a global scale have become richer than ever before, but at the same time, another global movement is becoming even more visible. Walls and borders are constructed and enforced, nationalism, xenophobia, and populism, in all their guises, are growing stronger in place after place. In this contradictory time of openness and enforced borders, as many scholars in the humanities and social sciences, we have found it highly relevant and important to explore how borders are transgressed and put into question, and reflect over the outcomes of such processes. Hence, the present volume aims at presenting a collection of essays that not only focus on narratives of border crossing, but also, taken as a whole, becomes a strong statement of intellectual and theoretical diversity. The readers of this collection will find some of their favorite concepts and ideological standpoints, but they should also be prepared that they will encounter methods and perspectives that feel uncommon and challenge their expectations. Our aim is to show that an understanding of the movement over cultural borders, in all its complexity, also needs to question the processes of theoretical conformity, commonly expressed through the establishment of fields, subjects, theoretical fashions and coteries, and which all too often become an obstacle to critical inquiry. Obviously, each of the chapters in the present collection will benefit from delimitations of topic and perspective, but the heterogeneity of the collection, as a whole, is essential to encourage readers to discover

How to cite this book chapter:

Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. 2021. Introduction. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 1–29. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.a>. License: CC-BY 4.0

new ways of thinking. It may be likened to a kaleidoscope moving around the central axis of border-crossing narratives, offering ever new approaches to understanding. The different chapters are also connected by a transnational, or transethnic, research approach, which is essential for studying the multiple dimensions of the collection's central topic and what follows is an outline for a general theoretical framework, stressing in particular its cross-disciplinary quality and the "travelling" of its key concepts.

For the past decades, various disciplines engaged in cultural and aesthetic studies, both in the social sciences and the humanities, have taken a "transnational turn" in a need to transcend the limiting scope of conceptualizing and understanding aesthetic expressions, influences, identity formations, cultural phenomena, social movements and change within an exclusively national framework. In order to better understand the new political, social and economic realities of a globalized world (migration processes of people, artefacts, commodities and ideas) the transnational research approach and transcultural reading practices have been implemented within wide range of research areas. These transnational readings have in different ways been conceptualized as various "turns" (paradigm shifts); hence two serving examples: "the translational turn" in cultural studies, advocating for a broadening of the concept of *translation*, reaching beyond its traditional linguistic context (transmitting from a source to a target language) into wider encompassing complex cultural dimensions involved in all kinds of mediating processes occurring in cultural-encounters (e.g. Bachmann-Medick, 2012; Bassnett, 1998), and the "transcultural turn" in cultural memory studies, which has allowed a shift from the methodological "nation-culture bind" to a focus on remembering across borders of nations and cultures (Crownshaw, 2010; Erll, 2011a, 2011b). The benefit of using a transcultural perspective is that it sets the ground for a broadened understanding of "the many fuzzy edges of national cultures of remembrance, the many shared sites of memory that have emerged through travel, trade, colonialism and other forms of cultural exchange" (Erll, 2011a, p. 65).

Transculturality and a variety of related and interchangeable concepts are applied throughout the volume to describe collective

and individual subject positions in expressions of cultural transfer and exchange. Such concepts have proved useful to capture the recent transformations of societies, communities and identity formations as textures woven of multiple cultural encounters and mutual exchange (e.g., Nordin et al., 2016, pp. 11–13; Welsch 1999). However, it is also important not to overlook that border-crossing cultural encounters and transcultural exchanges are not new phenomena dictated only by recent globalization processes. Rather, cultural exchange has occurred throughout human history and in the words of Laura Doyle, “Transnational studies puts nations back into the dialectical history from which they emerged” (Doyle, 2009, p. 1).

A transnational approach has also become increasingly important in the field of literary studies, in which the recent re-definition(s) and re-thinking of the area of *world literature* has turned more globally oriented and inclusive of non-Western texts. Literary texts are understood as (inter)relational and as entities crossing boundaries and borders. An important recent contribution from this area is the attentiveness to the uneven conditions of symbolic and economic capital involved in how narratives migrate in circulation and translation across borders (e.g., Helgesson *et al.* 2018; Mani 2017; Sapiro 2014). These sociological aspects of a narrative’s circulation are addressed in the volume through essays related to translation studies and reception theory (especially in the chapters by Schwartz, Aronsson, Inose, and Egri Ku-Mesu).

Something the examples above (providing cases of transnational research approaches) have in common with the other current transnational discourses fostered within the social sciences and humanities, is their profoundly inter- and transdisciplinary character and the use of “travelling” key concepts (Neumann & Nünning, 2012; Bal 2002). Concepts such as, “cultural transfer”, “cultural mediation”, “cultural transformation”, “cultural negotiation”, “reframing” and “exchange” have proved themselves useful to encompass and describe the multidimensional human creative activity taking place within cultural encounters and border zones. The conceptual transfer and this travelling of theories between different fields is not objective, linear, and unproblematic. Concepts are not fixed and established entities, instead they are “travelling

concepts”, that is, “dynamic and changeable as they travel back and forth between diverse academic contexts” (Neumann & Nünning, 2012, p. 3; Bal 2002). As noted by Neumann and Nünning: “Approaches, theories and concepts in the study of culture are not only heavily imbued with, and shaped by, particular historical, intellectual and local traditions, they also come with ideological freight and often unconscious biases” (2012, p. 2). This rationale has guided the theoretical and methodological focus of this volume to, first and foremost, not pay critical attention to specific buzzwords or single concepts as, for example, “cultural transfer”, “cultural mediation” or “cosmopolitanism.” The chapters are instead linked through their explorations of borders and boundaries, a theme chosen, in the words of Wendland: “since interaction (violent or non-violent) between cultures is mainly evident and virulent in their contact zones i.e. on their boundaries, borderlands or frontiers” (2012, p. 57).

The chapters make use of narratives as looking glasses to examine borders and boundaries and, more specifically, the resulting effects, when they are transgressed and traversed. A globally inclusive perspective has been maintained throughout the volume. The narratives studied, as well as the scholars themselves and their academic abodes, originate from a wide range of linguistic, geographical, and cultural contexts, covering Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, West-African, European, and Central and North American aspects. Each of the chapters includes several geographical positions in addition to identity positions. The variety of perspectives offered in the different chapters often reaches beyond the dominating Western concepts and includes studies that offer a multitude of theoretical approaches that critically examine how border crossings have inspired, or simply resulted in, narratives of geographically diverse sources.

Most of the chapters focus on narratives of fiction. Many of them would fit into the category of “border-crossing fiction” proposed by Black (2010, p. 3). It is the type of fiction that highlights the opposition between the subject and object, the self and the other, and seeks novel ways to overcome, if not reconcile, this opposition. But in this volume, narratives are also understood in a broader sense; the chapters not only examine concepts,

approaches and beliefs materialized in novels, poetry, drama, children's books, and literary anthologies, but also in newspaper articles, criticism and urban myths, and hence attempt to explain the relation between our notion of reality and the expressions or representations of the same. Such narratives have always represented an important vehicle to express complex collective and individual life conditions and identity formations in times of social and cultural change. Critical and representational analyses are thereby crucial for understanding and reconciling both situated historical and social events and new realities in times of social and political transformation.

The concept of the border is also highly ambiguous, and the act of crossing may imply, not only movement from one place to another, but the spaces and positions in-between. All chapters in the collection deal with borders that may be defined as, in some sense, spatial, that is, geographical, national, cultural (ethnic), linguistic, or based on identity constructions. In that sense, their topics are connected to a traditional definition of the border, whereas the process of crossing the border is scrutinized from several angles. Some chapters also go further and explore borders that may be materialistic and geopolitical (market conditions for literary circulation), institutional (established and non-established criticism), or symbolic (sense of belonging, exclusion, marginalization).

The present volume share thematic interest with an increasing number of publications, notably in the field of literary studies, that break away from the related, but narrower, frameworks of post-colonial and area studies. Many of these take the format of edited collections of essays. Important examples are the second volume of *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Society in a 'Post'-Colonial World* (Davis, et al., 2005), which explores South African fiction and examples of world literature in English in the light of transculturality, multiculturalism and hybridity, and *Crossing Borders, Dissolving Boundaries* (Viljoen, 2013), which offers analyses of literary texts and how they enact, and form, bordering processes with the purpose of gesturing towards a borderless world. Related, but with a somewhat different approach, is *Cross Worlds: Transcultural Poetics: An Anthology* (Waldman

& Wright, 2014), which deals with the act of writing itself, and how writers and translators position themselves when they write across borders. Of high relevance is also the volume *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections* (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2017), which has its focus on the border itself and its significance. Belonging to the field of border studies, which has mostly been concerned with the political, legal, and historical aspects of borders, it shows that the aesthetic aspect of human creativity in relation to borders is a fruitful object of study. In addition, there are two collections of essays produced by the same research group at Dalarna University which initiated the present volume: *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature* (Nordin, et al., 2013) and *Transcultural Identity Constructions in a Changing World* (Nordin, et al., 2016).

These diverse, but still related, publications may display more of theoretical conformity than the present volume, but they all share the aim to increase our understanding of cultural interactions and its ever-changing variety. Readers who are prepared to move beyond the well-known topics, which they are likely to find in some of the chapters, should be confident that they will gain new insights.

The volume has four major parts, within which chapters are gathered under separate headings:

1. **In-Betweenness:** This part includes four chapters that analyze prose and poetry that describe the state of being outside the borders of a cultural community. This state may be both voluntary and involuntary, both liberating and painful. Topics cover a Canadian novel about the excommunication of a Mennonite girl, the outsider aesthetics of the Japanese-German author Yoko Tawada, a Spanish novel exploring the otherness of characters in the non-spaces of a future society, and poetry formed by the genocides of the second world war.
2. **Cultural Transfer:** The five chapters that make up this part all discuss and investigate the movement of the narrative expressions themselves. They show not only how such narratives develop and changes in new contexts, but also that

they in turn affect these contexts. Here the chapters deal with the influence of Romanian folk culture on Dadaist poetry and drama, expressions of Islam in the works of an English migrant author, code switching in English novels from West Africa, the Pan-Asian origins of a Japanese Noh play, and the convergence of news narratives on the global level. These topics show how the transfer of a narrative from one culture to another can be both creative and dynamic, but that there are also opposite forces that may dilute and flatten their expression.

3. **Cultural Mediation:** The four chapters included in this part study both the transmission of literary works and the transmission of culture through literary works. Topics cover the stereotypical pictures of foreign cultures displayed in Swedish anthologies of Italian literature and in the back-translation into Japanese of Japanese culture. A thorough discussion of the concept of transculturality offers tools to understand the process of authorial self-translation from Italian to English, and an analysis of the role of the prosumer in the reception of the Swedish translations of Duras' novels becomes an investigation of the role of the blogosphere in relation to more traditional forms of critique.
4. **Travel and Migration:** The journey, in all its ambiguity, physical through space as well as conceptual and textual, are presented from different angles in the five chapters of this part. The topics range from representations of liminality in an Equatoguinean migration novel, to German children's stories on migration via a discussion on urban legends in the US and Mexico, and two chapters on travel writing, the first on a non-native writer publishing in Japanese and the second on a Chinese writer publishing in French. The chapters deal with both the actual migration of people and how this is expressed on different levels in fiction, and the metaphorical inner travelling of the protagonists. In relation to the travel of narratives both the translational processes and the cultural reception and adaptation are discussed.

There are alternative ways to group these chapters, but we propose that these headings point at possible points of connection between the texts, which will stimulate comparative readings, and reflections.

In-Betweenness

The four chapters included in the first part of the collection all deal with literary texts that tell stories about people who, for different reasons, find themselves outside the borders of a cultural community. Passing a border is seldom a smooth transition from one state into another, but rather a movement, whether painful or liberating, into the unknown. In anthropology the concept of liminality is commonly used for such states in which a person has left, but not yet arrived, and remains in a sort of limbo outside connections and contexts. The liminality depicted in these chapters is, however, not a temporary state, but a stable position of being outside, of leaving the enclosure of a culture but not fully entering another. And this may well be inevitable, as any individual crossing the border will carry a history of behaviors, attitudes and values, which will affect how this individual receives, and is received by, the world on the other side.

The notion of in-betweenness presupposes the existence of hegemonic and stable cultures, and suggests an outsider's relationship to these. From the point of view of those confident in their belonging to such a culture, the individuals residing in the in-between space are often perceived as odd and alien. They do not longer belong to the place that they left and are forever outside the place that they are aiming for. They are Others, both here and on the other side, and thus their otherness denies an otherness in the simplistic sense of binary oppositions, which has become widely used in academic discourse. Consider, for instance, the often quoted definition by Zygmunt Bauman: "abnormality is the other of the norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, barbarity the other of civilization, animal the other of the human, woman the other of man, stranger the other the native, enemy the other of friend, 'them' the other of 'us', insanity the other of reason, foreigner the other of state subject, lay public the other of the expert" (1991, p. 14).

Useful as this binarity may be when dealing with power relations, in which the one defined as the Other is always the oppressed part, otherness in this sense will fail to explain different aspects of being an outsider, even when on the other side, and that this in some cases may even be experienced as something attractive. The more optimistic, or positive, notion of otherness, suggested by Palumbo-Liu (2012), the Other who is an object of our interest as readers (whether we succeed to understand this Other or not), has a general bearing on the act of reading border-crossing literature, and have greater relevance here. It is still an otherness viewed from our point of view, which may be logical considering the semantics of the word, but what we can learn from the first two chapters in the present collection is that the perspective may be turned around and become that of the Other herself.

The concept of in-betweenness is used frequently in postcolonial theory to describe the many ways in which a human being may, at the same time, be both included in and excluded from a culture. For many readers this concept will probably function as a reference to a theorist like Homi K. Bhabha, due to his frequent use of this and related concepts. Compare, however, the German expression “Zwischenraum” that we will encounter in the second chapter. It is the in-between space central for the aesthetics of Yoko Tawada. After reading this chapter, perhaps we will be more apt to recall the name of Tawada as more relevant and up to date, when we encounter writing about this state of being both inside and outside the cage. It may be a celebration of independence and freedom, as in the first two chapters, or a study of alienation and lack of belonging, as in the third chapter, or again, as in the fourth chapter, the painful expression of trauma in which the notion of cultural belonging has ceased to be relevant.

In the first chapter, entitled *Freedom to Know Me: The Conflict between Identity and Mennonite Culture in Miriam Toew's A Complicated Kindness*, Rita Dirks focuses on this Canadian writer's novel from 2004. The protagonist here, Nomi Nickel, is a sixteen-year-old Mennonite girl from southern Manitoba, Canada, who tells the story of her short life before her excommunication from the closed community of the fictional East Village. Set in the early 1980s, the novel details the events that lead up to Nomi's

excommunication, or shunning. Nomi's exclusion is partly due to her embracing of the culture of the surrounding society through popular music and books. Insofar as Toews's novel presents the conflict between the teenaged narrator and the patriarchal, conservative Mennonite culture, the book stands "in-between", at the crossroads of negative freedom ("No Me") and positive freedom ("Know Me"). Rita Dirks argues, that since the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation, Mennonites have sought negative freedom, freedom from persecution, yet its own tenets foreclose on the positive freedom of its individual members. Toews presents this conflict between this early modern religious subculture and postmodern liberal democracy through the eyes of a sarcastic, satirical Nomi, who, in this "Bildungsroman", must come to terms with the dialectic of her hybrid identity: her position of being "in-between" the negative freedom of "No Me" and positive freedom of "Know Me".

In the second chapter, *Questioning the Border in Yoko Tawada's Poetics of Transformation: Akzentfrei (2016) and Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende (2016)*, Eriberto Russo, makes a thorough reading of these two books, starting out from research concerned with German intercultural and transcultural literature. Yoko Tawada is an author born in Japan and currently living in Germany, who writes in both Japanese and German, but Russo's study takes only her German texts into account. *Akzentfrei* is a collection of essays, and *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende* is a collection of poems. The reading of these two books aims at mapping Tawada's original poetics, as it is discussed in many of her essays and other critical writings. The study is thus an analysis of an author in the light of the author's own ideas, which are largely based on liminality and spaces and on "in-betweenness", the notion of "in-between space" ("Zwischenraum") and the dissolution (and shaping) of borders and borderlines. In this context the French anthropologist Marc Augé's concept of "non-place" ("non-lieux") is put into play. The term refers to spaces of transience, for example airports, where the human beings remain anonymous, spaces that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as real places. The concept of "non-place" goes well hand in hand with Tawada's will not to be defined. Her entire work can

be seen as the presentation of a tendency to refuse to be locked into any category, to be put into any determined and fixed place.

The third chapter, *Immigrants and Other Others in 2020* by Javier Moreno, written by Carolina Leon Vegas, is a study of the four main characters in the Spanish writer Javier Moreno's novel *2020* (2013). This story offers, in a sinister tone, through the portraits of the oddness or "otherness" of the four main characters, a dystopian image of Madrid in socioeconomic decline in the year 2020. The center figure is Bruno Gowan, a successful businessman of Scottish; he is a Stavrogin-like figure who is the link between the other main characters, Josefina, Nabil, and Jorge. Josefina, the daughter of Gowan, is an anorexic woman attracted by luxury items. Nabil, an unemployed Saharawi man, and Jorge, suffering from Asperger, are living together in an abandoned plane at an airport. The oddness and uniqueness, of the four main characters form the core of the novel. Further, this otherness adopts many different expressions and is studied in relation to different notions of space and body. Regarding for example Nabil, his otherness is related to space, to his identity somewhere "in-between" Africa and Europe, and to his living in a plane at an airport, i.e. at a place in-between nations. Further the "otherness" of for example Josefina is of a bodily character, related to her anorexia and obsession by her own body. All in all, the portraits of the four main protagonists, as isolated and deviant individuals, build together a world in decline that leaves little to hope for.

The fourth and final chapter in this section, written by Veronica De Pieri and entitled *Human Beings after Catastrophe: Poetical Portraits by Primo Levi and Hara Tamiki*, is a comparative study of two poetical expressions of that extreme kind of "otherness" which is unique to traumatic experiences of disasters and atrocities of global dimensions. The first of these texts falls into the category of the "Shoah Literature", the literature on the Holocaust, and is Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (*Se questo è un uomo*, 1947). The second text belongs to the category of the "Atomic Bombing Literature", texts on the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and is Hara Tamiki's *This Is a Human Being* (*Kore ga ningen na no desu*, 1948). The aim of De Pieri's study is to demonstrate how, regardless of territorial, cultural, and

stylistic boundaries between the two authors, a similar human response toward catastrophe and disaster can be detected in the two literary productions. The study builds on a comparison on stylistic, figurative, and expressive levels and attempts to reveal the analogous literary solutions adopted by the two authors to depict human's frailty in front of trauma. Both authors were personal witnesses to the disasters and atrocities they describe in their poetic texts. Their strong commitment unveils inner compulsions to bear witness and to convey the catastrophes to the memory of future generations. The comparison between the two poetic texts reveals how they both, even though the terrible disasters they describe were meant to divide human beings, on the contrary ends up overpassing any boundary and unifying different catastrophic experiences by the power of literature.

A question that remains after reading these four chapters is how we should understand the construction of meaning and identity when an obvious belonging to a certain community is not an option. We are often told that these matters are culturally and socially constructed, suggesting that we are helplessly stuck in our history. Even in these chapters, simple labels are used based on ethnicity or nationality, although these become dissolved in the different narratives. What is left becomes an open question. The last chapter suggests that there is a universality outside the realm of culture, here expressed by physical pain. It is the body, the animal, rather than the cultured being. The similarity between the holocaust and the atomic bombings of Japan may indeed give a challenge to any kind of ethical relativism, especially in a time when political leaders again have started to consider the use of nuclear weapons, but it is a specific case. In the other chapters culture is essential for understanding, but not in a firmly contextualized and stereotypical manner. Rather, these chapters highlight the uniqueness of the individuals inhabiting the in-between spaces. The conclusion would be that real understanding is first possible once we break the boundaries.

Cultural Transfer

The second part of the collection consists of five chapters that all investigate how aspects of a narrative, when moved from a

cultural context to another, not only transforms the new context in which they are placed but become transformed themselves. It is in this sense the term cultural transfer is used here, stressing that all forms of cultural expression have multiple origins and will give rise to ever new and mixed forms, when transferred to new times and places. “Cultural transfer” as an established concept is associated with certain movements within cultural history and literary studies. Rossini and Toggweiler trace the concept’s origin back to French and German historical studies of the mid-1980ies (2014, pp. 6–7). Attempts to delimit an academic field of cultural transfer studies, mostly focusing on European topics, may indeed be possible to identify, most recently represented by the “Peripheral Autonomy?” project (Broomans, van Voorst & Smits, 2012).

However, the study of how cultures influence each other has been a given in many other disciplines. It makes up an important part of academic fields such as historical linguistics, comparative literature, art history, ethnomusicology, and religious studies, besides cultural studies in general. There is often a focus on the relationship between centers of power and the powerless. Studies may, as in the present collection, deal with the ambiguous influences between the center and the periphery of Europe, the transmission of Sufism in a secular Western Europe, the impact of Chinese culture (and in extension the cultures of the Asian continent) on Japanese cultural expressions, and how English as the language of the colonizer has been digested and recreated by the colonized. Within media and communication studies, the theories of cultural imperialism and the study of the unevenness of the transmission of information offer yet another perspective on the concept of cultural transfer. This may be more colored by political standpoints and activism, but it also offers fruitful topics for fact-based scholarship, as displayed in the last of the five chapters included here. Taken together, they show that different disciplines and different methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of border-crossing cultural influences are possible and offer meaningful results.

In the first chapter, *Between Zurich and Romania: A Dada Exchange*, Amelia Miholca, puts a special focus on the Jewish-Romanian members of the early Dadaist movement, especially Tristan Tzara and Marcel Janco. Leaving a Romania where

anti-Semitism was growing, they had found an international scene in Zurich suitable for their artistic activities. Not that the Swiss society was welcoming, but the anti-establishment attitude of the Dadaist community offered an environment in which they could express their ideas. Tzara wrote a manifesto in which he discarded both the Western humanistic tradition and the future. According to Miholca, however, this does not mean that the Dadaists turned away from tradition. What they despised was the Western tradition, which they found responsible for the disastrous first world war. This made their interest turn to ancient or distant “primitive” art, and in the works of the Romanian Dadaists, one can see a clear influence from Romanian peasant culture and Jewish tradition. Miholca mentions the poems of Tzara, which have much in common with both Hasidic songs and the comic and absurd dances performed by the Jewish communities in Romania. She also analyzes the terrifying masks by Janco, which were used in the Dada performances, and traces their origin back to the Romanian midwinter Colinde festival. It becomes an example of how the culture of the periphery becomes part of the mix of influences that inspired a central avantgarde movement that spread over Europe, and eventually many other parts of the world.

The following chapter, *From the Secular to the Sacred: The Influence of Sufism on the Work of Leila Aboulela*, is a study on the novels of this author of Sudanese origin, who is presently living in Scotland. Billy Gray here makes a thorough hermeneutic reading of her work, showing how her novels have deep roots in Sufism, in its original form that is part of Islam. Written in English and aimed at an international readership, her novels might easily be categorized as migrant literature, but a careful reading of her work reveals that her focus is elsewhere. Gray notes that none of her characters fall into the common stereotypes of this literature, such as the Muslim terrorist or the oppressed Muslim woman. Her interest in Islam is not political, not a matter of identity construction, but aims at transmitting Islam as faith. From a secular post-colonial-studies perspective, her novels have often been criticized, but Gray offers another approach, maintaining that her writing is best understood in its religious context. If this is possible or not for a secular contemporary reader remains an open

question, but the chapter gives an account of the many obstacles an author will encounter when writing about Islam in the present age.

A very different transfer of culture, in this case in the form of language, is dealt with in the third chapter, *Inscribing Difference: Code-Switching and the Metonymic Gap in Post-Colonial Literature*. Katalin Egri Ku-Mesu here gives an account of how the language of the colonizer, English, is used by the colonized, here represented by novels written in English by West-African authors. Using the perspective of the linguist, rather than the literary scholar, she shows the different strategies used to employ code-switching in literary language. These include the direct use of vocabulary and concepts of African origin, the use of a kind of simplified pidgin for character description, and also less obvious ways of including discourse patterns that are alien to normal English but normal for the local culture. It is shown how writers often add explanatory content to aid a reader not familiar with the African context. The chapter ends with a discussion of the results Egri Ku-Mesu found from investigating differences in comprehension among readers of different backgrounds. For readers with a Western metropolitan background, most of the cultural-bound meaning was inaccessible, but readers with an African background showed various levels of understanding, depending on their closeness to the culture of the author. Such results may on the surface be regarded as trivial but give empirical proof that understanding is not a black-and-white matter. As Egri Ku-Mesu argues, even for a reader who finds certain parts of the text unintelligible, these parts have a rhetoric function by expressing a flavor of the writer's culture.

That border crossing and dissolution of identities and belonging are not modern phenomena is exemplified by the fourth chapter, *"Dangerous" Beauty: Imagining the Other in the Noh Play Sesshōseki*, which shows how such themes were treated already in fifteenth century Japanese drama. Here Dunja Jelesijevic offers an account of how different narratives originating on the Asian continent have travelled to Japan and have become incorporated into both folklore and literary texts. Transferred to new places and contexts, combined with other stories and expanded into new

narratives, these finally end up in the form of the medieval *noh* drama, which on its own is a mix of storytelling, poetry, religion, music, dance, acting and singing. The drama in question, “The Killing Stone,” is analyzed from the perspective of its main theme, that of movement, transfer, and transformation. It is shown to be both a story about its own history and a fiction about the characters who appear in it, a Buddhist monk, himself a homeless traveler, and a fox spirit which in the form of a beautiful woman has brought evil to several imperial reigns, both in Japan and abroad, and now is fettered inside this poisonous stone. It is a drama about the movement over borders and boundaries which is shown to be, on the one hand, frightful and challenging, on the other, a way to salvation. In that sense, the entire ambivalence towards border crossing that defines much of the post-colonial world, can be seen already in this ancient text.

The fifth chapter in this part of the collection is an investigation of news narratives. When discussing transfer over cultural borders, it is common to think of a movement from one cultural context to another, but in this case, the example is more of a movement of narratives from a local context to an area of global communication where they become adapted to and influence certain master narratives. Jamie Matthews’ chapter, *News Narratives across Borders: The Convergence of Interests and Patterns of Meaning in International Media Coverage of Disaster*, has a special focus on the 2011 tsunami disaster in Japan. He offers a broad outlook on recent research on the processes that forms news and journalism and shows that although opportunities for communicating news and events today are available for almost anyone, the main stories told on a global level are still much dominated by a few large news agencies. In the coverage of the 2011 tsunami disaster, much use was made of amateur videos, which were distributed globally by such dominating actors. The major narratives tended to follow similar patterns. Matthews identifies a repeated reference to the apocalypse, a master narrative of the disaster’s impact on the world economy, and a stereotypical usage of references to Japanese culture, stressing its otherness. It gives a regrettable picture of a journalism dominated by processes of homogenization; when leading actors start to run into one direction, everyone else

follows. This shows that however diverse and mixed the sources of such a narrative may be, when it rises to the global level and is copied by all and everyone, it does not necessarily turn into that rich and multifaceted expression that is described in many of the other chapters.

It is interesting to note how, in these five chapters, power relations affecting cultural transfer are shown to be highly ambiguous. These are just five case studies that depict only a small part of the processes that make cultural artifacts move from one place to another, but the diversity they present prove that generalized theories based on hypotheses of cultural imperialism are insufficient. When such theories might be relevant, as in the last chapter, it is also important to note how the creative force of cultural interaction stops dead. The English language used by West-African writers may, of course, be seen as a result of the cultural imperialism of a colonial power, but once it is adapted and digested by the culture of the colonized, it is no longer controlled by the colonizer but becomes a tool for new and independent expressions. In the end, the subtle nuances of this new variant of English is no longer accessible to the native British speaker. The same may be said about the Japanese *noh* drama studied in the fourth chapter. The drama in question, as well as the whole genre it represents, is definitely influenced by Chinese poetry and narratives. It is possible to interpret this as a transfer of culture from the central dominating power to the periphery, but it is not enforced, not exported with an aim to expand influence, but is rather eagerly searched for and adapted into an entirely new context, creating a form of expression that today is regarded as uniquely Japanese. Which in turn is ironic, as this mix of cultural expressions becomes a representative of a national culture that in some quarters is hailed as homogeneous. And it should be added that the supposedly Chinese influence here is rather a mix of cultural influences coming from all over the Asian continent. In the cases offered in the remaining first two chapters, the movement is undoubtedly from the periphery towards the center.

An important conclusion to draw from these chapters is related to the creative aspect briefly mentioned above. It seems that the more a central power manages to dominate the scene, the less

creativity is found. Or is it perhaps a matter of that creativity is the force that most effectively challenges the hegemony of power?

Cultural Mediation

The four chapters included in this part all address the phenomenon of *cultural mediation*, as they set out to examine different aspects of the multifaceted processes involved in translation, circulation and reception of narratives that have travelled beyond their geographical and linguistic origins into new cultural contexts. *Cultural mediation*, in relation to the translation and circulation patterns of a narrative, should here be understood in its broader cultural sense. By this we mean encompassing both the actual transformation of a narrative's content occurring in the translational process, as well as the involvement and impact of the various agents and institutions (mediators), crucial for the circulation and mediation of a work to take place. These translational processes have recently received an increased scholarly attention in a variety of research fields, beyond and interacting with Translation Studies. Within Comparative Literary Studies the recent re-definition and re-thinking of world literature has shed light on the uneven materialistic, geopolitical and sociological aspects of how literature travels (or does not travel) in circulation and translation across borders in a global marketplace (e.g., Helgesson et al. 2018a; 2018b). Narratives that migrate from one linguistic and geographical sphere into new literary landscapes inevitably undergo a "transformation" (Damrosch 2003), "recoding" (Mani 2017) or "reframing" of their content, in order to meet the expectations and (re)interpretations of new reader communities, as well as conditions of new literary markets. These mediation processes are effectively addressed by sociological approaches to translation and circulation, that also focus on the agents of intercultural mediation and transfer such as translators, publishers, organizer of anthologies, critics etc., (e.g., Shapiro 2014; Roig-Sanz & Meylaerts 2018). Furthermore, a work's circulation into new markets is highly dependent on, and subjugated to, the target culture's materialistic and economic conditions as, for example, publisher's choices, profile and marketing strategies, supporting institutions etc., (e.g., Brouillette 2007).

This diversified and manifold approach to cultural mediation in narratives' translational processes is mirrored in the rich variety of thematic and theoretical approaches fostered in the chapters of this section. The theoretical frameworks – as we will see – cover a wide range of fields, such as Translation Studies, Imagology, Sociology of Literature, Transculturality, Media Studies, Discourse Analysis, and Gender Studies. The topics, concerning geographical border crossings of texts in translation, includes cultural back-translation from Japan to the USA and back to Japan, anthologizing Italian literature in the Swedish market, self-translating from Italian to English and the mediating quality of the reception and critique of French author Margarite Duras' works in Sweden. As such, the chapters included in this section focus both on how to translate the linguistic (vocabulary) and cultural representation (vernacular identity, images, and phenomenon), contained in the source texts comprehensibly into the new target culture context. They discuss how cultural representations in the translational process convey cultural stereotypes, clichés, exoticism, and the uneven power positions (and conditions) in the field of cultural production, as well as examine various agents and materialistic conditions of the book market.

The first chapter in this section approaches *cultural mediation* and the process of re-contextualization of cultural representation conveyed through Italian literary anthologies published in Sweden (1947–2012). In her chapter: *Images of Italy: Cultural Representations in the Peritext of Translational National Anthologies in Sweden*, Cecilia Schwartz undertakes an analysis of the anthologies' peritext (titles, covers, blurbs, notes and prefaces) in order to examine the cultural image they mediate of Italy and the Italians to the Swedish reader. Using an innovative theoretical approach, that combines an imagological analysis (Leersen: the study of literary representations of nations and nationalities) with a sociological approach (peritext of Genette), Schwartz's analysis shows how the anthologies' paratextual apparatus, despite their elegant designs and prefaces written by influential intercultural actors (with academic titles), still recycle clichés and national stereotypes about Italy into the Swedish literary landscape. Hence, concluding that the anthologies' peritext holds and conveys

generic assumptions of Italy and Italians tending to reinforce national clichés and stereotypes in the target culture.

Likewise, the chapter by Hiroko Inose, entitled *Re-Imported Literature or Double Domestication: Shizuko's Daughter* by Kyoko Mori, investigates clichés and stereotypical images conveyed in the transformations of cultural representation that Mori's novel is subjected to, when travelling back and forth between cultures and languages. Mori, although growing up in Japan and using a Japanese setting for her novel, writes in English and published the novel in the USA. The novel was later translated into Japanese. The chapter comparatively examines two parallel strands; the USA and Japanese markets' expectations and reception, together with a close text analysis of how the Japanese translation is filling out the cultural gaps occurring in the translation process. While the Japanese market promoted the novel as "re-imported" and part of the national literature that had come home, the Japanese literary academy criticized it for reproducing stereotypical images and clichés of Japanese culture. In the USA, however, the educational and anthropological aspect of the novel, as a provider of cultural knowledge about Japan was highlighted. Drawing upon the Venetian concept of "domestication," Inose shows how both the original text and the translation have undergone adjustments of cultural content and language use to be more accessible (minimizing its foreignness) to both the American and the Japanese reader. The chapter also includes a discussion on the possible reasons behind Mori not assuming the task of self-translating her text into Japanese, although it supposedly is her first language. Inose argues for a strong connection between Mori's self-identity construction as American and an outspoken non-identification with the Japanese literary tradition.

The interconnection between Self-translation and the writer's identity formation is also emphasized in Arianna Dagnino's chapter, entitled *Self-Translation in Transcultural Mode: Francesca Duranti on how to Put 'a Scent of Basil' into One's Translations*. Dagnino examines the reasons motivating Duranti to self-translate her novel *Left-Handed Dreams* from Italian into English. From the perspective of viewing the self-translation as simultaneously "a dynamic process" and "a product," Dagnino provides insights

into the linguistic and cultural mediation, as well as the creative writing inherent in the self-translation process. The chapter uses an intersectional theoretical framework of transculturality, self-translation, and identity formation, which is mainly applied to an interview conducted with the writer. It is combined with a comparative text analysis, tracing Duranti's translation strategies. As such, the chapter is rich in theoretical reasoning in relation to the self-translation process, as well as in discussing the reasons that could motivate a writer to self-translate. In the case of Duranti, Dagnino argues for a connection between Duranti's process of self-translation and her multilingual and transnational background, forming a "process of cultural identity mediation." The analysis of Duranti's translation strategies shows how she has taken advantage of the self-translation process to write a new cultural identity for herself through the cultural repositioning of her authorial voice in the target culture.

In the final chapter of this section, the cultural mediation focus is headed towards an important mediating actor in the process in which translated works reach new readers in a target culture – the literary critique. Mattias Aronsson's *Established and Alternative Literary Criticism: A Study of Marguerite Duras's Works Reviewed in Sweden*, compares a corpus of reviews of Duras' works published in the (established) Swedish press with (alternative) reviews published on the Internet by bloggers. Aronsson starts out with a discussion on the uneven distribution of cultural capital in the field of cultural production, between established criticism – inhabiting dominating positions in highbrow newspapers – and the relatively new phenomenon of alternative criticism on the internet. Drawing upon media theories (Jenkins), conceptualizing these new interacting bloggers as "prosumers" (consumers/producers) and sociology of literature (Steiner), Aronsson effectively sheds light on the new importance of this "commercially valuable" (many followers) agents of "alternative criticism," both as voices and as challengers of traditional cultural hierarchies, in the modern literary market. Furthermore, the theoretical framework includes discussions of gender and reader-response studies as it methodologically makes use of discourse analysis (Wodak). Through a comparative analysis of the two discourses, Aronsson argues

that the established criticism characterizes as a “pseudo-objective discourse,” written in a neutral authoritarian style that disguises subjective opinions as facts. In contrast, the alternative discourse is written in a subjective and self-centered manner, relating the narratives to their own private lives. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the aspect of interaction in the blogosphere, and as such contributes to the introduction of this question into the field of reader-response theory.

The role of a cultural mediator is often to introduce the foreign, explain the different, and negotiate understanding over cultural borders. When there are language differences to overcome, translation becomes essential, and the four chapters included in this part all relate to different aspects of translation. What is striking here is that the translations, and the way they are transmitted and received, always tend to create a distorted picture. The creation of stereotypes is common enough when the foreign is explained, but there are also subtler ways to make a text accessible, as when the author translating her own text into a different language aims at creating a new identity for her as a narrator, which is closer to the reader’s culture. Perhaps such simplifications are inevitable, but they take away some of the challenges of reading and the enjoyment of discovering an unknown world. As shown in the last chapter, readers’ expectations differ widely, and to some it is more important to build a reputation as critics, than to aim for a cultural encounter. Explaining the fineries of cultural difference seems not to be the most urgent concern. And this also illustrates the problems facing the translator/mediator.

Travel and migration

Travel and migration are two concepts closely linked to the idea of people and individuals physically moving and crossing territorial borders. This part of the collection includes studies dealing with narratives that address different kinds and aspects of this physical journey of individuals and narratives’ features when crossing over national and linguistic borders. The chapters’ perspective on the theme of migration and travel simultaneously centers on the actual physical journey, and the metaphorical inner journey of facing difficulties and personal development for the protagonists.

Hence, the novels analyzed in the chapters belong to literary genres that contain the idea of a physical and metaphorical journey of personal (spiritual and moral) development: the Bildungsroman, urban legends, border-crossing literature by non-native authors, and migration and travelling literature for children and adults.

Studying narratives that focus both on the factual outer circumstances and personal inner processes of migration and traveling from one physical geographical place to another, demands a reconfiguration of the notion of space. The border-crossing zones of cultural encounters inhabited by locals, migrants, refugees, and travelers present their specific challenges. Several of the chapters opt for theoretical approaches informed by the reconfigurations (the move beyond polarities) of the meaning of space (as a contact zone), as for example, different takes on “liminality” and Homi Bhabha’s two concepts “in-betweenness” and “third space” (Bhabha 1994: 53–56). Besides these concepts, the chapters in this section problematize cultural and linguistic encounters departing from concepts as “untranslatability,” “cultural translation,” “otherness,” and “deviant other.”

The first chapter, *Liminality, Migration and Transgression in El metro by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo*, written by Carles Magriñá, provides a comprehensive genealogy of the concept of *liminality*. Drawing upon Turner, Magriñá stresses the fruitfulness of the concept for containing ideas of ambiguity, ambivalence, and instability, through embracing the potentiality for transformations, and creating new identities and cultural syntheses of integration in society. The chapter begins with an explanation of the marginal position of the Equatoguinean novel in studies of literatures in Spanish at Spanish-speaking universities and shows how the novel is a hybrid of the European genre of the Bildungsroman and African oral traditions. The plot of the novel analyzed revolves around a young Cameroonian man forced to leave his village and start a new life as an illegal immigrant in Spain and thus ties into the theme of the dangerous route of migration and border crossing. However, the focus of the analysis is not on the theme of globalism and migration per se, but rather looks at the main character’s personal identity development throughout the novel and the phases he goes through in a fictional rite of passage. Through a narratological approach and the analysis of chronotopes, word

choices and verb forms, Magriñá demonstrates how liminal spaces such as boats, subways or disputed territories are used to emphasize the in-between state of the protagonist in his new country of residence. The chapter concludes by asserting that crossing the border into a fictitious world might be a way to get a better understanding of important social issues such as migration.

The theme of migration and personal development is also central in the second chapter, *“Bestimmt wird alles gut”*: *Journeys and Arrivals in Contemporary German Children’s Books* written by Anneli Fjordevik. The chapter analyses eight picture books published in German, which all are written on the theme of forced migration due to war. The chapter sets out by discussing the structure and perspective of the texts studied and specifically focuses on the topics of leaving home, language barriers, and experiences of otherness in the arrival situation. The classical narrative structure of “home” – “away” – “home again” often found in children’s literature is identified and discussed in relation to migration and the search for a new place to call “home,” a factor which according to Fjordevik adds a new dimension to these children’s stories. The chapter concludes by discussing the over-all happy endings of the stories and argues that, although happy endings are no longer considered necessary in children’s literature, a topic like migration might warrant an exception.

The third chapter deals with the migration and transformation of tales rather than humans. In *Same Urban Legends, Different Bad Hombres: The Risk of Narratives across Borders about Deviant Others*, Gonzalo Soltero demonstrates how folk narratives utilize the social mistrust found in a community to create a collective identity of a “we” and a “them.” Soltero departs from the assumption that the function of an urban legend is to provide a fictional narrative that “explains an intricate world and alleviates anxiety” and tightens social bonds of the immediate group. The chapter compares the reception of and reaction to two urban legends circulating in the US and Mexico in addition to tracing its point of transit. Soltero demonstrates that even though the narrative structures of the legends and the content are the same, the representation of the villains’ identities change depending on which side of the American/Mexican border the story is told.

Through a metaphorical reading of the legends' meaning, Soltero argues that the value of these legends is not, in the first place, of portraying reality, but rather reflect a real fear. Soltero ends the chapter with the paradoxical conclusion that although the legends travel across borders, and thus show the cultural similarity and co-existence between the people in the border areas, the vilification of the other contributes to a greater will to enforce borders and border controls due to a fear of the unknown other.

The fourth chapter in this part is Dan Fujiwara's analysis of a fictional travel record, *Travel in Ribi Hideo's Novels or the Search for an Alternative Style of Writing in Japanese*. Like the first chapter of the section, this chapter approaches the theme of crossing borders both through the content of the novel and through the new style of writing that the novel exemplifies. The plot of the story focuses on a traveling protagonist but more than the plot itself, it is the style of the novel that is analyzed in the chapter. Fujiwara shows that Hideo's style, characterized by "multi-lingual simultaneity," constant "language-trouble" (untranslatability between languages), and hybridity, forms an alternative style which breaks with the monoethnic ideology long prevailing in Japanese literature. The experiences of travel described in the novel are according to Fujiwara above all a linguistic adventure since the main character is troubled with various usages of language. Fujiwara argues that the questions posed by the main character provoke the reader to think critically about the potentials and limits of language and the effect languages have on identity. Although this could be read as an example of a globalized world, the chapter argues that Hideo's novels instead should be understood as a critique of globalization, since they focus on the un-translatable words and the loss of meaning that the main character suffers in his attempts to make himself understood during his travels. The chapter concludes that even Hideo's choice to write in Japanese rather than English can be seen as an act of resistance to globalism and argues that the use of English is a driving force behind globalism.

The fifth chapter, A "Spiritual Journey" through the "Middle" Kingdom: *Travel and Translation in François Cheng's Translingual Novel*, written by Shuangyi Li, examines the novel *Le Dit de Tianyi* by François Cheng. The novel was originally written in French and

it was later translated into Chinese and published with a preface by the author himself. Thus, the novel crosses cultural borders in several ways through its Chinese writer utilizing French, generic hybridity, translation and finally its theme of traveling. Drawing upon Bhabha's theories of cultural translation Li argues that the relationship between travel and translation in the novel is particularly interesting due to the author's trans-lingual creative practices. He continues that contrary to most ideas of travel, where the goal is to move from one place to another, Cheng's writings, even though concerned with travel motifs, aim to describe the position in between two locations, which he describes as the position of becoming, the place towards which everything navigates. The movements across cultural borders described in the novel therefore, Li concludes, create a liminal space, a "horizontal transcendence" (from Irigaray) which he argues is neither European nor Chinese but instead provokes a rethinking of the subject of cultural representations from a position in between, simultaneously rendering something new and recreating something old.

Travel and migration may be regarded as two sides of the same coin, but, as these five chapters show, the journeys experienced by the traveller and the migrant are very different in nature. The travellers studied in the two last chapters carry several traits of traditional cosmopolitanism. Both are male. They are intellectual and highly theoretical in their reflections, and their travels are voluntary, driven by curiosity and interest. The migrants, however, are miserable. They are often poor, forced to leave their home countries and they struggle in their new environments. Being outsiders, they encounter both hatred and contempt, fear and suspicion. It may be a coincidence, but it seems typical that their gender is more diverse. And so, a black-and-white picture emerges of the wealthy (at least in the sense of cultural capital) and aloof traveller opposed by the suffering and wretched migrant. It is not that the authors of these chapters have aimed at highlighting this contrast, their interest lies elsewhere, but this contrast reflects the stereotypes that are alive in the narratives they have studied. It is easy to be ironic about the leisurely-paced traveller who can afford exploring his interests in the philosophical problems of understanding, but there is, in fact, no opposition between him and

the migrant. On the contrary, it is precisely the intellectual project these travellers venture into that will give us the key to a world which is more welcoming to migrants and refugees.

References

- Bachmann-Medick, D. (2012). "Culture as Text: Reading and Interpreting Cultures," in Neumann, B. and Nünning, A. (eds.) *Travelling concepts for the study of culture*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, pp. 99–118.
- Bassnett, S. (1998). "The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies," in Bassnett, S. and Lefevere, A. (eds.) *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 123–40.
- Bauman, Z. (1991). *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Black, S. (2010). *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth-Century Novels*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- Broomans, P., van Voorst, S. and Smits, K. (eds.) (2012). *Rethinking cultural transfer and transmission: Reflections and new perspectives*. Groningen: Barkhuis.
- Brouillette, S. (2007). *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crownshaw, R. (2010). *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory in Literature and Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Damrosch, D. (2003). *What is World Literature?* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Davis, G. V., Marsden, P. H., Ledent, B. and Delrez, M. (eds.) (2005). *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Society in a 'Post'-Colonial World. Volume 2*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi.
- Doyle, L. (2009). "Toward a Philosophy of Transnationalism", in *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 1(1).
- Erlil, A. (2011a) *Memory in Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Erlil, A. (2011b). "Traumatic pasts, literary afterlives, and transcultural memory: new directions of literary and media memory studies", *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, Vol. 3.
- Helgesson, S. (2018). "Translation and the Circuits of World Literature," in Etherington, B. and Zimbler, J. (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to World Literature*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 85–99.
- Helgesson, S., Mörte Alling, A., Lindqvist, Y. and Wulff, H. (eds.) (2018). *World Literatures: Exploring the Cosmopolitan-Vernacular Exchange*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press.
- Mani, B. V. (2017). *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany's Pact with Books*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Neumann, B. and Nünning, A. (eds.) (2012) *Travelling concepts for the study of culture*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.
- Nordin, I. G., Hansen, J. and Zamorano Llena, C. (eds.) (2013). *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi.
- Nordin, I. G., Edfeldt, C., Hu, L.-L., Jonsson, H. and Leblanc, A., (eds.) (2016). *Transcultural Identity Constructions in a Changing World*. Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang GmbH.
- Palumbo-Liu, David. (2012). *The Deliverance of Others: Reading Literature in a Global Age*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Roig-Sanz, D. and Meylaerts, R. (2018). "General Introduction" in D. Roig-Sanz and R. Meylaerts (eds.) *Literary Translation and Cultural Mediators in 'Peripheral' Cultures Customs Officers or Smugglers?*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 1–37.
- Rossini, M. and Toggweiler, M. (2014). "Cultural Transfer: An Introduction," *Word and Text*, IV(2), pp. 5–9.
- Sapiro, G. (2014). "The Sociology of Translation," in Bermann, S. and Porter, C. (eds.) *A Companion to Translation Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 82–94.
- Schimanski, S. and Wolfe, S. F. (eds.) (2017). *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books.

- Viljoen, H. (ed.) (2013) *Crossing Borders, Dissolving Boundaries*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi.
- Waldman, A., and Wright, L. (eds.) (2014). *Cross Worlds: Transcultural Poetics: An Anthology*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press.
- Wendland, A. V. (2012). "Cultural Transfer," in Neumann, B. and Nünning, A. (eds.) *Travelling concepts for the study of culture*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.
- Wolfgang, W. (1999). "Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today," in Featherstone, M. and Lash, S. (eds.) *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*. London: Sage, pp. 194–213.

IN-BETWEENNESS

Freedom to Know Me: The Conflict between Identity and Mennonite Culture in Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness*

Rita Dirks

Ambrose University, Calgary

“Freedom’s just another word
For nothin’ left to lose.”¹

In Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness* (2004), Nomi Nickel, a sixteen-year-old Mennonite girl from southern Manitoba, Canada, tells her story, in episodic chunks of memory, of her short life before being excommunicated from the closed community of East Village. Set in the early 1980s, the story details the events that lead up to Nomi's excommunication, or shunning; Nomi's exclusion is partly due to her embracing of the “English” (“That’s what people in my town called anybody who wasn’t Mennonite”—Toews, p. 134) culture through popular, mostly 1970s, music and books such as J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Insofar as Toews's novel presents the conflict between the teenaged narrator and the patriarchal, conservative Mennonite community, the book represents Nomi's position at the crossroads of negative and positive freedom (Dworkin, 2015). The sarcastic, satirical Nomi must, in this *Bildungsroman*, resolve the dialectic of her very identity: the negative freedom of No Me (she declares herself to be “Nomi from Nowhere” (Toews, p. 56) incurred through shunning, where

¹ Lightfoot, Gordon, “Me and Bobby McGee,” *If You Could Read My Mind* (1970, Warner Bros.).

How to cite this book chapter:

Dirks, R. 2021. Freedom to Know Me: The Conflict between Identity and Mennonite Culture in Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness*. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 33–50. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.b>. License: CC-BY 4.0

she literally has “nothin’ left to lose,” or the positive freedom of Know Me, insofar as having an identity outside of her community. Nomi’s excommunication leaves her invisible or erased in East Village; there is no interference from anyone—everyone remains passive in light of her excommunication—a circumstance which gives her a kind of negative freedom; yet, inadvertently it becomes here positive freedom as she gains self-understanding and becomes a writer.

Nomi is a representative of the second generation of Mennonite Canadians that finds itself on the periphery of at least two cultures. At first reading, because of the engaging satirical tone of the teenage narrator, the novel presents itself as a condemnation of the religious fundamentalism of her own people. Certainly, the author’s powerful iconoclastic work is fuelled by her own intimate knowledge of the Mennonite way of life, for Toews lays bare the punishing mores of that culture in a young protagonist’s formative experiences. Yet, that is not the whole story. My chapter, then, places on view the tension between Nomi’s identification with her own culture and the disowning of it, as it disowns her because she also participates in the culture outside of it. Such a position is at once a predicament and a blessing; writers and marginalized intellectuals are often in this same situation and must negotiate their place within and without such communities. As such, Nomi represents the plight of the second wave of Mennonite writers in Canada. Di Brandt, a poet who rose to prominence in the 1980s, writes:

I think it’s important for us to remember . . . how difficult it was for most of us to become writers in the 1980s, how much resistance we needed to put up to the many internal community forces that were trying to control the narrative identity of Mennonites. (Brandt)

Shunning in some shape or form was a common experience for these writers because they offered a different voice than the official “schmock bliewe”² one. They needed to overcome resistance, or cultural, symbolic, and identity borders, in order to give voice

² Mennonite Low German for “remaining” or “abiding obedient,” or painting “pretty” pictures only when telling a story. “Schmock bliewe,” literally “remaining pretty” or “nice,” along with “ontlich,” meaning “obedient”

to their distinct Mennonite experiences. Mennonites, historically, have crossed many a geographical border to flee persecution; much of their oral and sometimes published narratives in the past involved stories of faith, martyrdom, and escape from oppressors. Such narratives were always controlled, before the event of Canadian Mennonite writers getting published in the twentieth century. Toews, in *A Complicated Kindness*, places the act of shunning on view as an invisible enforced border between Nomi and her community; in East Village she becomes a non-entity, a ghost, but she begins to write, in her own voice.

Notably, *A Complicated Kindness* begins with absences and shunnings: “The furniture keeps disappearing,” and “half of our family, the better-looking half, is missing,” symbolizing the loss of stability of the Nickel family within their community, causing Nomi to question her own relationship between self and Mennonite community and the larger community of city, country, and world (Toews, p. 1). At the beginning of the novel, Nomi does not know that she is about to be shunned herself, and the only other remaining family member, her father Ray, is selling the furniture in order to leave East Village as well. In this novel of becoming, Nomi becomes a writer, for on the first page of *A Complicated Kindness*, she is working on an assignment for her English teacher, which, in fact, becomes the novel. Mr. Quiring expects her to write an essay about “The Flight of Our People,” in the vein of the official narrative wherein her ancestors escaped Russia, “fleeing in the middle of the night, scrambling madly to find a place, any place, where they’d be free” (Toews, p. 148). Nomi, instead, and in a sinister parallel, writes of her sister and mother, leaving in the middle of the night, after they had been excommunicated, toward a dubious freedom.

As a burgeoning writer, Nomi navigates between the politics of belonging/not belonging, between memory, history, her communal and familial identity, and her own individual agency within and without. Yet, the novel presents no easy binary; by the end of the novel, completely alone, we do not know where Nomi will go; before the final pages she dreams of going to New York and

or “observing decorum,” were words that many of us heard as Mennonite children.

Winnipeg. The truth is more complicated than Nomi “find[ing] salvation in the city and damnation in a small town” (Loewen, 2015, p. 45). Worthy of note here is a recent volume edited by Robert Zacharias, *After Identity: Mennonite Writing in North America* (2015), which suggests that we live in a post-identity age. Yet, as both Toews and the contributors to *After Identity* indicate, it is not that simple. In this after-identity age, Nomi’s search resonates with readers in Canada more than ever, even if one considers the awards *A Complicated Kindness* has received (The Governor General’s Award), translations into other languages, and copies sold. For the purposes of this chapter I utilize Zacharias’s meaning of the word “after” as denoting a pursuit of or still seeking or owning a complicated identity.

Mennonites (Writing) in Canada

As I address the topic of the conflict between Mennonite culture and Canadian society, I must call attention to the fact that Canada does not have one readily identifiable mainstream culture; to begin with, it is First Nations, then English and French, and, since the Multiculturalism Act of 1988, at least officially, it celebrates the plurality of ethnical cultural production. However, most Canadian writers still publish in one of the official languages or else remain obscure, incidental, and narrowly ethnic. For example, Reuben Epp (1920–2009), who has chosen to write his poetry and short stories in Low German, the oral language of the Mennonites, reaches only a “restrictive” audience (Levertov, 1998, p. 482). E.D. Blodgett also writes of this dilemma:

The paradox for . . . immigrants whose native language is not English, is that if access to agency appears offered by English, it carries a high cultural price. If some immigrant writers continue to write in their national languages, such as Ukrainian and Hungarian, their presence in Canada and their bearing on the literary system of Anglophone writing is limited, inasmuch as they have chosen separation or marginalization. If they choose English or French, as . . . most immigrants have done, they acquire, in many cases, the insights of integration, but run the risk of being read without full understanding by the people of other cultures of their difference and their challenge. (2004, p. 230)

Canadian Mennonites are also distinct from other ethnic groups living in Canada in yet another way: They do not belong to one parent nation state in Europe or elsewhere in the world. While Italian, Ukrainian, Russian, and Swedish immigrants to Canada have a point of reference in their ancient homes in Europe, Mennonites have no such home.

Toews obviously writes in English, yet she finds a way to include her Mennonite heritage using Low German phrases, often untranslated, throughout the novel. In her own way, she evades the two pressures to conform: She does not write in one of the official Canadian languages exclusively, yet, at the same time, she resists appropriation by the Mennonite tradition, however, not without bearing out the tension in the inclusion of both. In combining the two languages, she expresses and safeguards her own heterogeneous identity, her own voice. If Toews had simply wanted to write a novel disparaging the Mennonites, it would have been easy to bash the backward religious conservative folk that she left behind. However, in an interview, she admits, “For the longest time I didn’t think that all that Mennonite stuff affected me the way that it did. I felt I could somehow just move away from the community and escape and be fine. And then I realized that it gets under your skin and settles in there” (Wiebe, 2007, p. 121). Toews continues to live in the creative tension between having left the Mennonite fold physically, yet also coming to terms with Mennonitism in her novels.

Certainly, there is an added tension in the form of conflict between Mennonite writer and Mennonite community because, for most of its history, a strict ancient binary has separated art and worldliness in that tradition. Mennonites were instructed to be a separate people by their founder Menno Simons (1496–1561) who said, “we must not love the world and the things therein, nor conform to the world” (Simons, p. 101). The separatist mentality arose because of their dissenting beliefs, as they broke away from the Catholic Church—professing pacifism, adult baptism, a literal reading of the Bible, separation of church and state—and was reinforced by sustained persecutions and forced migrations. The “theological separation” followed by a “cultural separation” encourage Mennonites to “acquire . . . a separatist psychology,” or

an us/them mentality (Epp, 1974, p. 20). Cornelius J. Dyck writes that often for Mennonites, when they began to settle in North America,

non-Mennonites were a threat to the faith, necessitating withdrawal from the “world” with its temptation and sin. Marriage with non-Mennonites, for example, was strongly opposed and sometimes led to excommunication because the new partner was considered to be worldly and an outsider, usually designated by the terms *Weltmensch* [man of the world—my translation] and *Engländer* [the English—my translation] respectively. (Dyck, 1967, p. 292)

Even in the nineteen eighties, Toews portrays marriage between close relations as common practice: “Trudie and Ray [Nomi’s parents] are second cousins. Which makes me and Tash [Nomi’s sister] not only sisters but also third cousins” (Toews, p. 6). In the novel, intercourse with non-Mennonites is discouraged, and intermarriage within the Mennonite settlements is common, to warrant minimal integration and much resistance to acculturation in Canada and elsewhere. By the same token, art is “worldly,” belonging to “them,” outside of the Mennonite milieu.

East Village represents a kind of a state within a state, or the historical situation of Mennonite settlements within larger countries, as in Russia from the end of the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries and in Canada from the late nineteenth century onward. A unique picture of colonialism emerges as it concerns the Mennonites: Through Tsarina Catharine II’s invitation they settled in southern Russia, now Ukraine, to develop “the lands vacated by the Turks” (Dyck, p. 126). Mennonites started to come in the 1780s, partly because “Russian colonial policy at that time aimed at a complete separation of all foreigners from the native population,” a policy that “appealed to the Mennonites” a great deal (Dyck, 1967, p. 127). Mennonites lived in colonies in Russia, and then again in separate communities within Canada.

Because Mennonites cannot refer to a single country as their ancestral home but have fled several, this homelessness and group trauma from persecutions strengthen their bond and exclusivity; they have a shared sense of continuity instead of a shared culture of origin. Mennonites have always shown a resistance to subordination, have received permission not to assimilate—no

military service, their own religion, language and schools—and have moved on if such permissions were terminated, notably in Russia. While early Canadian writers might have had the difficulty of distinguishing their own writing in Canada from a continuation of say English or German writing, Mennonites had no indigenous literature arising from what could be called a mother country. When Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994, p. xi) writes of his position as someone who lives and writes “within a world-system whose major economic impulses and cultural investments are pointed in a direction away from you, your country or your people,” and that “such neglect can be a deeply negating, oppressive and exclusionary,” there is no such parallel experience with the Mennonites. Certainly, Mennonites as a people have experienced persecution and oppression, but they have, by and large, chosen to exclude themselves and migrate to the next country. In other words, they do not concern themselves with exclusion and lack of cultural investments from the world; on the contrary, they want to be left alone.

Toews’s Mennonites

Paradoxically, the Mennonites, as represented by Toews in *A Complicated Kindness*, who have escaped past persecutions because their beliefs were different from mainstream religions, oppress individuals within their own community who are different from the clan. The Nickel family lives in East Village as if inside another larger, even hostile, country, under the authority and strict observation of tyrannical leaders. Ervin Beck writes of “the tragic outcome of communitarianism that yields too much authority to the fanatic leadership of a few—usually patriarchal—leaders” and that “enforced conformity leads to oppression” (Beck, 1998, p. 544). Mennonite hegemony has the right to exercise the rite of excommunication, as Toews’s novel demonstrates through Nomi’s and her sister’s, and countless others’, shunnings.

The totalitarian regime that controls individual behaviour still defines the colony: Nomi compares the head minister of East Village, dubbed The Mouth, or “the Über-Schultz,” to “Moammar Gaddafi or Joseph Stalin. You fall into line or you fall” (Toews, p. 10). The mechanism of exclusion is operated by The Mouth

and a few elders who subordinate the villagers's identities to their own will:

They threw my mother out, gave her the old heave-ho. The term is *excommunicated*. . . . The Mouth and the other elders and the deacons and the lay people had met for a good seven or eight minutes before they decided that Trudie was history. (Toews, p. 189)

The laws of shunning do not allow for members of the community to speak to or eat with or in any way associate with the shunned. The patriarchal nature of the control is exemplified through the deliberate choice in shunning women: pre- and extramarital sexual activity is punished severely in East Village; yet, it is Nomi who is excommunicated, not her boyfriend Travis, and, similarly, Tash is shunned but not her boyfriend Ian, and Trudie is given “the old heave-ho,” but not Mr. Quiring.

The homelessness of Mennonites globally in a strange way reinforces the ‘unhoming’ or making of their own members, the ones who fall out of line, homeless. Shunning destroys Nomi's family life and her family home. Her mother, older sister, and eventually her father desert East Village one after the other, leaving the sixteen-year-old alone. Toews describes a kind of “homelessness” for Nomi that Edward Said refers to in his autobiographical *Out of Place* (1999) that “begins at home,” a feeling of displacement and not quite identifying oneself with the place where one is (Winnett, 2004, pp. 354, 352). Nomi had a home and a family and a community in her hometown until she was thirteen. *A Complicated Kindness* begins with the young girl trying to cope with her losses, as she, at the same time, becomes a teenager and seeks the freedom to know herself. Nomi lets the title of one of her favourite albums—the Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main Street*—speak unambiguously; her taste in music betrays her state of exile at the centre of her community (Toews, p. 48). The shunning of her family makes Nomi an outsider in her very own society, among her own people.

Toews and the Situation of Mennonite Writers and (Fictional) Readers

Inasmuch as *A Complicated Kindness* is based on autobiographical material, Toews finds freedom in leaving her Steinbach home

and writing in English. Nomi's situation reflects the many obstacles that a Mennonite writer usually faces, before he or she leaves. Harry Loewen points out that there was some "creative literature established by Russian Mennonites" before their immigration to Canada (1992, 52). David Arnason also speaks of the "tradition of writing" that had "developed among the Mennonites in Russia in the late nineteenth century (1992, p. 213). However, until recently, and more specifically since Rudy Wiebe's publication of his first novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), and then the flourishing of the Mennonite arts in Canada in the 1980s, Mennonites have not been known for their independent artistic output. The 1980s were a turning point for Mennonite literature: Di Brandt, Patrick Friesen, Audrey Poetker, Sandra Birdsell, just to name a few, reclaimed their right to creative freedom. The decade marks the end of the "repression of the artistic impulse," as Maurice Mierau writes in his essay "Rebel Mennos Move into the Arts" (1987-88, p. 18). In 1996, Di Brandt, in the foreword to her collection of essays entitled *Dancing Naked*, writes about "how long it took [her] to recover from the trauma of breaking through the strict codes of separatism and public silence [she] grew up with in the Mennonite community of south-central Manitoba, and how difficult it was to actually break centuries-old taboos against self-expression and art-making" (Wiebe, 2007, p. 116). "The strict codes of separatism" are giving way to participation in the life of higher education or artistic production. "The major causes," Brandt names about the old ways dying, "are television, radio, and travel, all of which break down the community's essential separateness from outside society" (Mierau, 1987-88, p. 19). From within, Mennonite literature "is one of the ways of destroying that separateness. . . I'm helping to kill it (Mennonitism) off," she says in an interview with Mierau (1987-88, p. 19). Fittingly, Toews demonstrates the reality this influence via (banned) music and books in her novel.

Miriam Toews, in the twenty-first century, breaks through the rigid codes and the taboos of silence in her own way in *A Complicated Kindness*. In the beginning of her novel, the separation from the world expresses itself in the very prohibitions against literature, modern music, and television. Even in East Village people got televisions, although, in Nomi's words, "TVs were . . . on Menno's shitlist, at least they would have been if he's been

around when they were invented. We didn't get one until one of our cousins who was both a first and second cousin to us, and possibly an uncle and future in-law, was on 'Reach for the Top'" (Toews, p. 15). Nomi writes about her confusion regarding what is allowed in East Village and what is not:

There were so many bizarre categories of things we couldn't do and things we could do and none of it has ever made any sense to me at all. Menno was on a cough-syrup binge when he drew up these lists of dos and donts and somehow, inexplicably, they've survived and are now an integral part of our lives. (Toews, p. 13).

In terms of books, they are allowed to read J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, for their Christian message, but not books much read in the '80s like those by Hesse or Nabokov. Nomi exclaims that "[I]f [she] is forced to read one more Narnia series book [by C.S. Lewis] [she]'ll kill [her]self" (Toews, p. 6).

Trudie, Nomi's mother, loves to read as well: "My sister and I went to school in the morning and my mom would stand in the doorway in her nightgown and say goodbye . . . and we'd come home at four o'clock in the afternoon and she'd still be in her nightgown, but on the couch, with her finger as a marker in the books, saying . . . don't tell me it's after four already" (Toews, p. 8). In Nomi's words, Trudie was "[h]alf in the world, half out" (Toews, p. 12). Trudie also loved music; she sang loudly in church but also

hid her records in Tash's old toy box in the basement. One time when Tash was around ten, Tash called up The Mouth and told him she's found one of Trudie's Kris Kristofferson's eight-tracks and she was very afraid she was about to listen to it and The Mouth said okay, now, calm down, pray with me. Take the . . . item and put it in a paper bag. Staple the bag closed and bring it to me here, to the parsonage, and we will deal with it together. Satan is tempting you, do you know that? Yes, said Tash. . . . She and her friends, who were listening to the whole thing, rolled around on the floor, killing themselves laughing. . . . Later that day The Mouth came over to talk and pray with Trudie about her fondness for guys like Kristofferson and Billy Joel. He told her that in his dictionary *hell* comes after *rock 'n' roll*. (Toews, p. 12)

Instead of reading and listening to popular music, adult women in East Village are relegated to the church basement: “She [Trudie] was supposed to do all sorts of stuff at church, . . . generally get her ass in humble helping gear” (Toews, p. 9). They are expected “to spend a lot of time there [in the basement]. If they don’t, they go to hell”; this was particularly hateful to Trudie who was a free spirit: “She got into trouble for throwing a couple of romance novels into a barrel headed for Nicaragua” (Toews, p. 9). Trudie was a misfit in East Village; she “hated thinking of herself as a citizen of the world’s most non-progressive community” (Toews, p. 32). The women in the Nickel family, and for the most part Ray as well, find their heteroglossic identity in the intersections of various cultures: American and Canadian TV and (forbidden) books, as well as their own twisted Mennonite humour. Nomi’s parents use Low German phrases in a playful joking way, for, in this instance, *Plautdietsch* represents the colourful language of the people, of jokes, an instance where Low German is just the right word or words to express something specifically Mennonite. Among the Nickels, the language becomes one of laughter, or subversive humour.

Nomi and Tash and other teenagers in *A Complicated Kindness* read much and freely: *The Joy of Sex*, Alice Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Seventeens*, Günter Grass, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*, Kahlil Gibran’s *The Prophet*, Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*, and Kafka. These Mennonite teenagers want to know what is happening in the larger world; they want to be in the know. However, in school, for their English assignments, they are “not allowed to write about Kahlil Gibran, . . . Holden Caulfield, Nietzsche, . . . Nabokov” (Toews, p. 152). The person who enforces the “oddball” school curriculum is also The Mouth who after “the purges,” or declared non-compliance with standard provincial guidelines, “took over everything” (Toews, pp. 13, 10, 13). Nomi tries to write objectively on a Mennonite topic: “I had once tried to hand in an essay entitled ‘How Menno Lost His Faith in the Real World (Possible Reasons)’ which was similarly rejected” (Toews, p. 69). “So what should I write about?” asks Nomi after her latest essay for English “got panned by Mr. Quiring”

(Toews, p. 152). Everything of interest to a growing mind and anything that might challenge the imagination are forbidden. The Mennonites in authoritarian positions in East Village perceive literature as an outside threat to their ways of being. “We’re a national joke,” Tash would say, “Everybody mocks us and the more they do the more The Mouth goes: We won’t give in! . . . We’ll ban more books! We’ll burn more records!” (Toews, pp. 70–71). As her response to the intellectual prohibition, Tash hitches rides to the city and, scandalously, gets a city library card; she brings “home books not by Billy Graham [n]or about the Sugar Creek Gang” but, among other books, pamphlets about communism” (Toews, p. 119). Soon after, Nomi writes, “my mother told me that Tash had become an atheist”; “Oh my God, I whispered . . . That fucking library card, man” (Toews, pp. 164, 165).

Mennonites and Art

“Art,” according to Brandt, has been unacceptable to many Mennonites because it challenges and criticizes the one [authoritarian] voice in the community” (Mierau, 1987–88, p. 19). And worse, according to Patrick Friesen, in “the traditional Mennonite view,” art “hampered your pursuit of salvation” (Mierau, 1987–88, p. 20). “‘They don’t understand,’ continues Friesen, ‘that art can be a life-enlightening thing’” (Mierau, 1097–88, p. 20). Closed communities tend to be afraid of imaginative and intellectual inquiry (Wiebe, 1980, p. 150). For centuries, they have been “culturally barren islands of devoid of a genuine life and artistic activity” (Reimer, 1980, p. 221). The only type of writing that is acceptable among Mennonites is of the “rigidly didactic” and “sweetly pious” kind (Reimer, 1980, p. 222). For her assignments in school, Nomi is encouraged to write about “The Flight of Our People”-kind of essays that delineate the great trek of Mennonites escaping Russia to come to Canada. Instead, Nomi’s story, which she does hand in at the end of the novel, also entitled “The Flight of Our People,” is about her family, fleeing East Village. Mennonites love to tell stories about suffering, escape, exodus, and martyrdom in the past; Toews, through Nomi, rewrites this well-known Mennonite master narrative of migration journeys when she writes of the trauma within their own communities.

Toews's novel offers a condemnation of the religious fundamentalism of her people through the voice of the intelligent, sad, and sarcastic Nomi who places on view the unbending age-old traditions through the perspective of a teenager who questions such customs. Patrick Friesen, writing of the real Steinbach community where both he and Toews grew up, refers to it as "a bloody concentration camp" with "no culture" and where "they treat people as objects and don't see each other as humans first" (Loewen Reimer and Tiessen, 1985, pp. 245, 246). For Friesen, "if the Mennonite religion takes hold, a person may never become an artist" because of what the poet terms the "totalitarian" effect of the community on the artistic individual. "For me as an artist," he writes, "the religion was a dictatorship" (Mierau, 1987-88, p. 20). Toews, in an interview with Rachael Kohn, talks about growing up in Steinbach as well: "There was suspicion of education. You know certainly not supportive of intellectual life. There was just no room for the artist or for the subversive in that type of community. . . . we were restricted as to the types of books that we could read, and the music and that sort of thing" (Kohn, 2005). For Friesen and Toews, these restrictions would have stifled them as writers and, in order to remain such, they had to leave Steinbach.

In an interview three years after the publication of *A Complicated Kindness* Toews says that her novel is "not an indictment or a criticism of the faith of the Mennonite people, but of the fundamentalism" (Wiebe, 2007, p. 104). She criticizes religious fundamentalism but not faith itself; in the end of the novel, her protagonist says: "East Village has given me the faith to believe in the possibility of a happy family reunion someday. Is it wrong to trust in a beautiful lie if it helps you get through life?" (Toews, pp. 245-246). Nomi's faith remains as a beautiful lie or fiction or literature in the form of her own traumatic yet hopeful story. Nomi, about to pack up the car that her father leaves for her, ponders all the good things, or the things she will miss, about East Village. She is the last of her family to leave East Village, if indeed she does (the ending is not clear). As she tells her guidance counsellor earlier, she does love this place (Toews, p. 5). Nomi finds herself torn between the love she has for her hometown where she was happy with her family and, as much as she expresses her

desire to leave the place throughout the novel, the pain of being cast aside by the community. Toews does not resolve the dialectic between belonging at the cost of personal freedom and freedom without roots. For Nomi, identity remains hybrid, not in the least found in questioning the assumptions and practices of her community. As is perhaps fitting of a sixteen-year-old, her identity is not static, but confirmed, destroyed, in process, an amalgam of acceptance and rejection (of self and by others).

Nomi has, however, developed into a writer. The whole novel can be seen as Nomi's submission of the final assignment to Mr. Quiring. In fact, Nomi hands it in at the end of the book: "*for the way things could have been*. Which is what I'm calling my assignment" (Toews, p 242). The assignment is Nomi's novel and her own, not "schmock bliewe" assessment of her people. She does not hold out much hope that Mr. Quiring will like it or even read it to the end, but she writes the story anyway. With her final assignment she includes Mr. Quiring's own blackmail letter to Trudie (which Nomi finds in a dresser drawer after her mother leaves) that threatens to "expose" her mother to the community as an adulteress if she refuses to meet with him. Nomi understands some of the reasons Trudie leaves; this realization is also the teenager's understanding through disillusionment that her parents' love was not perfect and that in this patriarchal community Trudie has no voice. Mr. Quiring's story would be believed without question, leaving Trudie powerless and silent. In this final act, Nomi exposes the phoniness à la Holden Caulfield and hypocrisy of the male authority in her community.

As observed above, Canadian Mennonite artists have frequently had to leave their Mennonite communities in order to be artists. Often, they have found support from mainstream Canadian folk and organizations. Inside conservative Mennonite circles, one would expect a negative reception of *A Complicated Kindness*. Indeed, Toews herself says: "There were angry people who said it's all lies. . . . This is what I expected to happen. What I did not expect was the incredible support that was out there" (Wiebe, 2007, p. 118). In 1992, Rudy Wiebe, after the publication of his Mennonite novels between 1962 and the early nineties, remarks that the "encouragement" he had "received has very rarely come

from Mennonites. It has certainly never come from official circles” (Tiessen and Hinchcliffe, 1992, p. 229). When Natasha G. Wiebe asks Toews why there was more favourable response to Toews’ novels than to Rudy Wiebe’s “Mennonite” novels, and wonders: “Is it because most of the Mennonites are now assimilated (within Canadian culture), Toews answers: “I think that is a big part of it, absolutely. Times change, people change” (Wiebe, 2007, p. 119). When Rachael Kohn asked Toews in 2005 about the Mennonite reaction to her books, she says:

first of all, the Mennonite culture,... it’s tight-lipped, it’s a silent disapproval. And I’m used to that, I’ve had that all my life, so it doesn’t bother me. But . . . it’s not even the most conservative group of Mennonites in my community that disapprove of the books, it’s a type of individual, and they’re everywhere, that has no sense of humour, doesn’t like self-analysis, doesn’t understand that you can be critical of something and love it at the same time. (2005, no page)

Toews continues in the same interview: “Some say it [the novel] is harsh, it’s ugly to read, and there is truth to it, you know we have to look at this about ourselves, this damage that we’re doing basically to families, with the whole shunning thing” (Kohn, 2005, no page). To be sure, Mennonites in Canada are in the process of re-examining their continuation of obsolete, damaging practices and attitudes.

Nomi is consigned to the marginal realm within her community by its elders; her loneliness, conduct, and rootlessness are the result of losing her mother and sister to the Mennonite practice of shunning. Toews herself still rages “against that type of hypocrisy and self-righteousness and arrogance and cruelty” as expressed in the novel by *The Mouth* and *Mr. Quiring* (Kohn, 2005, no page). Martin Kuester also writes of “the inhumanity of a provincial, strict Mennonite community” and “the callousness of these male dominated communities” (Kuester, 2011, no page). Kuester, however, does not see Nomi as “completely powerless”; “she can take her life into her own hands,” even with her whole family gone and having been shunned herself, because she has found her voice as a writer, as a storyteller, despite the abuse she experiences at the hands of men in authority in *East Village* (Kuester, 2011, no page).

Towards a Conclusion

Recently, Hildi Froese Tiessen recalls a “strategic planning session” at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario, where an unnamed “committed Grebel alumnus” urged to “support and encourage those academics (“he was referring exclusively to historians and theologians”) who are committed to the task of telling our story, . . . adding, without an ounce of humor, ‘otherwise Miriam Toews will have the last word’” (Tiessen, 2008, p. 46). I hope she does, for literature destabilizes the tidy singular meanings of a particular culture, in this case of the Mennonite tradition, and speaks freely from the rich margins of heterogeneous identity. As Nomi navigates towards freedom in *A Complicated Kindness*, she speaks, in her own satirical, sad, beautiful voice, saying Know Me, as I am. The conflict between the teenager-writer and Mennonite patriarchal fundamentalism, had it been resolved in its favour, would have resulted in No Me, or a silenced unfree person. From the beginning, Nomi says to one of her teachers, “I just want to be myself . . . I want to be free” (Toews, 48). Through the very music and books that were banned in East Village, she finds the language and freedom to express herself and to know herself. In becoming banned or shunned Nomi finds herself with “nothing left to lose” (Toews, p, 189); unintentionally, after everything and everyone are taken from her, the only option that remains is her freedom to write, to form her own identity, or a positive freedom. Nomi rewrites the controlling Mennonite narrative as she hands in her own “The Flight of Our People.” Ironically, Mennonite culture, so full of tales of having no permanent home and crossing a variety of borders, makes its own undesirables, among them artists and writers, homeless. Yet, Nomi finds herself and her home among writers.

References

- Arnason, D. (1992). “A History of Turnstone Press,” in H. Froese Tiessen and P. Hinchcliffe (eds.) *Acts of Concealment: Mennonite/s Writing in Canada*. Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, pp. 212–22.
- Beck, E. (1998). “The Signifying Menno: Archetypes for Authors and Critics,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 72(4), pp. 529–47.

- Bhabha, H. G. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Blodgett, E.D. (2004, 2003). *Five Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Brandt, Di. (2016). "Di Brandt: Recommended Reading List." Blog. University of Manitoba Press. March 23, 2016. Available at <https://uofmpress.ca/blog/entry/di-brandt-recommended-reading-list> (Accessed: February 27, 2018).
- Dworkin, G. (2015). "Positive and negative freedom." In R. Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. 3rd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at: http://ezproxy.lib.ualgary.ca/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/cupdphil/positive_and_negative_freedom/o?institutionId=261 (Accessed 27 February 2018).
- Dyck, C.J. (1967). "Mennonites in the North American Environment," in Dyck, C.J. (ed.) *An Introduction to Mennonite History*. Scottdale: Herald Press.
- Epp, F. H. (1974). *Mennonites in Canada, 1786–1920: The History of a Separate People*. Toronto: Macmillan.
- Kohn, R. (2005). *The Spirit of Things: 5 June 2005—A Complicated Kindness*. ABC Radio National, Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Available at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/stories/S1380744.html> (Accessed 20 October 2011).
- Kuester, M. (2011). "A Complicated Kindness—The Contribution of Mennonite Authors to Canadian Culture." Reimer, G. (trans.). *CMW Journal* 3(2). Available at <http://www.mennonitewriting.org/journal/3/2/> (Accessed 8 June 2011).
- Levertov, D. (1998). "The Migrant Muse: Roots and Airplants," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 72(4), pp. 481–89.
- Loewen, H. (1992). "The Beginning of Russian-Mennonite Literature in Canada: With a Focus on Gerhard Loewen (1863–1946), Poet and Teacher," in H. Froese Tiessen and P. Hinchcliffe (eds.) *Acts of Concealment: Mennonite's Writing in Canada*. Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, pp. 52–70.
- Loewen, H., Reimer, M. and Teissen, P. G. (1985). "The Poetry of Patrick Friesen and David Waltner-Toews," in Loewen, H. and

- Reimer, A. (eds). *Visions and Realities: Essays, Poems, and Fiction Dealing with Mennonite Issues*. Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, pp. 234–53.
- Loewen, R. (2015). “A Mennonite *Fin de Siècle*: Exploring Identity at the Turn of the Century,” in Zacharias, R. (ed.) *Exploring identity at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, pp. 37–51.
- Mierau, M. (1987–88). “Rebel Mennos Move into the Art,” in *Midcontinental*, pp. 18–23.
- Reimer, A. (1980). The Russian-Mennonite Experience in Fiction, in Loewen, H. (ed.) *Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing with Mennonite Issues*. Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, pp. 221–235.
- Simons, M. (1984, 1956). “The New Birth,” in *The Complete Works of Menno Simons, c. 1496–1561*. Verduin, L. (trans.) and Wenger, J.C. (ed.), with a biography by Bender, H.S. Scottsdale/Kitchener: Herald Press.
- Tiessen, H.F. (2008). “Mennonite/s Writing: State of the Art?,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 26(1), pp. 41–49.
- Tiessen, H. F. and Hinchcliffe, P., eds. (1992). *Acts of Concealment: Mennonite/s Writing in Canada*. Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press.
- Toews, M. (2004). *A Complicated Kindness*. Toronto: Vintage.
- Wiebe, D. (1980). “Philosophical Reflections on Twentieth-Century Mennonite Thought,” in Loewen, H. (ed.). *Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing with Mennonite Issues*. Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, pp. 149–164.
- Wiebe, N. G. (2007). “‘It gets under the skin and settles in’: A Conversation with Miriam Toews,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 26(1), pp. 103–124.
- Winnett, S. (2004). “Writing in Place: Edward Said’s Constructions of Exile,” *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 52.4, pp. 531–365.

Migrants and Other Others in 2020 by Javier Moreno

Carolina Leon Vegas

Dalarna University

Introduction

The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country — a border culture. (Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3)

Borders can exist on many different levels in a text: between the textual and the extratextual, between the levels of the narration, and between the reader and the text. In this article, I will approach the notion of the border as a gateway into the study of the relation between otherness, space and the body. There is an invisible border between Me and the Other. It is defined by empty space but also by the visual and physical aspects of the body that differentiate them, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity or gender. At a more tangible level, the body is the border that constitutes, surrounds and isolates the individual, thus setting the grounds for otherness. In her quote above, Anzaldúa illustrates the connection between liminal space¹ and the body through a metaphor which builds upon corporal elements humanizing an otherwise geographic element, the border, and stresses the suffering contained in the space she portrays: the borderland, a border zone. Anzaldúa's metaphor serves to illustrate the connections

1 The notion of liminality, whose origin is to be found in the anthropological theories of van Gennep (*The Rites of Passage*), is used here in its sense of a place in the border, a place of transit between different areas.

How to cite this book chapter:

Vegas, C. L. 2021. Migrants and Other Others in 2020 by Javier Moreno. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 51–74. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.c>. License: CC-BY 4.0

between two different and yet parallel spatial notions: the dichotomy center-periphery on the one hand, and in-betweenness, “the border culture”, on the other hand. The border, apart from its thin lineal function as a mere separator of two areas, is itself a space: a space in between, a limbo, a hybrid location.

In this study of otherness, space and the body, I will explore the novel *2020*, written by the Spanish poet and novelist Javier Moreno and published in 2013. The text offers a dystopian image of Madrid in the year 2020 after the financial crisis and presents at its center the figure of Bruno Gowan, a Scottish business executive who is missing from home and his job and for whom a search is now underway. The novel is built around short chapters that follow different characters belonging to different genders, races, nationalities, ages and sociocultural backgrounds. These characters include Josefina, Gowan’s daughter, an attractive young anorexic who is obsessed with her body and enjoys acquiring luxury items; Nabil, a well-educated, young Saharawi man, who lives in an abandoned plane because he cannot find a job; and Jorge, an obese man with Asperger’s syndrome who works in a Chinese bazaar and shares the plane with Nabil. The father of Josefina, the tutor of Nabil and the victim of Jorge, Gowan is the link between all these characters.

As other studies have pointed out, *2020* is a powerful representation of a country in crisis, as well as its causes and consequences². Michelle Murray calls it a “formidable novel of socioeconomic decline” and argues that space plays a “vital dimension” in this portrayal of crisis (Murray, 2016, p. 73). While I agree, my aim is to look at other spatial aspects of *2020* that I believe to be just as central. The novel’s futuristic gaze on an urban society in decay is built by and on the portrait of the oddness and uniqueness of the characters that form the core of the text. These characters are all peculiar in a quite disproportionate way, with Bruno Gowan, as the utmost representation of deviation, situated at the epicenter of the narration.

² The novel of the crisis (*novela de la crisis*), novels that portray the socioeconomic aspects of the financial crisis of 2008, has been studied by a series of critics and journalists: Javier Rodríguez Marcos (2013), Julio Vélaz Sainz (2014), David Becerra (2015), Valdivia (2016), and Murray (2016).

Center-Periphery and the Portrait of the Migrant

The Irish writer Lisa McInerney has pointed out that literature in English is mostly written by and for the middle classes and frequently portrays well-educated characters with different personal afflictions (Marín, 2016). The working classes are largely absent and, as Beatriz Celaya-Carrillo points out, the representation of the migrant is also scarce. The same holds true in Spanish literature (2011, p. 344). In many contemporary Spanish texts, even those concerned with recent contemporary crises and its effects on people, migrants do not figure. Instead, the action reverberates around middle-class characters who are losing ground. Migrants, the ones on whom the crisis has taken the hardest toll, often have a secondary, merely decorative function in these texts, portraying diminutive and anecdotal figures such as the Asian maid, the Latin prostitute, the Chinese bazaar worker or the Romanian pickpocket³. Moreno's 2020 includes similar stereotypical references to minor characters such as Josefina's Philippino house cleaner or the Thai internet prostitute, characters who are mentioned briefly and seem to have only an ornamental function. However, the novel goes beyond this and places at the center of its narration two characters with roots outside Spain: Gowan and Nabil. Far from the archetypal images commonly present in current-day narratives on crisis, these two figures impersonate hybrid and peculiar individuals. Gowan is a second-generation Scottish migrant who, far from representing poverty or failure, is a rich, influential businessman who has now fled this life to embark

³ This observation, as well as others in this article, is based on my reading of a number of books portraying the crisis: *Panfleto para seguir viviendo* by Fernando Díaz (2014), *Los ciervos llegan sin avisar* by Berna González Harbour (2015), *El comité de la noche* by Belén Gopegui (2014), *Los besos en el pan* by Almudena Grandes (2015), *Democracia* by Pablo Gutiérrez (2012), *La trabajadora* by Elvira Navarro (2014), *Vente a casa* by Jordi Nopca (2015), *Ajuste de cuentas* by Benjamín Prado (2013), *Compro oro* (2013) and *La habitación oscura* (2013) by Isaac Rosa. A text that breaks this norm of absence or limitation in the portrait of the migrant is *En la orilla* (2013) by Rafael Chirbes, a masterly example of how a text can transmit the strangeness, fear and vulnerability of the migrant through a character's own perspective. Chirbes's realistic, introspective style is different from Javier Moreno's more fragmentary and futuristic prose, but they share the inclusion of migrant characters at the heart of their novels.

on a quest for social change. Nabil, a homeless migrant with a university education, has become part of Gowan's quest. Dressed in his presents of an Armani suit, Vuitton shoes and a Breitling watch, Nabil acts as Gowan's submissive, and at times resentful, personal assistant.

Pablo Valdivia (2016, p. 34) argues for the existence of a new literature of the disinherited in Spain, a literature about poverty and deprivation. Valdivia's concept, the origin of which can be found in the work of the historian Henry Kamen⁴, can be associated with McClung's notion of the betrayed arcadia "whose good days are hopelessly lost" (1988, p. 34) and of the promise of a future life that never comes. This sense of want and failure is a recurring topic in the portrayal of Nabil: "He had never possessed anything and, yet, he fights hard to find something that lays hidden somewhere, waiting for him" (p. 183)⁵. However, as this quote suggests, Nabil is not so much disinherited as uninherited, and that is a part of his otherness, of his strangeness. A recurring feature in the crisis literature that I have read is the representation of a loss, of a removal of something that had been acquired or was supposed to come with time, through the themes of unemployment, eviction and precariousness. In the case of Nabil, however, rather than the loss (of something promised or awaited), there is absence and rather than a deprivation, there is a privation. Despite his fight for an education and for a job, Nabil is excluded and transmits his outcast position in these words: "I am an outcast. I am less than a proletarian. A descendant from men and women who made the desert their home" (p. 20)⁶. Through this acknowledgment of his north African origins, Nabil associates his feeling of exclusion to a landscape, the desert, and at the same

⁴ In his book *The Disinherited; Exile and the Making of Spanish Culture*, Henry Kamen uses the notion of the disinherited to talk about different groups of exiled people through Spanish history. Valdivia's use of the term is different as he relates it to the loss and precariousness associated with a financial crisis.

⁵ "Él no había poseído nunca nada y, sin embargo, lucha denodadamente por encontrar algo que yacía escondido en algún lugar, esperándolo" (p. 183). This, and all subsequent translations into English in this article, are mine.

⁶ "Soy un descastado. Soy menos que un proletario. Un descendiente de hombres y mujeres que hicieron del desierto su hogar" (p. 20).

time to a nationality and ethnicity that this element implies. This character is a border crosser on many levels. Geographically, he has moved from Africa to Europe, from Morocco to Spain, and from the desert to the city. At a cultural level, he has made the journey from illiteracy to university educated. However, in socio-economic terms, the trajectory is less linear and seems to reverse and turn back, as after years of fighting, studying and looking for a job, he finds himself in homelessness and total exclusion. As Nabil puts it, “The present on the other hand is hardship, helplessness” (p. 21)⁷. When these thoughts are articulated, Nabil is living in an abandoned plane together with other homeless people. The airplane – normally a symbol of luxury, movement, and a search for the exotic – is in 2020 turned into a static container of failed destinies. It is an undoubtedly powerful image of a rusty, defeated Titanic (or titan), broken and brought down.

Described as “the angel of revolution” (p. 97)⁸, Nabil has been chosen by Gowan to help him in his mission, a revolution which, throughout the novel, remains unclear in terms of its objectives or methods. Nabil’s position, falling asleep in the cockpit of this abandoned plane, can be seen, in the context of this revolution, as the image of a co-pilot bound to fail and fall, or even a co-pilot already fallen. Murray (2016, p. 85) connects this image of the plane to the failure of the economic system⁹. She points out the liminality of this space, referring to periphery and to Augé’s notion of non-place¹⁰ when she says “The characters reside in a socioeconomic oblivion situated on the periphery of the frightful, futuristic capital” (Murray, 2016, p. 85). Although this does not apply to all characters (Josefina, for instance, does not live in this

⁷ “El presente en cambio es la intemperie, el desamparo” (p. 21).

⁸ “El ángel de la revolución” (p. 97).

⁹ Murray writes that the “airplane imagery could represent a crash, an unexpected real and physical tragedy with atrocious consequences” (Murray, 2016, p. 85) and links it to the “senseless nature of capital as it creates scenarios akin to those of a plane crash through market speculation” (Murray, 2016, p. 85).

¹⁰ The notion of non-place was developed by Marc Augé in his book *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. Non-places are places of transit associated with consumerism and supermodernity, another notion by Augé. Examples of non-places are airports, shopping centers and hotels.

liminality), the notion of periphery is central to understanding Nabil. In a colonial sense, this Saharawi character clearly comes from the periphery, from the sterility and nothingness of the desert. Once in Madrid, the capital, the center, Nabil spends his childhood in Villaverde, an especially deprived area on the outskirts of Madrid. At the time of the action in the novel, Nabil has moved from one peripheral location to another, from Villaverde to the airport: a space beyond the city, a space between nations, and, as Mora points out, a kind of limbo (2014, p. 15–17). Nabil's steps seem to start and end in similarly empty places, from the emptiness of the desert he comes from to the featureless expanse of the airport or, as he puts it, “the plateau, that geographic tribute to nothingness” (p. 38)¹¹. The blurriness of this spatial limbo seems to extend to Nabil's conception of himself when at one point he wakes up with the thought: “I am a nebula” (p. 37)¹². In the character of Nabil there is a sense of confusion and contradiction. The space he inhabits, a plane that houses homeless people, contrasts with his awareness of his visual appearance:

A homeless Saharawi wearing an Armani suit is suspicious enough. The airstrip is frozen. I expand my arms searching for balance. Vuitton shoes were not designed to walk on ice. I imagine one of the homeless people looking through the window, rubbing his eyes at the unreality of the scene; a man wearing an executive suit slides towards an abandoned plane. (p. 19)¹³

Nabil's sense of otherness, expressed in his feeling of being seen as suspect, is conveyed in terms of spatiality. His spatial position, at the airport's abandoned landing area, together with his attire, is what creates an incongruence and a feeling of being strange.

Nabil's sense of otherness is linked to the imagined gaze of another person and is connected to the sense of suspicion that

¹¹ “la meseta castellana, ese homenaje geográfico a la nada” (p. 38).

¹² “Soy una nebulosa” (p. 37).

¹³ “Bastante sospechoso resulta el hecho de que un saharawi que no tiene dónde caerse muerto vista un traje de Armani. La pista está helada. Extiendo los brazos en busca de equilibrio. Los Vuitton no fueron diseñados para caminar sobre hielo. Imagino a uno de los sin techo asomado a la ventanilla, frotándose los ojos ante la irrealidad de la escena: un hombre vestido con traje de ejecutivo se desliza hacia un avión abandonado” (p. 19).

in the text remains a mental construction because it appears as a self-perception. At the same time, the strangeness has a strong spatial (and ethnic) dimension because it is the fact that Nabil finds himself in a peripheral space occupied by marginalized people that makes his appearance “unreal”. Nabil and the plane share the rich-poor duality; both are an image of the coexistence of luxury and ruin and both have been deprived of their supposed social function.

Bruno Gowan partially shares Nabil’s outcast position. He too is hidden and has lost the privileged life he used to have as a successful and married business executive living in a luxury house. Bruno Gowan is the main Other in the novel, but his otherness is not built so much on a sense of deprivation as on his portrayal as superior and unique. Gowan is described throughout the novel by different characters as being a special and outstanding figure. For Josefina he is “the only genius I know” (p. 165)¹⁴. For Lázaro, the person in charge of finding him, the dossier he has been given about Gowan reveals his outstanding performance at university and his multiple achievements as the youngest director of a multinational telecommunications company, a professional tennis player and a critically-acclaimed visual artist, with paintings that now hang in prestigious art galleries. Gowan’s self-perception is also one of being exceptional or singular: “I have grown. I have flourished. I am mortally beautiful. ... My kingdom, Nabil, is not from this world” (p. 95).¹⁵

The interaction of these two characters, Bruno Gowan and Nabil, is asymmetric and can be seen as representing the wider relationship between center-periphery, Africa-Europe, rich-deprived. The imbalance of power between these two characters prevails throughout the text. Gowan, representing the center, has a paternalistic and dominant attitude towards Nabil, whose function seems to be that of a disciple. At the same time, Nabil also seems to operate as an assistant, a subaltern in the postcolonial sense of

¹⁴ “el único genio que conozco” (p. 165).

¹⁵ “He crecido. He florecido. Soy mortalmente bello... Mi reino, Nabil, no es de este mundo” (p. 95).

the term¹⁶. Whereas this character seems to accept quite naturally his role, Gowan displays the contradictions, the love-hate feelings, inherent in his father figure role, which crystallize when he says “I love you so much, that I could spit at you” (p. 97)¹⁷. With his quest that nobody fully understands, Gowan is a quixotic figure. As Josefina, his daughter, puts it: “Many people made the mistake of trying to understand my father” (p. 166)¹⁸. However, far from Don Quixote’s naiveté and kindness, Gowan’s aims and methods seem to stem from more complex artistic and philosophical urges. And if Gowan shows quixotic features, Nabil has certain parallels with the figure of Sancho Panza, whose motives in his quest alongside Don Quixote were equally economic. Gowan’s material gifts to Nabil (his Breitling watch, Armani suit and Vuitton shoes) echo Quixote’s promise of an island where Sancho could be the Governor. Like Sancho, Nabil also seems to share a fascination with and submissiveness towards his patron, whom he perceives as unnaturally remarkable:

It is difficult to follow Gowan’s steps. To detect his movements becomes an exercise in perceptive acuteness. He manages to make an instant last more than agreed. He dances an 8/8 rhythm while the rest of the dancers move to a 2/4. Like a rat in a world of sloths. If I tried to hit him I would not know where to throw my fist. (p. 46)¹⁹

This quote is relevant as it reaffirms Gowan’s singularity, which in other characters’ speeches acquires divine tones, such as when

¹⁶ There have been a number of different definitions of and discussions about the term *subaltern*, a notion that has been fruitfully developed by the *Subaltern Studies Group* and theorists such as Gayatri Spivak. It is not the aim of this text to add to the discussions on the notion of the *subaltern*. When used in this chapter, it will be associated with powerlessness, exclusion and subjugation.

¹⁷ “Te amo tanto, que podría escupirte” (p. 97).

¹⁸ “Muchas personas cometieron el error de intentar comprender a mi padre” (p. 166).

¹⁹ “Es complicado seguir los pasos de Gowan. Detectar sus movimientos se convierte en un ejercicio de agudeza perceptiva. Consigue hacer que el instante dure más de lo convenido. Baila un ocho por ocho mientras que el resto de los bailarines nos movemos siguiendo un dos por cuatro. Como una rata en un mundo de perezosos. Si intentara golpearlo no sabría dónde lanzar el puño” (p. 46).

Lázaro describes Gowan as “an idol in front of whom one humbles oneself”²⁰ (p. 54) or when Josefina says “my father did God’s work”²¹ (p. 166). However, the quote’s final sentence suggests the violence and resentment that lies behind this adulation, suffocated but present in the center-periphery relationship. Nabil’s submission coexists with a desire to hurt, a thought that also manifests itself later on in the book in a passage where Gowan puts into words the relationship between the two men:

I am reason disguised as barbarity. You are uncontrollable nature under the seductive appearance of culture. You have learnt my language, but you introduce error into it. You are not to blame. Your origin, your class gives you away... The cultivated slave loses contact with their peers and ends up, terrible paradox, confessing to their master. Only the master understands his worries, only the master values and acknowledges him. Still, you will never be like me, Nabil. I dictate and you copy my words. You use my language and fill it with blots. You know it, and that thought feeds your hatred and poisons you.

I [Nabil] look at the knife again. A faint impulse would be enough. It would be fair. (p. 206)²²

In Gowan’s discourse one can find some revealing contrapositions, such as nature-culture or slave-master, that reinforce the classic postcolonial duality of center-periphery present in his relationship with Nabil. Gowan’s patronizing and arrogant words here seem to awaken in Nabil a murderous impulse to stab Gowan, but he eventually leaves the knife and goes back to his keyboard. Even if this could be seen as an apparent attempt at revolt, Gowan

²⁰ “un ídolo ante el que uno se humilla” (p. 54).

²¹ “mi padre hacía el trabajo de Dios” (p. 166).

²² “Yo soy la razón disfrazada de barbarie. Tú eres la naturaleza incontrolable bajo la seductora apariencia de la cultura. Has aprendido mi idioma, pero introduces en él el error. No eres culpable. Te delata tu origen, tu clase... El esclavo cultivado pierde el contacto con sus semejantes y acaba teniendo que confesarse, terrible paradoja, con su amo. Solo el amo comprende sus cuitas, solo el amo lo valora y lo reconoce. Aun así nunca podrás ser como yo, Nabil. Yo dicto y tú copias mis palabras. Usas mi registro y lo colmas de borrones. Lo sabes, y ese pensamiento alimenta tu odio y te envenena.

Miro de nuevo el puñal. Bastaría un leve impulso. Sería fácil. Sería justo.” (p. 206).

seems to be the brains behind it. He has given the knife to Nabil, claiming that it was his goal to empower him so as to channel some kind of vengeance: “I reveal myself in front of you so that you learn of my nature, so that the grandchildren of your grandchildren have some opportunity, an object for their fury” (p. 97)²³. Even when on the brink of death, Gowan, personifying power, remains in control. At a more symbolic level, Gowan represents Europe and the capitalistic system, an elite with money and power that controls, manipulates and governs other less-empowered characters. The novel, thus, suggests a clear message when, at the end of the book, a bullet suddenly ends Gowan’s life.

Limbo, non-places and hybridity

Gowan chooses Nabil, a choice that reflects his fascination with the desert, crisis and ruins. In Nabil’s life, the desert is the past, his origins, while for Bruno Gowan “the desert is the future”²⁴ (p. 98). If the desert is the past and the future, the present is the crisis and its ruins. When Lázaro, the man looking for Bruno Gowan, visits Gowan’s house, he is led to a room in the basement where Gowan spent most of his time while at home. Everything in this room is white. Its emptiness is broken only by the presence of a table, a chair and a wall covered with photos depicting contemporary ruins, such as buildings fallen apart, stranded oil ships and abandoned planes. Etymologically, limbo comes from the notion of border, the border that can deny access to heaven or hell after death, usually to newborns and the unbaptized. Limbo is thus a space in-between – between life and death, between earth and heaven – and is a place for the unwanted, a place of uncertainty and oblivion. Ruins are limbic in the sense that they are a place of transition, a pause between prosperity and oblivion, a place of decay. The final stage of the ruination process would be a place where the stones have decomposed because of the wind and the rain, leaving only a desert behind, with its most basic element: the sand. In this sense, ruins are the limbo where, now dead and deprived of their function, these buildings are on a journey towards what Gowan

²³ “Me desvelo ante ti para que aprendas mi naturaleza, para que los nietos de tus nietos tengan alguna posibilidad, un objeto para su furia” (p. 97).

²⁴ “el desierto es el futuro” (p. 98)

sees as the future, the desert. The ruins portrayed in the text are of a special kind, one not so much linked to the effects of time, as in Roman ruins, but rather to the consequences of the crisis: buildings whose construction has not been completed because of the financial collapse and that now, unfinished, are crumbling into dust. Gowan is, however, not only a passive observer of ruins but also a creator of them. As Josefina tells Lázaro, guided by “a spirit both scientific and artistic” (p. 185)²⁵, Gowan has in the past bought properties (a hotel, a restaurant) with no economic interest in them but instead with the aim of letting them decay. His neglectful acquisitions are an echo of the financial operations that caused the crisis, where toxic assets were bought and sold. Space becomes thus an object that can be bought, sold, and trashed, and comes to represent a wider economic reality where capitalism rules and where a large part of the population is ruined.

If Nabil’s vital fight has been to move from the periphery to the center, Gowan’s quest had been towards a limbo, represented by the desert and the ruins. At the same time, it is interesting to see the spaces in the novel that are linked to Gowan. Michelle Murray has mentioned the recurrence of non-places (2016, p. 77), following Marc Augé’s definition, and Gowan is definitely associated with such spatial spheres. In two different chapters Gowan is seen in a hotel room and in another two, the action takes place during a taxi ride. At the end of the novel, he is murdered in a hotel’s conference room. When still living at home, the place where he spent most of his time, the white room mentioned before, was deprived of all signs of homeliness or habitation. Michelle Murray discusses how the abandoned plane used as a shelter by the homeless is a non-place “reverted back into a place” (2016, p. 85). Gowan’s room reverses that process when he makes the place of permanence par excellence, the home, a place commonly full of the traces of its inhabitants, a space that is empty and impersonal. When Lázaro visits Gowan’s house, he expresses the impression that “Gowan had started to disappear from his own house a long time ago” (p. 101)²⁶. Just as there is a subversive

²⁵ “un espíritu al mismo tiempo científico y artístico” (p. 185).

²⁶ “Gowan había empezado a desaparecer de su propia casa desde hacía bastante tiempo” (p. 101).

element to the squatting of abandoned planes, Gowan's presence in different non-places runs parallel to his rebellious quest for change.

Another character who is repeatedly associated with non-places throughout the text is Jorge. Jorge lives in the plane with Nabil, works in a Chinese bazaar and appears at places of leisure, such as an ice-skating arena, Eurovegas or a hotel's conference room. Physically, Jorge is characterized by the fact he is overweight. Frequent allusions are made to his amorphous body and to a crust on his head, which he describes as his cradle cap and which everyone finds disgusting. On a psychological level, Jorge has Asperger's syndrome and his communication with other people is difficult. There are thus several borders, both physical and mental, that arise between him and the people around him and make him seem strange and abnormal, an Other in the text. Twice Jorge is seen talking to customers in the Chinese bazaar, and both times the customers leave suddenly after listening to his unconventional conversation full of complex logic and lacking the most basic social skills.

The non-places Jorge is associated with are characterized by their hybridity and, at the same time, by a sense of falseness. Teresa Gómez Trueba (2012, p. 59) writes about the relation between Marc Augé's non-place and Baudrillard's simulacrum. Although Augé's non-place and Baudrillard's simulacrum are in no way synonymous, in 2020, Jorge is often found in spaces that combine both notions. Whereas Gómez Trueba calls the city of Las Vegas a "simulacrum paradigm"²⁷ (2012, p. 68), what can be found in 2020 is a simulacrum of a simulacrum, embodied by a place called Eurovegas, a recreation of Las Vegas in Madrid²⁸. The narrator outlines the reasons why Jorge likes this place:

That is why he likes Eurovegas, because he does not need to worry about difference here. Everything here is fake. He knows what to expect. The brightness of the luxury cars, the contagious vitality

²⁷ "paradigma del simulacro" (p. 68).

²⁸ Eurovegas was an idea to construct a gambling and leisure resort on the outskirts of Madrid conceived by Sheldon Adelson, an American business executive. In 2013, after long negotiations with local authorities, the project was cancelled.

of the neon lights, the bodies' eroticism. That is real. The real here is the surface, the makeup, the accidents, the attributes. Even he, so proud at other times, hides his crust under a cup that advertises Ron Havana.²⁹ (p. 217)

Jorge's strategies to avoid his sense of exclusion are various and often linked to space. In the quote above, we can see that the falseness of Eurovegas allows him to transform, to hide under his cap and thus conceal a part of his difference. Just like Eurovegas, Jorge becomes a simulacrum of himself. Another place where he seems to fit in is his workplace, a Chinese bazaar in Madrid. In his portrayal of this place, Jorge seems to be conscious of his otherness:

I like it when an object serves a function that is not exactly suitable, like a bedroom carpet reused in the living room or a bathroom lamp hanging in the kitchen ceiling. An occidental working in a Chinese bazaar is a good example as well. The Chinese are the only ones who do not care about my crust. As long as you are happy with a crappy salary. The rest is none of their business. (p. 34)³⁰

The first sentence of this quote displays both hybridity and difference, a mixture of different functions and the transfer to new places. There are different aspects to this transfer. National identity could be one: people moving to a place where they do not belong and where they feel the otherness inherent in their "malplacement". In Jorge's thoughts, though, his difference and movement is not only national, from Spanish to Chinese; it has

²⁹ Por eso le gusta Eurovegas, porque aquí no necesita preocuparse de la diferencia. Aquí todo es fingido. Sabe a lo que atenerse. El brillo de la carrocería de los coches de lujo, la vitalidad contagiosa de los neones, el erotismo de los cuerpos. Eso es verdadero. Lo verdadero es aquí la superficie, el maquillaje, los accidentes, los atributos. Incluso él, tan orgulloso de ella en otras circunstancias, oculta su costra bajo una gorra publicitaria de Ron Havana. (p. 217)

³⁰ Me gusta cuando un objeto desempeña una función que no le corresponde exactamente, como una alfombra de dormitorio reciclada en alfombra de salón o una lámpara de baño colgando del techo de la cocina. Un occidental trabajando en una tienda de chinos también sirve como ejemplo. Son los únicos, los chinos, a los que no les importa lo de mi costra. Basta con que te conformes con un sueldo de mierda. Lo demás no les incumbe. (p. 34)

a wider range. For when working in the bazaar he feels no need to hide and the disgust often projected towards him is replaced by indifference. In a homogeneous human landscape, Jorge sticks out and his otherness, both physical and psychological, produces aversion around him. Jorge's strategy to avoid rejection is thus to place himself in non-homogeneous spaces, in spaces of difference, hybridity and falseness, such as Eurovegas or the Chinese bazaar.

These non-places have a dual value. On the one hand, they are a refuge for Jorge. On the other hand, they exert and expose a precarious system. Jorge protects himself under the wings of hybrid fake places, but this same hybridity exposes him to a system of exploitation. His own precariousness, as he calls it, a "crappy salary", is an echo of a more widespread reality:

Chinese women can now be blond and Spanish. The crisis made the miracle. Millions and millions of Spanish converted into cheap labor. Chinese from El Ferrol, Chinese from Albacete, Chinese from Madrid. We do not need to bring immigrants here to do the dirty work anymore. Globalization has made them shelter in precarious work contracts. They hand out adverts for one of the casinos in the complex. They look happy and scared. (p. 215)³¹

National identity dissolves under the influence of globalizing capitalistic precariousness. Multiculturalism and hybridity are sarcastically used to denounce an economic system where exploitation becomes the norm. A few pages after this quote, precariousness takes on even darker tones with the allusion to a group of prostitutes waiting in the hotel conference hall. Jorge immediately falls for one of them, whom he believes to be of Slavic origin. In his thoughts, he imagines the girl as the result of a long history of events, including far away episodes such as the extinction of the dinosaurs as well as the violent rape of a peasant woman by a Napoleonic soldier. Hybridity and interculturality

³¹ Ahora las chinas pueden ser rubias y españolas. La crisis obró el milagro. Millones y millones de españoles convertidos en mano de obra barata. Chinos de El Ferrol, chinos de Albacete, chinos madrileños. Ya no hace falta traer inmigrantes para que hagan el trabajo sucio. La globalización los llevó a refugiarse en brazos de contratos de trabajo precarios. Reparten publicidad de uno de los casinos que pueblan el complejo. Parecen felices y asustadas. (p. 215)

take on, in Jorge's thoughts, brutal and cosmic tones: "Her beauty redeems, on its own, all of the bloodshed in the past, the vastness and meaninglessness of a universe which has managed to produce that diamond" (p. 220)³². Although the violently described rape happens only in Jorge's mind, it illustrates a wider phenomenon in 2020: the connection of certain traditional postcolonial notions, such as the Other or hybridity, with not so positive concepts, with destruction, poverty, exploitation and undesirability. The portrait of Jorge is far from sympathetic. He remains a stranger to the reader, who shares the feeling of the teenager who comes into the shop where Jorge is working to buy some bullets and thinks that "There is something strange in the way that man speaks, as if he ignored his possible interlocutor" (p. 92)³³. Throughout the text, there is a connection between Jorge and the space that contains him. In the first chapter of the novel he is seen at an ice-skating arena where his amorphous and heavy body is contrasted with the lightness and agility of the female skater: "The skaters come from the cold. They turned and moved on the ice with the lightness of mythological beings... He raised an arm and felt gravity seizing it, a catenary of fat obeying an abstract mass situated in the center of the Earth" (p. 11-12)³⁴. In the following chapters, Jorge moves in different hybrid spaces (the Chinese bazaar, the abandoned plane, Eurovegas) until the final chapter where we find him in an even more atypical scene – a hotel's conference room that is hosting performance art. There, on the stage, a group of cooks prepare pork-based dishes while, inside a small folk-like enclosure, a group of artists utter the different sounds from the lifecycle of a pig, including the sound of bacon being fried. Jorge walks into this space with a gun and shoots, killing Gowan and a woman. Gowan's murder is echoed in the space that contains him and that is staging the lifecycle of a pig at the hands of the

³² "Su belleza redime por sí sola toda la sangre derramada en el pasado, la vastedad y el sinsentido de un universo que ha logrado producir ese diamante" (p. 220).

³³ "Hay algo extraño en el modo de hablar de ese hombre, como si ignorara a su posible interlocutor" (p. 92)

³⁴ "Las patinadoras venían del frío. Giraban y se desplazaban sobre el hielo con la levedad de seres mitológicos... Elevó un brazo y sintió la gravedad atenazándolo, una catenaria de grasa obediente a un centro de masas abstracto situado en el centro de la Tierra" (p. 11-12).

meat industry. It is relevant, though, that Jorge, while perpetrating this massacre and his subsequent suicide, is listening to a German heavy metal band through his earphones and is, thus, acoustically isolated from his surroundings. Jorge sings the text: “Ich will eure Stimmen hören. Ich will die Ruhe stören. Ich will dass ihr mich gut seht. Ich will dass ihr mich versteht” (p. 256)³⁵. Jorge clings to his rifle and sings sadly, scared and angry at the same time. Jorge’s final words are thus a desperate cry against his isolation, against his otherness, against the physical and psychological borders that keep him from being seen and understood.

The Body as a Border

2020 contains references to the bodies of most of its characters. In the case of Nabil, his body carries the ethnic features that mark his origin and his difference. Gowan, on the other hand, is described as muscular in what seems an echo of his overall superiority and his almost superhuman levels of performance. I have already mentioned how corporeality has an important role in Jorge’s otherness. Jorge is repeatedly described as heavy and amorphous. The crust on his head creates repulsion and causes him to be rejected by the people around him, which only increases his sense of isolation. The character, however, whose body is mentioned most insistently is Josefina. From her first appearance in the text, the construction of her character is built upon repeated allusions to the beauty of her body, to the way she observes the reflection of her figure, to the way she moves, to the poses she strikes, to her anorexic traits. Josefina is obsessed with her body, as, seemingly, are the people around her. Josefina’s body is described as extremely beautiful and at the same time as excessively thin due to her anorexia. As opposed to Jorge, whose body becomes an obstacle between himself and others, Josefina’s body attracts other people. In a scene in an art gallery, Josefina stops to look at one of the pieces on display. Her mere presence in front of the installation has a magnetic effect and the gallery space, originally deserted,

³⁵ The text is from the song “Ich Will” by the German group Rammstein, which can be translated to English as: “I want to hear your voices. I want to disturb your rest. I want you to see me well. I want you to understand me”.

soon fills with visitors. Not only does her physical presence attract other people to the spot, but her being there seems to increase the value of the installation: “You could say that it is Josefina’s stunning presence that gives value to the work” (p. 32)³⁶. However, in this scene and in others, Josefina is alone and isolated. In this respect, there is one element central to Josefina: the gaze, both that of others and her own. In a way, the gaze supposes an ephemeral crossing and at the same time it works as a confirmation of the border between bodies and of the distance and isolation between characters. In 2020, however, the gaze also serves as a means of communication, a means to break down the isolation and cross a border. To Josefina, the gaze is a form of contact, a soft “graze”³⁷ (p. 229) and, during her walks in the center of Madrid, she has the habit of counting the number of looks that her body attracts. The connection between gaze and desire becomes patent in the scene where Josefina calculates the desire thrown at her during a day, eventually reaching a record two hundred and fifty-three looks which added together created a “memorable, kilometer-long orgasm” (p. 230)³⁸. Josefina thus inverts the power relation implicit in the gaze, as Foucault proposes it³⁹, by appropriating these looks for her own pleasure. She revolts against her role as an object by seizing the desire in the gazes of others and using it for her own gain. Another way Josefina takes power from other people’s gazes is by looking at herself and thus becoming the subject. The first time the reader meets Josefina, she is in a shop:

Josefina enjoys looking at herself in the mirrors that cover the walls of the boutique. She places herself at the right distance. She knows that the optimum degree of beauty is a question of scale. Some people look attractive seen from a distance. Others reserve the best of their anatomies for the close-up. Josefina’s figure requires three or four meters to deploy all of its seductive potential. She takes a bag from one of the counters, looks at herself and, in the image

³⁶ “Puede decirse que es la presencia imponente de Josefina la que otorga valor a la obra” (p. 32).

³⁷ “roce” (p. 229).

³⁸ “orgasmo kilométrico y memorable” (p. 230).

³⁹ In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Foucault writes about the role of the gaze as a means of power to enforce discipline and create “docile bodies” that are suitable for the modern age.

thrown back by the mirror, she thinks about an advertising poster. More Coco Rocha than Zahia Dehar. (p. 27)⁴⁰

This quote illustrates several phenomena that are associated with Josefina's body. The distance that separates her from others is patent in the three or four meters needed to best appreciate her beauty. Her contemplation of herself, far from being a natural action where she enjoys her own beauty, is described as being self-conscious with a hint of both surveillance and posing. Throughout the text, Josefina compares herself to different models and actresses and she seems to pursue an imitation of their beauty and glamor.

We have mentioned before the notion of simulacrum when studying Jorge's relation to space and his dwelling in locations such as Eurovegas. Similar parallels can be drawn in the character of Josefina between the imitation processes described before and some of the spaces she inhabits. The "Barrio de las letras", a quarter in the center of Madrid, is described as being renovated "the way many of Madrid's quarters are renovated, imitating some *arrondissement* in Paris" (p. 29)⁴¹. This imitation echoes the repeated scenes where Josefina is seen mimicking a model's gestures or looks or walking with "her Loewe hanging from her arm with that gesture full of orthodoxy which consists in keeping the joint in a perfect ninety degree angle, as she had seen Audrey Hepburn do in Rome, or as the Japanese Lolitas do under a paradise of neon lights" (p. 29)⁴². Both Josefina and the space she moves in are thus

⁴⁰ Josefina se recrea en los espejos que cubren las paredes de la boutique. Se coloca a la distancia adecuada. Sabe que el grado óptimo de belleza es un asunto de escala. Hay personas que resultan atractivas vistas de lejos. Otras reservan lo mejor de su anatomía al primer plano. La figura de Josefina requiere de tres o cuatro metros de distancia para desplegar todo su potencial de seducción. Toma un bolso de mano de uno de los mostradores, se mira y, en la imagen que le devuelve el espejo, contempla un cartel publicitario. Más Coco Rocha que Zahia Dehar. (p. 27)

⁴¹ "de ese modo en que se rehabilitan los barrios de Madrid, imitando a algún *arrondissement* parisino" (p. 29).

⁴² "su Loewe colgado del brazo con ese gesto pleno de ortodoxia que consiste en mantener la articulación en un perfecto ángulo recto, como ha visto hacer a Audrey Hepburn en Roma, como hacen las lolitas japonesas bajo un paraíso de neones" (p. 29).

imitations of something else, something supposedly sophisticated and lavish.

These processes of simulation point to a wider function of the body in 2020, one related to a discourse on the existing socio-economic system and the decay it implies. As mentioned previously, Murray sees the airplane used by the homeless as the representation of the economic crash and its consequences. In a similar way, Josefina's body can be seen as an element of a bigger economic system. Josefina's allusions to her body are accompanied by references to luxury items, to advertising and to statistics. She describes her eating disorder in economic terms:

Anorexia is an exhausting system of production. There is not a day goes by that I do not throw myself overtired on the sheets... I am open twenty-four hours a day, at full performance. My diet is made of flux and limitless availability. To reject food is work. To let parts of other bodies come into my body is work. Buying is an exhausting activity. My organism is a factory. My mind is the employer. I produce void nonstop, depriving the flesh. (p. 133)⁴³

The metaphor of Josefina's body as a reflection of a mercantile system is very explicit. The final remark on void as the product of her extenuating efforts makes her anorexia a mirror of a capitalistic system engaged in the production of unnecessary items, of invented needs, of nothingness. There is a duality in Josefina's relationship to her body. In a sense, she has lost control and become a mirror of bigger external processes; she has become a reflection of an economic system that rules her as well as the rest of the characters. She is in that sense a slave to capitalism, a mode of production that leaves its traces on her body and her life. Even if, as the above quote suggests, to Josefina's mind she is "the employer" and is, therefore, in charge, the impression is that she has only a limited control over her body, that her body belongs to something

⁴³ La anorexia es un sistema de producción agotador. No hay día que no me arroje exhausta sobre las sábanas. ... Yo permanezco abierta veinticuatro horas al día, a pleno rendimiento. Mi régimen está hecho de flujo y disponibilidad sin límite. Rechazar la comida es trabajo. Dejar entrar en mi cuerpo a partes de otros cuerpos es trabajo. Comprar es una actividad extenuante. Mi organismo es una fábrica. Mi mente es el empresario. Produzco vacío sin descanso, despojamiento de la carne. (p. 133)

beyond her, that it is part of a bigger system that governs all the characters. Josefina demonstrates a tenacious desire to control her body and still it seems not to belong to her. In the scene where Lázaro meets her for the first time: “[Josefina] approached me and feebly extended her hand to me, as if offering an object you are not too sure you possess” (p. 100)⁴⁴. The duality and contradiction inherent in Josefina’s relation to her body become even more patent when she speaks about her anorexia, in terms opposed to the ones quoted before, not as a mirror of the economic system but as a form of revolt:

Revolution is a product Josefina consumes now and then. Everyone is unhappy about something, everyone wishes for things to change. It is logical that we show our discontent with a t-shirt or a raised hand. You do not need to go further. After all, the enemy does not have a face, it is a monster that has mutated to become a part of ourselves. The only reasonable opportunity to unleash our rage is to infringe upon our own body or – as we all are guilty of doing – to use indiscriminate violence. (p. 30)⁴⁵

These lines contain two kinds of revolt: a tame one embedded in the very system it wants to fight and a more personal and violent one. Josefina’s anorexia has to be seen in the context of this “rage”, that she, on the one hand, shares with her father. Just as Josefina’s body is described as a production system, Gowan’s DNA is “connected to that stock market code that only his body is able to metabolize and make into organs, moving muscles, into a human semblance capable of speech and extraordinarily complex thought” (p. 114)⁴⁶. Both daughter and father are invaded

⁴⁴ “[Josefina] Se acercó para tenderme lánguidamente la mano, como quien ofrece un objeto de cuya posesión no se está del todo seguro” (p. 100).

⁴⁵ La revolución es un producto que Josefina consume de vez en cuando. Todo el mundo está descontento con algo, todo el mundo desea que cambien las cosas. Es lógico manifestar nuestro malestar con una camiseta o una mano alzada. No hace falta ir más lejos. Al fin y al cabo el enemigo carece de rostro, es un monstruo que ha mutado hasta convertirse en una parte de nosotros mismos. La única posibilidad razonable de dar rienda suelta a nuestra rabia consiste en atentar contra el propio cuerpo o —puesto que todos somos culpables— el uso de la violencia indiscriminada. (p. 30)

⁴⁶ “conectado con ese código bursátil que solo su cuerpo es capaz de metabolizar para convertirlo en órganos y músculos en movimiento, en una

by the enemy that “does not have a face” (p. 30), and both seem to engage in revolts of different characters, but which share their relation to the body, the gaze and the void. Whereas Josefina performs her revolt through and against her body, Gowan uses audiovisual practices. Part of his revolt involves the creation of a television channel called “channel 13”, which broadcasts only “white noise”, an image with hypnotic effects and clear connections to a void. Gowan’s revolution is also observational, not only because watching channel 13 implies a gaze but also because he has set up a network of cameras that spy on and record the lives of certain individuals in high positions. The broadcasting of short bits of these recordings on his channel 13 unites both void and gaze and the central role of this channel is suggested by Javier Moreno, the author, who appears as a character in the novel and reveals that the novel originated while he was watching channel 13. Both Josefina and Gowan thus produce void, Josefina through her body and Gowan via his channel 13. Both share the possession of a sick body: Josefina’s sickness is her eating disorder and Gowan’s is a kind of cancer or virus that seems to be taking over his body.

It is Jorge and Josefina’s bodies, though, that have the greater presence in the text, especially since they are deviant in certain ways. Their bodies reveal opposed mechanisms, such as the duality of repulsion-attraction mentioned before. However, the contradiction between the two characters is wider than their opposition. Even at the heart of the description of Josefina’s anorexia, one can see how the same body can be a servant for an economic system and a means of revolt, an object of gaze and power and an empowered gaze collector. Duality and contradiction are once again at the center of the text.

Conclusions

In the fourteenth chapter of this fragmented novel, the narrating voice reflects on notions of otherness, identity and assimilation. Moreno states that only a very small part of the population can escape what he calls “mimetic crisis”, a crisis based on the dual wish to maintain a personal identity and at the same time be part

apariencia humana capaz de habla y pensamiento extraordinariamente complejo” (p. 114).

of a bigger reality. The few that are devoid of these worries are what the narrator describes as a powerful predatory elite, once again raising a border between them and the rest of the characters, maintaining their inaccessibility to the point that they remain completely unknown to the rest. This reading of *2020* has shown how the novel is articulated around a series of characters whose otherness adopts different expressions, including the migrant, the sick, the diagnosed, the anorexic or the homeless. Nabil, whose status as both migrant and homeless person makes him the archetypal Other, is aware of the fact that he never had anything. This differentiates him from the majority of people affected by the financial crisis, the “disinherited” people who have lost something because they had something, or at least the promise of something. Nabil, uninherited instead of disinherited, is a border-crosser who tries to move towards the center, although his steps seem to take him to different peripheral locations, as if he was climbing an escalator that was going down, taking him from the desert to the outskirts of Madrid and finally to a remote part of a busy airport. On a deserted landing strip, he lodges in an abandoned plane, an echo of a bigger crisis but also of a character fighting to find a place and a function in society. If Nabil is trying to move towards the center, Gowan, a character whose otherness is based on his prodigious superiority, is travelling in the opposite direction, as he moves from a central position of power to a peripheral one from which he seeks to revolt. We have seen how the occupation of the plane by the homeless inverts Augé’s notion of non-places, by turning the transitory into the permanent. Gowan’s special room in the cellar seems to do the opposite: in the heart of the permanent, of the home, Gowan creates impermanence, a white room, blindingly bright and seemingly temporary. This room underlines Gowan’s obsession with the desert and with ruins, to the point that he becomes not only an observer of ruins but also their creator. Buying properties with the intention of letting them turn to ruin, Gowan’s actions represent a wider economic reality where objects can be bought, sold and trashed.

Two key characters in the novel are Josefina and Jorge. Both are characterized by their bodies, which act as borders that isolate them in very different ways. A key notion in this study of Jorge has been hybridity, for it is in hybrid spaces, such as the Chinese bazaar, where his difference becomes diluted, but he is exposed to

a system of exploitation. Simulacrum has also been an important idea, embodied by Eurovegas, a place where Jorge can be found masking his difference. Josefina and her body have also been associated to simulacrum as she relentlessly seems to imitate the beauty found in fashion magazines and the media. Her simulation, and the anorexia attached to it, mirrors a wider socioeconomic system, a void-producing and enslaving process. In both Josefina and Gowan, as well as in the other characters examined here, body and power, gaze and desire, space and otherness, are key elements in the composition of a text that talks about difference in the context of a future society in crisis. Even if the dystopic vision of 2020 is far from apocalyptic, the whole novel has a sinister tone and through its portrayal of isolated and deviant characters and spaces, it builds a world in ruins that leaves little to hope for.

References

- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands: The New Mestiza. La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute.
- Augé, M. (1995). *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. London: Verso.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Becerra, D. (ed.) (2015). *Convocando al fantasma. Novela crítica en la España Actual*. Madrid: Tierradenadie.
- Celaya-Carrillo, B. (2011). “Pánicos racistas: reflexiones sobre la inmigración en Cataluña y España a partir de un texto de Najat El Hachmi,” *MLN*, 126(2), pp. 344–365.
- Chirbes, R. (2013). *En la orilla*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Gómez Trueba, T. (2012). “Nuevos espacios míticos para la última narrativa mutante: el no lugar y la estética del simulacro,” *Revista de Alces XXI. Journal of contemporary Spanish Literature & Film*, 0, pp. 54–85.
- Harvey, D. (2012). *Rebel Cities*. New York: Verso.

- Kamen, Henry (2007). *The Disinherited: Exile and the Making of Spanish Culture, 1492–1975*. London: Allen Lane
- Marín, M. (2016). “Lisa McInerney: «La clase trabajadora ha sido olvidada en literatura»,” *El país*. Available at: http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2016/12/21/actualidad/1482342980_099633.html, (Accessed: 10 September 2017).
- McClung, W. A. (1988). “Dialectics of Literary Cities.” *Journal of Architectural Education*, 41(3), pp 33–37.
- Mora, V. L. (2014). “Welcome to Limbo: literatura hispánica entre lugares,” *Diálogos Latinoamericanos*, 23, pp. 6–24.
- Moreno, J. (2013). 2020. Madrid: Lengua de trapo.
- Murray, M. (2016). “Capital Ruptures: Economies of Crisis and Urban Space in Javier Moreno’s 2020,” *452°F: Revista de Teoría de la Literatura y Literatura Comparada*, 15, pp. 71–92.
- Rodríguez Marcos, Javier (2013). “Una crisis de novela,” *El País*, Available at: https://elpais.com/sociedad/2013/03/16/actualidad/1363470608_130051.html, (Accessed: 10 September 2017).
- Valdivia, P. (2016). “Narrando la crisis financiera de 2008 y sus repercusiones,” *452°F: Revista de Teoría de la Literatura y Literatura Comparada*, 15, pp. 18–36.
- Van Gennep, A. (1977). *The rites of passage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Vélez Sainz, J. (2014). “La novela de la crisis,” *Huffington Post*, Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.es/julio-velez-sainz/la-novela-de-la-crisis_b_5309345.html, (Accessed: 10 September 2017).

Questioning the Border in Yoko Tawada's Poetics of Trans-Formation: *Akzentfrei* (2016) and *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende* (2016)¹

Eriberito Russo

Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples

Introduction

Yoko Tawada is among the major exponents of the so-called *Chamisso-Literatur*. This represents a literary designation which echoes a German literary award, the *Chamisso-Preis*, and which embraced, at the beginning, the identity of non-German-speaking authors who wrote in German. Nowadays, as the social landscape of German-speaking countries has changed and we deal with German authors with migratory backgrounds, the definition has transformed its criteria and targets and is starting to be fully integrated into the framework of German canonical literature (Schmitz 2009), while removing the idea that texts written by migrants are to be considered as non-German books (Joachimsthaler; 2009, p. 19).

Tawada was born in Tokyo. After studying Russian literature, she went to Germany, where she achieved a Ph.D. in German

¹ As there will be many quotations from the German original texts by Yoko Tawada, which have not been yet officially translated, the author of this article will perform all the translations. These latter must not be considered as the official translations, but rather as a way to make the German quotations linguistically intelligible for all readers. Where possible, rhymes and puns have been translated as well. The original text will be included in the footnotes.

How to cite this book chapter:

Russo, E. 2021. Questioning the Border in Yoko Tawada's Poetics of Trans-Formation: *Akzentfrei* (2016) and *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende* (2016). In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 75–98. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.d>. License: CC-BY 4.0

literature and where she currently lives. She writes in both German and Japanese; it must be underlined that the present chapter does not take Tawada's production in Japanese into account, but only her production in German. From end to end, her production oscillates between narratives and essays, and makes full use of both ordinary and surreal aspects. The starting point of her writing is the common side of ordinary life, whose meaning she virtually negotiates through the encounter with the surreal. It is in the very moment of that collision that we find ourselves immersed in a narrative flow, which happens to be located on the border between these two domains. The liminal and marginal spaces become, in this way, the dialectical device through which texts transform and translate themselves and land in remote places that, progressively, turn out to be fragments of otherness.

The present contribution will start from these conceptual premises, while exploring some paradigmatic texts in Tawada's production (*Slavia in Berlin*, *Akzentfrei* and *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende*), through which the problematic nature of the border space, to which she dedicates many of her reflections, is made more explicit. The methodological debt to the so-called *spatial turn* (Arias and Warf 2009), an approach that identifies, both in indoors and outdoors places and in mobility, a point of necessary intersection, represents a fundamental starting point. Tawada's texts that have been here taken into account move themselves, in fact, through the dimension of transculturality (Welsch 2002) and depict spatial physiognomies, which reverberate methodologically, moreover, with border theories, which investigate the concept of the border in geographical (the physical and political border), literary (the border as a threshold, a limit etc.) and interdisciplinary (the border in the arts and media) perspectives (Schimanski and Wolfe 2007) and provide important theoretical tools for the present examination.

The investigation of Tawada's perception of the border anticipates the analysis of the poetry *Slavia in Berlin*, in which the author exploits the full potential of delocating and relocating places in order to structure a sophisticated language game. The reflection opens, on the one hand, to a metalinguistic and meta-poetological writing (*Akzentfrei*) and, on the other hand, to an

experimental text with a difficult identification from the point of view of the literary genre (*Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende*). In *Akzentfrei*, the emphasis is placed on the border as a meta-linguistic space and in *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende* the focus shifts to the text's foreplay, which, in addition to representing a paratextual figure (Genette 1987), also constitutes a fluid passing space into the narrative universe.

Talking from the Border: Yoko Tawada's *Rede zum Kleistpreis*

Writing an essay on Yoko Tawada's conception of the border means confronting, first of all, an author whose writing process has been said to be rooted in the ravine of language (Slaymaker 2010) and at the crossroads of languages (Braun and Valtolina 2016). We do not only deal with the so-called "in-between space" of the language, as this would provide a definition and a location—this is not something we can do with Tawada, as she herself refuses any categorization. We could rather say that her writing overlaps cultures and cultural forms, which, while continuing to keep their characteristics, evolve through new and unexpected forms. In other words, her condition as a writer from another "world" is, this way, initially imaginable as a boundary. The essential point is but, that, for Tawada, there actually are no boundaries, or rather, there can be no boundaries. When critics try to define her writing persona through the word *Grenzgängerin* — literally "boundary-goer", they collide with Tawada's will not to be defined. The dimensions of the amorphous and of the undefined are the territories she likes to visit and to inhabit. Her entire work can be seen as the presentation of a tendency to refuse to be locked into any category, which she, nevertheless, cannot escape. In support of the ambivalence of these attitudes, we need to remember the acceptance speech she gave during the award ceremony of the prestigious *Kleistpreis* in 2016. One of the themes she treated was in fact the border: "At the word *boundary*, however, I often flinch. It reminds me of armed soldiers"² (Tawada 2016a).

² "Beim Wort Grenze zuckte ich aber oft zusammen. Es erinnert mich an bewaffnete Soldaten".

Tawada recovers from her memory the image of armed soldiers at national borders and adds that her idea of the boundary has not changed since her first journey to the Soviet Union, which later brought her to Germany. The neuralgic point of her reflection is clear in the statement “Between two languages, on the other hand, I never saw a border”³ (Tawada 2016a). This image refers to the condition of an exophone speaker—someone who lives between languages and throughout languages—who does not question the existence of a border or boundary as he/she himself/herself represents the boundary (Arndt, Naguschewski and Stockhammer 2007). “Each language forms an interspace, and the space between two languages is not a space, but the real space in which literature is written.”⁴ (Tawada 2016a). In this latter statement, however, the true meaning of the concept of *Zwischenraum*—in-between space (Bhabha 1994; Wirth 2012)—comes to light, in the very form in which it is regarded and presented throughout Tawada’s production. We can conceive it from two points of view: it can be considered as the blank space between two languages or cultures, or as the diversifying element of a language. On the one hand, we have a *Zwischenraum* which is built into the language itself, and therefore can have the aspect of a perennial intermediary. On the other hand, we find the space between two languages, which should not be identified as an in-between space, but rather as the place where artistic creation can manifest itself. The author’s identity, which is questioned, lies not only in the fracture between languages but also in the point of disjunctiveness between individuality and extraneousness, even if identities, after all, never come to a true conjunction. They rather wander and fluctuate like the soul, which Yoko Tawada describes in her tale *Erzähler ohne Seele* (1996). The absence of the soul, or rather its loss, becomes the starting point for the author and organizes itself as the primordial expression of a lack that finds room also in writing. The inability to recognize the deepened fractures between forms and contents leads to an inquiry that questions the nature of the dynamics underlying the writing itself. The shattering of certainties linked

³ “Zwischen zwei Sprachen hingegen habe ich nie eine Grenze gesehen”.

⁴ “Jede Sprache bildet einen Zwischenraum und der Raum zwischen zwei Sprachen ist kein Zwischenraum, sondern der eigentliche Raum, in dem Literatur geschrieben wird”.

to the power of writing and the processes leading to it makes it possible to open the *quaestio* to a further consideration. If writing is the result of a fracture between the languages and the nature of the writing itself, where is it possible to conceptually locate the author's figure? It is, perhaps, drawn from the inescapable swirling of the *Zwischenraum*, which settles itself as the medium through which the structures both of the intermediary and of the boundary come to terms with the dimension of the fictional word.

On the Non-Existence of Places

“I look like a person without a soul,
because my soul is always uprooted.”⁵

(Tawada 1996, p. 20)

After introducing the places in which Tawada's work conceptually takes place, we will see how her way of conveying the instance of authorship actually affects her writing about otherness. On the occasion of a conference in San Francisco, she held a talk entitled “Tawada Yoko does not exist”. Thanks to a kind of uninterrupted and uninterruptible “sleight of hand” with her own work and her persona, Tawada makes it possible to consider her as an example of what I would now like to begin describing as the “staging of a border of otherness”.

In one of her most famous tales, which we can find in the volume *Talisman* (1996), Tawada points out in first person, as though confessing a secret, that she has been deprived of her soul. From that moment on she has actually become the *Erzähler ohne Seele* (Tawada 1996, p. 20)— a storyteller without a soul — of which she talks about in her aforementioned tale. The latter question is something that we can circumscribe as a multiform privation that occurs through the most unlikely ways and that is strictly linked to cultural dimensions such as the Western and Eastern worlds, that are, in her personal life and writing experience, so close together. It is Tawada herself who constantly questions the possibility of speaking of a diametrical conceptual opposition

⁵ “Ich sehe aus wie ein seeloser Mensch, weil meine Seele immer unterwegs ist”.

of the East, from which she herself comes, and the West, which welcomed her. These ways of conceiving of otherness represent objections that are frequently raised since they are primarily related to the concept of belonging. Where does she, actually, belong? The author herself tries to give an answer in the incipit of *Sprachpolizei und Spielpolyglotte* (2008).

I am in Europe. I don't know where I am. One thing is sure: the nearest East is very near from here, too. The place, from which the nearest East very near is, is named Europe. When I still used to live in the far East, the nearest East was very far.⁶ (Tawada, 2008, p. 21)

In the core of her reflection, there is a presumable dismemberment of the concepts of proximity and distance, of both East and West. Tawada claims to be in Europe, but at the same time she denies this with a geographical recognition. In order to escape the feeling of disregard for Europe, where her body should theoretically be, Tawada finds shelter in an attempt to redefine the geographical categories of the Near East and the Far East. Since the first effort to locate Europe fails, she leads her own investigation to the extreme by introducing the figure of the airport, which the French thinker Marc Augé has included in his list of the *non-lieux* (Augé 2009). By bringing it back to her recent experience, she declares that she has observed the departure and arrival schedules of the planes and has produced a kind of solution: the essence of Europe lies in the places where the planes land. She denies, even so, a real value to this other solution since sometimes planes do not land as expected where they are supposed to land (Tawada 2008, p. 23).

In addition, *Talisman* is very important because it is possible to find a poem entitled *Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen, aber Europa gibt es nicht*, in which Tawada had already given her final judgment on the existence of Europe. Europe does not exist, but it is necessary to silence this truth. This continent is localized on a geographical map but can be found neither in the mind nor

⁶ "Ich bin in Europa. Ich weiß nicht, wo ich bin. Eines ist sicher: der Nahe Osten ist von hier aus ganz nah. Der Ort, von dem der Nahe Osten ganz nah ist, heißt Europa. Als ich noch im Fernen Osten lebte, war der Nahe Osten ganz fern".

in the soul. We should not, however, be upset by such a dissection of what should be geographically unitary. Theoretical attempts to locate, in Tawada, are often imbued with an ideological lust for a delocalization (Ottmar 2010, p. 221)

When I wrote in a poem that Europe does not exist, I did not mean that it was lost. I wanted to argue that Europe was already invented as a lost figure.⁷ (Tawada 1996, p. 50)

Tawada does not want to create ambiguity. It is not possible to define this loss in relation to an earlier existence of Europe. The loss of which Tawada speaks is an a priori loss, a real absence of identity, born with Europe. This is an aspect which sheds light on another central issue in Tawada's conception of places. The European continent, as well as other places, is to be seen as a basic object of interest, which can be summarized through some elementary questions. What is a country and what is, moreover, a place? They can be considered both as simple points on the geographic map to which a particular nomenclature is tied, or they can be entirely questioned. Tawada chooses this second option.

She offers, in fact, an interpretation of the concept of land in the poem that opens the volume *Sprachpolizei und Spielpolyglotte*. The poem is titled *Slavia in Berlin*. The peculiarity of this poem is to be found in the total violation of both the dimensions of significance and meaning. The composition is told from the point of view of a traveler who is wandering to reach someone with whom she has a close and perhaps sentimental relationship that is endangered by the distance.

Slavia in Berlin shows a particular and unusual use of vocabulary. Everyday words are replaced and, at various moments, interrupted by place names. Such a technique seems, however, to be unconscious. It seems, in fact, to flow naturally into the mind of the narrator.

⁷ "Als ich in einem Gedicht schrieb, dass es Europa nicht gibt, meinte ich auf keinen Fall, dass sie verlorengegangen sei. Ich wollte eher behaupten, dass Europe bereits im Ursprung als eine Verlust-Figur erfunden wurde. The so mythical idea of a Europe and so often talked about and celebrated is actually born as a figure of the loss."

I took Abu Simbel from my Cameroon and left
 Los Angeles
 Appointed at three o'clock⁸
 (Tawada 2007, p. 7)

The places that Tawada mentions throughout the poem are rather disparate; we can find, in fact, known, unknown, urban, rural, contemporary, ancient and exotic locations. Through their employment, the author intends to create a discourse revolving around a dialectic of spatiality, the relocation of something which cannot be apparently located (since it does not exist) and that aspires to survive in the ordinary language only through a statement of the impossibility to locate itself.

In the first three lines quoted, it is possible to recognize three main sites: Abu Simbel, Cameroon and Los Angeles. In a phonetic space of about 25 syllables, the reader is brought to his knowledge on two continents, Asia and Africa, and two epochs, antiquity⁹ and contemporaneity (Mousel Knott 2010, pp. 401–404). A reader who is well acquainted with the German language will identify the inclusion in the first line of a grammatical agreement that could be understood as an apparent mistake, namely *von mein Cameroon*, which should have been *von meinem Cameroon*. The mistake is however intentional, as, in the context of an oral reading, the plural form of the dative in its phonetical reduction is able to recreate the articulatory atmosphere of the expression *von meinen Kammern*. Every word, every sound and every single constituent element of a sentence or line of poetry plays a role in the overall context and has to recall another element, which must be equally significant and at the service of the senses: this is due to the presence of an infinite creation of intertextual links. It is possible to raise, nonetheless, a question in relation to the associations that the author constantly uses. In the case of a poem like *Slavia in Berlin*, it cannot be said that the piece of information that each element mentions is immediately clear to every type of reader. An average, educated individual might not know the cultural value of

⁸ “Ich nahm Abu Simbel von mein Cameroon und ging Los Angeles, verabredet um drei Uhr”.

⁹ Abu Simbel is an archeological site, whose importance is strongly related to the antiquity.

a place of worship like Abu Simbel, but he or she might know Los Angeles and Cameroon; in the case of a complete lack of intelligibility with respect to the places mentioned in the poem, the author ensures and incites a sort of collapse of all links by reducing the locations to simple letters.

I was in K, too
 I will be in G
 You will be in T¹⁰
 (Tawada 2007, p. 8)

Another method of deconstruction is the reduction of the localities to contracted and easily recognizable shapes.

In California you were a deer
 in San F., in San D¹¹
 (Tawada 2007, p. 7)

It is at this point that the idea of a total deconstruction of the spatiality materializes itself at its best and through an idea of a space that can be both filled and possibly blackened or, categorically, dodged. The intertextual and hypertextual quality of the poem extends while embracing the hermeneutic activity in its entirety. The reader is called to contribute actively to the development and the melting of the interpretative knots of the text. It must, actually, face a poetic voice that is totally unaware of the grammatical and lexical transgressions it is making. Tawada, as the author, is certainly conscious, in contrast to the poetic voice, which is not. The question arising from these reflections is mainly linked to the role of the act of reading. How does one come to terms with the inability of the poetic voice to recognize its transgressions? The reader is certainly called, in an elementary way, to read the whole poem in order to understand its meaning and to investigate its own impressions. After the reading process has ended, you have, of course, to recapture in your memory and in your individuality the meaning you have tried to give while constructing its horizon of analysis. The reader must understand, with a deeper and more technical gaze, how the poem relates to itself and which

¹⁰ "Ich war auch in K. / Ich werde in G. sein/ Du wirst in T. sein".

¹¹ "In California warst du ein Reh/ In San-F, in San-D".

narrative devices inspire it. This may, of course, apply to any type of experimental poetry, which, as in Tawada's case, wants to present in the purest and most concrete way the idea of a polyglot game, or a *Spielpolyglotte*. However, we need to go back to the first lines of poetry in order to make an important observation. It has been said how much the name of each place is central to the understanding of the poem's message. Nothing is left to chance; the name of each appropriately reduced phonetic site can be attributed to an expression or to a German word. By practicing this rule, we would see that "Ich nahm Abu Simbel von mein Kamerun und ging Los Angeles verabredet um drei Uhr" could be reformulated in the following way: "I left my rooms and went away, appointed at 3."¹² Likewise, while reading, we come across other places, the names of which we can almost immediately correlate to some words in German:

Cigarettes were Heilbronn
 Ticket machines were Cape Town
 The machine did not take my Europe,
 neither Munich nor Shines¹³ (Tawada 2007, p. 7)

This unceasing self-staging through wordplay provokes a brief moment of bafflement. Is there, then, another place behind each place, another space to be filled, a place to recognize and interpret? Let us take for example *Heilbronn* and *Kapstadt*. Behind the two cities, it is not difficult to recognize the adjectives *heil* and *kaputt*, which could virtually replace the names of the two cities. If, from a lexical point of view, behind the city of Munich it is possible to identify the term *Münzen*, a somewhat more complex role is played by the use of the term *Europa*, which, in this case, experiences a true reification by becoming a thing—perhaps a banknote—that the machine cannot read. The experiment opens up, in this way, into a sort of trespassing labyrinth. Places, cities or continents, of any size and extension, are like objects to be grasped. The grammatical categories hiding behind the place

¹² "Ich nahm ab von meinen Kammern und ging los, verabredet um drei Uhr".

¹³ "Zigarettenautomaten war Heilbronn/ Fahrkartenautomaten waren Kapstadt/ Die Maschine nahm meine Europa nicht an /weder München noch Scheine".

names are various; the name of a city or a land indicates a noun, an adjective and sometimes other interjections or conjunctions.

Sinai, Sinai, you can find here no Prague
 Bathu Dhabi, I need to go to Prague¹⁴
 (Tawada 2007, p. 7)

In a conversation between the first-person narrator and the *Texasfahrer*, the misunderstanding takes over when the woman asks to go to Prague. The *Texasfahrer*—the term behind which is hidden *Taxifahrer*—is confused and responds negatively by replacing *Nein* with *Sinai*. The repetitions of the term *Prag*, at the end of the two verses, fits inside an unreported dialogue, which sees the city *Abu Dhabi* as a replacement for the conjunction *Aber*. The entire poem is crossed by this replacement technique. By lexically scrutinizing the text we find other consonances such as *Finnland—Finden, Ägypten—Gibt* and *Lassen Sie mich dann hier Australien—Lassen Sie mich dann hier aussteigen*. This geographical discourse runs out towards the end of the poem, even if not completely, with a sudden change of register. The ironic alternation of city names and misunderstandings are replaced with a more melancholic tone. The first-person narrator does not forget her goal, which is the appointment with a lover, introduced through the personal pronoun *you*: “I have described you the wrong place. You told me.”¹⁵ The monolingualism is abandoned in order to give space for a dialogue which moves from a focus on *me* to *us*: “We found the brightest table without a city map.”¹⁶ The sentimental element breaks into the narration as the meeting starts to take shape and ends by concluding the poetic project, which takes on dramatic tones.

Crawling on the ground
 I look for the clock second hand,
 which has fallen out of my mouth.
 What is the name of the city that never ends?
 Its first syllable does not occur to me

¹⁴ “Sinai, Sinai, Sie finden dort kein Prag! / Abu Dhabi, ich muss nach Prag!”

¹⁵ “Ich habe Dir den Ort falsch beschrieben, sagtest du zu mir.”

¹⁶ “Den hellsten Tisch am Fenster fanden wir ohne Stadtplan.”

In its place begins your absence.¹⁷
(Tawada 2007, p. 9)

This way, the required blank spaces and the distortions of the localization take the form of an absence, or better said, of a lack of memory. After having quoted and virtually visited so many places and traveling metonymically between continents and countries, the first-person narrator shows a mournful tiredness. She wonders what the name of the city is which does not end and suggests that she is not even able to remember the first syllable. At the same time, she declares the end of the searching process. The quest for the place, that cannot be found, is, consequently, replaced by the nonappearance of the beloved. The curtain falls, the light goes off and the public *Ab-Laus* (*ap-plause*). Everything goes back to normal, the interlocutor goes away and returns to its own hideout and the narrator, tired from the long and hard journey and confused by the unsolvable research of the places, starts a further journey towards the station *Nirgendzoo*, behind which hides the final declaration of non-existence, actually a *Nirgendwo* (nowhere).

Infringing the Perception of Spatial Border: *Akzentfrei* and *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende*

As we have seen, places play a central role in Yoko Tawada's poetics, which Christiane Ivanovic (2010) defines as a poetics of transformation, by expecting this concept to be the description of the whole work written by Tawada. The author, in fact, has, on more than one occasion, described her intellectual debts to both Ovid and Kafka, as she manipulates the transformative quality of the language in order to transform and decentralize physical, perceptual and mental places.

The spaces that the author brings into play are not only to be considered as belonging to the geographical domains, but to the mental and poetic ones as well. In Tawada's writing dimension, everything can configure itself as a place, which by employing

¹⁷ "Auf dem Boden kriechend suche ich nach dem Sekundenzeiger/ der aus meinem Mund gefallen ist. / Wie lautet der Name der Stadt, der nie endet? / Seine erste Silbe fällt mir nicht ein. / An ihrer Stelle beginnt schon deine Abwesenheit".

at most the pervasive quality of the boundaries, outlines itself as a way to conceive the space of the transformation. The author's last two works, *Akzentfrei* and *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende*, both published in 2016, fit within the complex and dialectical overcoming of both the category of the border and the act of trespass.

Akzentfrei (2016): On Languages and Edges

Akzentfrei is considered, as the back covers show, to be a continuation of the collection of essays put together in the *Talisman* (1996) and was published in 2016, exactly twenty years after the publication of the aforementioned *Talisman*. *Akzentfrei* gathers in itself all aspects of poetics, which have, over time, succeeded in exploiting the ubiquitous transformation characteristic to which Tawada's poetic texts are subject, in order to transform themselves. The volume is divided into three parts: *In einem neuen Land*, *Nicht vergangen* and *Französischer Nachtschisch*. In the first section, to which I will turn my attention, Tawada resumes some of her production themes, namely, the accent, the Trans-Siberian location and the problems of writing and translation, placing them in dialogue with the virtual configurations of modernity. By accompanying readers on an imaginary journey between the forms and the drifts of extraneousness, Tawada describes, or rather, deepens her metapoetic project, which becomes summarized in the title of one of the stories in the volume: *Schreiben im Netz der Sprachen*. Tawada's writing is not about melancholy and a lack of a country of origin, but is a critical reflection on being foreign in a country, in fact, foreign. Daily and surreal dimensions overlap, creating new forms and translations of identity. The encounter of the surreal with objects drawn from the sphere of everyday life leads to a semantic enhancement of the space of writing.

The title of the *Akzentfrei* volume refers to several issues related to her production and shows, while trying to translate it, different levels of confrontation with otherness. We might translate it as "without accent", "free from accent", or "released/freed from accent". In the first case, "without accent", we would point to the lack of accent in a certain word. This aspect is impossible in German, since non-ideological languages, as Tawada stresses on several occasions, base their existence on rhythm. In the

second and third cases, “free or freed from accent” would mean emancipation from the formal characteristics of the language itself (accent, pronunciation, rhythm) and consideration of language as a visible object. “The accent is the face of the spoken language”¹⁸ (Tawada 2016b, p. 24). By meeting the visual object—*das Gesicht*—with the acoustical aspect—*der Akzent*—Tawada casts the foundation for further writing on identity, that of a figure seeking a space for oneself in everyday life. Talking, just like traveling, means drinking “foreign water”. This is a topos that often comes back in Tawada’s texts, almost as an interpretative formula of the condition of otherness in its entirety. The accent is audible just as the face is visible; if the exterior appearance carries the traces of the time passing and facial expressions point to the mood, the accent is a trace of one’s own sound identity. Any alteration and deviation from the socially accepted norm, which dictates that words must be pronounced in a certain way, or with a specific accent, should not be identified as a reason for discrimination or as an inability to speak properly a language, but rather as an invitation to create: “It is not my task to distinguish between a regional coloring, a foreign accent, a sociolect and a language error.”¹⁹ (Tawada 2016b, p. 24). What does it mean to deviate from the norm and to take advantage of the deviation in order to make poetry? Tawada explains her point by describing an everyday situation. If we find ourselves at a restaurant during lunchtime, we might face, through a dialogue or a passive listening of the voices around us, an encounter with other accents or with other landscapes. When a presumably foreign waitress would begin to speak, her words would start floating around in the air and transform themselves into something different. In that very moment the waitress and her accent are inviting us to see distant places through her mouth.

The author tells us about an imaginary expedition beginning on an equally imaginary Orient Express: “Her breath is an Orient

¹⁸ “Der Akzent ist das Gesicht der gesprochenen Sprache”.

¹⁹ “Es ist nicht meine Aufgabe, eine regionale Färbung, einen ausländischen Akzent, einen Soziolekt und einen Sprachfehler voneinander zu unterscheiden.”

express. I get on.”²⁰ (Tawada 2016b, p. 24). If, on the one hand, the accent can be seen as a cause for discrimination, since it is subject to negative assessments, on the other hand, the impulse to integrate and to keep alive the inevitable *Zwischenraum* emerges from the crevices between the different identities and the various lives of a foreigner. The contrasting feeling of mixed fear and desire to be or become someone else through interaction with the otherness emerges in the reflection on the accent, contained in the story *Schreiben im Netz der Sprachen*. While recovering the formulas of *Zwischenraum* and *Exophonie*, Tawada employs the metaphor of the web in order to explain how writing should be intended as a result of an interaction: “When I came to Europe I had burning questions in my luggage: will I become another person, when I speak another language?”²¹ (Tawada 2016b, p. 29). Some moments of the biography of Tawada have become the subject of an epic process. The arrival in Europe is one of them. In the quoted statement, which summarizes the insecurity and curiosity of living a lifetime, the author questions the experience of residing in a foreign country not only in its material aspects but also in its spiritual consequences.

The act of interrogating one's own destiny, face, accent and language is used as an excuse to come to a conclusion. The individual must be considered to be a network that is progressively encouraged to create new interpretative models for the self and for the world. We deal with a network that resembles a new body, as it has bones, cavities and ends, which, combined with the knowledge, give birth to a new self. In this new reticular form, writing is engraved—it is a mixture of words, which on the one hand, remain in a web in the vice of the impossibility of a profound understanding, and on the other hand, exploit the network itself to “define” and become autonomous. To illustrate this aspect, Tawada uses the term *Wortspielerei*, which, in her opinion, dialogues with the space-time overlapping, in which the individual acts.

²⁰ “Ihr Atemzug ist der Orient Express. Ich steige ein.”

²¹ “Als ich nach Europa kam, hatte ich brennende Fragen in meiner Reisetasche: werde ich zu einem anderen Menschen, wenn ich eine andere Sprache spreche?”

Why do we have to deal with such a word play? In today's world we can always see words and images from different worlds side by side. Through migration, world travel or surfing on the Internet one finds oneself more and more often in a situation in which the co-existence already exists, without a corresponding thinking space was developed. Sometimes I catch the bus and go through the city and am surrounded by several conversations in different languages. Two sentences, that randomly enter my ears, do not yet have a common space. You need a framework to connect these sentences together.²² (Tawada, 2016b, p. 35).

Tawada declares, in a sense, our inability to think of the world as singular, while emphasizing, moreover, the need to think of it in a plural way and not forgetting that each plurality has, in the end, a singularity. In transitioning from an imaginary journey to a real one among the cities, the author notes how different languages and cultures come into contact in places such as on the bus, leading to the creation of new narrative scenarios. This process, continues Tawada, recalls the projects of surrealists that can be considered as the initiators of this *Poetik der Wortspielerei* (poetics of the puns) produced by a shared design “which could bring a sewing machine together with an umbrella.”²³ (Tawada 2016b, p. 36). It is not just surrealists who are referring to the point of reference, but also Goethe, as in one of the poems contained in the *West-östlicher Divan* in which the words *Wort* and *Fort* create a rhyme. To these two words Tawada adds the word *Ort*, generating a triad of rhymes that she herself uses to expose the “evocative” quality of the three words: “Every time when I think these three words together, it flashes in my head. Words create places, but in the

²² “Wozu muss man sich mit so einer Wortspielerei beschäftigen? Im heutigen Leben sieht man ständig Wörter und Bilder aus verschiedenen Welten nebeneinander. Durch Migration, Weltreisen oder Surfen im Internet befindet man sich immer häufiger in einer Situation, in der das Nebeneinander bereits existiert, ohne dass ein entsprechender Denkraum entwickelt worden ist. Manchmal fahre ich mit dem Bus durch die Stadt und bin umgeben von mehreren Gesprächen in verschiedenen Sprachen. Zwei Sätze, die zufällig direkt hintereinander in meine Ohren dringen, haben noch keinen gemeinsamen Raum. Man braucht eine Rahmenhandlung, um diese Sätze miteinander zu verbinden.”

²³ “auf dem eine Tretnähmaschine mit einem Regenschirm zusammenkommen konnte.”

place where one is located, one is always already gone”²⁴ (Tawada 2016a, p. 36). The perception produced by thinking of words that are similar in sound but not in meaning leads the author to invest the individual terms with a new semantic valence, with the purpose of producing an effect of strangeness. Only through surreal alienation, which virulently defies the order of things, is it, in fact, possible to generate definitions; words have evocative power when they find themselves on the space of the page. The evocation produces a place that does not necessarily correspond to the one in which it is located.

Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende (2016): The Foreplay as Introductory Border

With *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende*, Tawada's narrative experimentalism reaches high levels of both authorial and interpretative opacity. This text is part of that new moment of Tawada's poetics which we can now try to define as a “poetics of water”, and which appears to be a development of the already problematic “poetics of transformation”. It is not meant as a change of course, but simply as a narrative sophistication of the metamorphic dimension. The water, the amorphous figure par excellence, becomes a new motif to which we turn our gaze in order to outline the narrative features of Tawada's last works. This new phase of her poetics, initiated properly with the publication of the volume *Fremde Wasser*, is the result of a series of lessons held in the framework of the *Hamburger Poetikvorlesungen* in 2012, and is basically taken from a revealing sentence that Tawada often uses, in which she sees the journey as a time of contact with foreign waters (Tawada 1995, p. 1).

Like most of the works by the Japanese-German author, the text moves through polyvalent territory. On the one hand, we find the daily dimension, on the other hand, the surreal dimension. The encounter, which can sometimes be seen as a critical crash, leads to a great inferential effort for the reader. Departing from the traditional classification of the literary genres, Tawada's last

²⁴ “Jedes Mal, wenn ich diese drei Wörter zusammen denke, blitzt es in meinem Kopf. Worte schaffen Orte, aber an dem Ort, an dem man sich befindet, ist man immer bereits fort.”

work could be identified both as a poetic novel and as a fiction of poetry. Such definitions, the result of a play on words, define the author's space of action, which never moves only within in a genre, but alters the very concept of literary categories while overcoming formal boundaries. It is precisely this aspect that leads us to distance ourselves from the rules and to construct a discourse about the infractions.

The text is composed of 14 narrations in verse and opens with a kind of prologue, to which the author gives the name of *Vorspiel* (foreplay), a name which indicates, in the theatrical lexicon, an anticipatory moment. Such a foreplay is, as we will see, an important narrative feature.

Revolving around a space-time dimension that can be traced in the free space between the theatrical and the poetic surface, the work moves around the anthropomorphizing of the forms, in which all that is watery manifests itself, including the river and the sea, and comes to revise and rethink the figure of the siren, which acts as a glue and as an emblem of the encounter between the sea and the terrestrial space.

In the *Vorspiel*, where the dimension of liminality is both physical and conceptual, we witness tight processes of lexical associations that, however, do not always produce a meaning. This latter aspect makes it possible to configure Tawada's work as an open work which does not incorporate formal and mental limitations, and which crosses all possible boundaries (Eco 2000).

By taking advantage of its changing identity, borrowed from the maritime dimension, *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende* succeeds in overcoming the facet of unintelligibility and acquires, therefore, infringing features. The title, literally "a place on a balcony for ephemeral nights", can be considered to be the place from which it is possible to observe an uninterrupted flow of impressions, thoughts and images. These are destined to break into the primary matter of Tawada's possible worlds, that is to say, the language. Even if we consider a theoretical framework different from that of *Akzentfrei* or *Slavia in Berlin*, *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende* is a tribute to the ability of the language to mold and transform itself when in contact with the liquidity of artistic creation. The symbolism of the balcony, which can be seen as a physically suspended place that facilitates an individual's

contact with the outside, reveals itself in its essence in a form similar to another eye that describes what can be represented as a duel between the pseudo-corporeity of the tongue and the watery amorphism, which, however, proves *to be* in the overturning of the ordinary into surrealism (Tawada 2016b, p. 5).

The North Sea has longing for the Czech Republic
stretches her blue arm into the interior of Europe
[...]
Who pushes the sleeping-clouds/ in the cosmic abacus?
The rehabilitation of the sky goes into the
Length [...]
passersby are cleansed
curtains at the window
all traffic lights between A and B
between Altona and Blankenese
stay out²⁵
(Tawada, 2016c, p. 5)

The foreplay exemplifies, in a nutshell, two collateral processes: on the one hand, the personification of what is inanimate, on the other hand, the surreal reification of what is animated. In this regard, the North Sea, in a nostalgic longing for the Czech Republic, stretches its arms towards Central Europe; the sky is undergoing a restructuring; the passers-by are put in order (note the use of the verb *aufräumen*, usually used to indicate the ordering of a room or a messy space).

The space of the infraction thus becomes a space in which the sensitive and surreal dimensions overlap, creating a further space where everything flows and trespasses.

As the Elbe—the river flowing in the city of Hamburg and representing the figure around which the text is built—retires, we read of a male speaking voice:

²⁵ “Die Nordsee hat Sehnsucht nach Tschechien, / streckt ihren blauen Arm ins Innere Europas./ [...] Wer schiebt die Schlafleinwolken/ im kosmischen Abakus hin und her?
Die Sanierung des Himmels zieht sich in die/ Länge. /[...] Passanten werden aufgeräumt,
Gardinen am Fenster zugezogen, / alle Ampeln zwischen A und B, / zwischen Altona und Blankenese / bleiben aus.”

From one of the roses bush speaks to me/
 Voice on, male-hoarse'
 Hey, you there, can you place yourself there and
 control that no one can see me? I need to
 What does he have to do?
 Have to is an auxiliary verb
 which helps no verbs
 Watch out? So that no one sees him?
 an invisibility service?

The man blinks nervously²⁶
 (Tawada, 2016c, p. 6)

From the bush, presumably nearby the river, arises a masculine, slightly gloomy voice, asking someone—probably one of the realigned passers—to check that no one sees it, while giving a reason, introduced by the modal duty verb, without concluding, however, the sentence. From the dialogic form, we return to the narration in the third person. The narrator focuses her attention on the absence of a modal-related verb, which is, therefore, considered to be an auxiliary verb which, in fact, does not perform any auxiliary function—perhaps because it does not belong to it. After the linguistic reflection, we find ourselves, again, in the dialogue between the two characters: the corporal voice becomes ever more nervous and masculine. The reader starts questioning his identity and his purposes: what does he want and what does he expect from his interlocutor? He is, actually, questing for an invisibility, that cannot be realized.

Do you understand German? I have to
 Leave the water
 There is already enough water, I replied
 In the word answer sits a we.
 This time it was not him but me.
 He's looking at me from hair to
 shoe and says:

²⁶ “Aus dem Rosenbusch spricht mich eine/ Stimme an, männlich-heiser. / Hei, du da, kannst du dich/ dort hinstellen und auf- /Passen, damit niemand mich sieht? Ich muss mal. Was muss er? / Müssen ist ein Hilfsverb, dem kein Verb/ zu helfen weiß. / Aufpassen? / Damit keiner ihn sieht? / Ein Unsichtbarkeitsdienst? / Der Mann blinzelt nervös.”

What! You are a girl!
 I would not have thought. Such a shi...! Words hiss in his mouth
 the slider drives up the pants.
 The curtain too and the man
 Is swallowed by the rose bush
 What did he want from a boy?
 who was not me?²⁷
 (Tawada 2016b, p. 7)

The demanding tone grows exponentially into an urgent need for communication. The being, which we can now recognize as stranded in the sea, declares to the interlocutor a need to leave the water, and this expression creates a communicative misunderstanding. While the stranded being intends to claim a need to abandon the aquatic space, the interlocutor intends this action to be a “saving” of the water. After this follows the last scene of the foreplay. The identity of the converser is discovered: it is a young girl. This finding leads to the disappearance of the male stranded being, which anticipates this disappearance with an opening of both the encounter and the conversation to possible ambiguous declinations, motivated by the use of the term *Knaben* (boy) by the young girl. This latter wonders, in fact, what he might have wanted from a boy that, besides, she was not.

The stranded being, which we can now compare to a male mermaid, or a merman, provides the text with the first deep inclusion into the dimension of indecisiveness. The mermaid, usually described as female, is described here as a male. The presumable sexualization process of the girl he is talking to and his following escape reveals that his disappearance is intended to be an echoing and overturning action of the fate of those who came near the mermaids and were attracted by their murderous voices. In this case, when the merman discovers

²⁷ “Verstehst du Deutsch? Ich muss / Wasser lassen/ Wasser gibt es schon genug, erwidere ich. / Im Wort erwidern sitzt ein er. / Dieses Mal war es aber nicht er, sondern ich. / Er mustert mich vom Haar bis zum/ Schuh und sagt:/ Ach was! Ein Mädchen bist du! Das hätte ich nicht gedacht. So ein Schei...! / Wörter zischen in seinem Mund, / der Schieber/ fährt die Hose hoch. / Der Vorhang zu und der Mann/ Ist wie vom Rosenbuch verschluckt. / Was wollte er von einem Knaben, / der nicht ich war?”

that the person, he is talking to, is not a boy, he escapes while leaving the girl behind: his voice has not attracted the right human being and his attempt to sexualize and being helped has failed. Only a boy could have saved him from the water.

Conclusion

Tawada's connection to an emerging parallel German literary canon makes it difficult to attempt any categorization of her work, which she herself eludes by defining her existence as exophone, that is, residing in no fixed place but in one's questionable identity. The ambition to reach an expression of delocalization and a claim of the non-existence of the spatial dimension play, as we have seen, a dominant role in her production: the border expresses, in fact, the elected dimension in which such a narrative ambition finds expression

Three different levels of the expression of the border have been explored in this paper. In *Slavia in Berlin*, which functioned to introduce the vagueness of the concepts of "places" and "spaces", the border is configured as an expedient through which we come to understand the need to question any location and relocation. In *Akzentfrei*, we have seen the border as connected to language; the latter has proved to dispose of infinite possibilities of reticular manifestations. In *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende*, the border has been highlighted from two points of view. On the one hand, we have considered the foreplay as an introductory and integral part of the narrative flow; on the other hand, we have seen how the borders shape themselves through the encounter between the ordinary and the surreal, displaying them, in this case, in a challenging relation to the amorphous dimension of the water.

References

- Arndt S., Naguschewski D., Stockhammer, R. (eds.) (2007). *Exophonie. Anderssprachigkeit in der Literatur*. Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos.
- Arias S., Warf B. (eds.) (2009). *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Augé, M. (2009). *Non-Places. An Introduction to Supermodernity*. Brooklyn: Verso Books.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Braun, M., Valtolina, A. (eds.) (2016). *Am Scheideweg der Sprachen* [At the crossroads of languages], Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- Eco, U. (2000). *Opera aperta*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Genette, G. (1987). *Seuils*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Ivanovic, C. (eds.) (2011). *Poetik der Transformation*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag.
- Joachimsthaler, J. (2009). "Undeutsche Bücher: Zur Geschichte interkultureller Literatur in Deutschland," in Helmut Schmitz (ed.), *Von der nationalen zur internationalen Literatur. Transkulturelle deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur im Zeitalter globaler Migration*, Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, pp. 19–40.
- Knott, M. S. (2010). "External links from Yoko Tawada's Text to a Hypertext Beyond," in Ivanovic C. (eds.), *Yoko Tawada. Poetik der Transformation. Beiträge zum Gesamtwerk*, pp. 401–404.
- Ottmar, E. (2010). "Zeichenreiche. Insel-Texte bei Roland Barthes und Yoko Tawada," in Ivanovic, C. (eds.), *Yoko Tawada. Poetik der Transformation. Beiträge zum Gesamtwerk*, Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, pp. 207–230.
- Schimanski J., Wolfe S. (eds.) (2007). *Border Poetics De-limited*, Hannover: Werhahn Verlag.
- Schmitz, H. (eds.) (2009). *Von der nationalen zur internationalen Literatur. Transkulturelle deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur im Zeitalter globaler Migration*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi.
- Slaymaker, D. (eds.) (2010). *Yoko Tawada. Voices from everywhere*. Plymouth: Lexington books.
- Tawada, Y. (2016b). *Akzentfrei*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch Verlag.
- (2016c). *Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch Verlag.
- (1996). *Erzähler ohne Seele*. in Tawada, Y., *Talisman*, Tübingen: Konkursbuch Verlag.

- (2012). *Fremde Wasser*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch Verlag.
- (2016a). *Rede zum Kleistpreis* [Speech for the Kleistprize]. Available at: <http://www.konkursbuch.com/html/net%202016herbst/reden%20kleist/yoko%20tawada-KleistPreisrede.pdf>
- (2007). “Slavia in Berlin,” in Tawada, Y. *Sprachpolizei und Spielpolyglotte*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch Verlag.
- (1996). *Talisman*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch Verlag.
- (1995). *Wo Europa anfängt*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch Verlag.
- Welsch, W. (2002). *Kulturverständnis. Netzdesign der Kulturen*. In: *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch*. 1/2002, pp. 86–88.
- Wirth, U. (2012). “Zwischenräumliche Bewegungspraktiken,” in Wirth, U. (eds.), *Bewegen im Zwischenraum*, Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, pp. 7–34.

Human Beings after Catastrophe: Poetical Portraits by Primo Levi and Tamiki Hara

Veronica De Pieri

Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna

Introduction

The representability of collective trauma has been a demanding challenge since the occurrence of the two major atrocities of the twentieth century: The deportation and the extermination of Jews and other minorities in the Nazi concentration camps, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the US on August 6–9, 1945.

The legitimacy of artistically representing human annihilation is far from being a solved issue. It has rather encouraged the collaboration of academics in the attempt to shed some light on the events: Historians have been committed to the collection of historical data; psychologists have made efforts in approaching survivors to help victims in acting out and working through the traumatic experience they witnessed (LaCapra, 2001, p. 64); literary critics have animated the discussion about the aesthetic value of the literary responses to the topic.¹ Eventually, the so-called “trauma study” field born in the US in the 1990s, especially thanks to the contributions by Cathy Caruth, can be addressed as a great achievement in converging this multidisciplinary perspective on trauma narratives. Actually, the investigation of testimonial accounts became crucial on two fronts: On the one hand,

¹ Works by Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, Robert Jay Lifton, van der Kolk, John Whittier Treat and Tachibana Reiko are worth to mention.

How to cite this book chapter:

De Pieri, V. 2021. Human Beings after Catastrophe: Poetical Portraits by Primo Levi and Tamiki Hara. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 99–120. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.e>. License: CC-BY 4.0

the appeal for a collective understanding of the historical events was at the basis of the cultural memory formation. This was considered an essential step in order to enhance the recovery of the national governments after the war. On the other hand, it was at the core of the re-construction of survivor's identity, disrupted by the horrors of the war which reached an unbelievable, massive scale.

Although historical research was mainly interested in the historical reliability of the testimonial accounts, psychology proved that the scriptotherapy (therapeutical writing, LaCapra's "confessional literature"; Dayton, 2000, p. 18) was an effective means to activate the process of healing from trauma and to recover self-identity by keeping journals and diaries. The search for meaning regarding the human massacres set in motion the quest for a missing link, a form of "history-telling that includes both the voice of the historian and the memory of survivors" (Young, 2003, p. 277–278), in other words, a literary production that well combines historical data and survivors' testimonies. Obviously, this pursuit raised questions about the literary value of the writings thus casting doubts on the fictionality approach to represent catastrophes such as the Shoah and the atomic bombings.

The controversy revolved around the aesthetic transposition into words of survivors' struggles. Based on the assumption that a new language was necessary to express both Shoah and atomic bombing experiences, any rhetorical, stylistic, artistic embellishment in order to convey the unspeakable contributes to make it more accessible to a wider public, and even more acceptable, thus, comprehensible. To domesticate the atrocity was argued by some survivors – and by some critics too – as disrespectful because it implies the devaluation of victims' painful memories, suffering and loss. To make the trauma of Auschwitz and Hiroshima and Nagasaki acceptable also means to turn it into a tolerable, even justifiable barbarity. Finally, to try to subdue those experiences to literary production also implies its understanding: An unachievable task for the traumatic scale those catastrophes entailed.

In this context Theodor W. Adorno stated his famous quote: "Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch" (Adorno, 1955, p. 30) which additionally encouraged the literary

domain to discuss the legitimacy of fictional representations of the catastrophic event and its aftermath, or its effects on the traumatized victims. It is not by mere chance that the Japanese *genbaku bungaku* 原爆文学 (“literature of the atomic bombings”) was firstly refused by the Japanese establishment and by the *hibakusha*² themselves, sounding a critical note for the literary value of the fictionalized works on the theme. Although works on this particular topic have been rediscovered soon after the Fukushima nuclear accident, they still cannot be found easily on bookstores’ shelves.

What these considerations underline, is their intrinsic connection with the ethics of the disaster, that is, the ethical implications beyond a public discourse about survivors’ suffering. Aesthetics and ethics came to the fore as the keywords in the cultural narrative on Shoah and atomic bombing topics and continue to fuel the critical debate even nowadays.

This brief study is focused on two authors, namely, Primo Levi and Tamiki Hara, who are very prolific in their literary experiments, both in prose and poetry. The study turns the attention to two poems, Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo* and Hara’s *Kore ga ningen na no desu*, which rose from the ashes of the Nazi concentration camps and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, respectively. The aim is to stress the analogies, rather than the differences, between these poetic works, in an attempt to demonstrate how similar responses to trauma can be detached regardless of territorial, cultural and stylistic boundaries. Hence, the testimonial narrative turns out to convey a universal language that unifies, rather than divides, human beings in the wake of catastrophes.

I should make some remarks about the terminology that usually denotes these events. Both tragedies are addressed by the inaccurate use of the term genocide, which obviously intends to stress the scale of the disaster according to the number of victims. Critics highly disagree about the number of victims of the Nazi’s Final Solution plan, that nowadays is estimated to be

² Victims exposed to atomic bombing radiations. After Fukushima Daichi Nuclear Power Plant accident of March 11, 2011, this label was also used for victims exposed to radioactivity, although different characters are used for the words in Japanese (被爆者 for the former, 被曝者 for the latter).

somewhere in between 6 and 11 millions of deportees,³ while a total of 130–226 thousand victims are estimated to have been decimated by nuclear weapons.⁴ The term genocide, firstly used by Raphael Lemkin to denounce the Armenian extermination by the Ottomans (1914–1923) was accepted and adopted by the UN to define the premeditated plan to annihilate a group of people for their particular nationality, ethnicity, race or religion (Lemkin, 1946). This is obviously not the case for the *hibakusha* victims, who are simply referred to as “casualties of war,” thus devaluating the civilian role in the catastrophe. As for the Holocaust, it remains perhaps the most common term in the collective imagination, since it is generally used by historians as the appellation corresponding to Shoah, at least from the end of World War II. Its usage is still inappropriate due to its religious meaning and references to the Old Testament, especially to the religious service during which the victim – usually animals – is offered to pay tribute to God. This meaning adds totally dissenting connotations to the historical facts, negatively influencing the definition of the event. Nevertheless, some literary critics still address the literary production on the theme as “Holocaust literature” or “Holocaust novel.” For the above-mentioned reasons I support those scholars who prefer the use of Shoah, which in Hebrew means (simply) “very big catastrophe.” It should be noticed, however, that, due to its Hebrew origin, this appellative can be confused as referring only to the extermination of Jews, as is, actually, the employment of the words “Final Solution,” which was a secret military scheme reserved only to Jews (Angress, W. T. et al., 2002). All in all, in my research, I usually use Shoah as a term to refer to the annihilation of

³ I suggest checking the site 70.Auschwitz.org, which was created for the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. A detailed article about the ethnic origins and number of victims can be found at the following link: http://70.auschwitz.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=89:nationality-and-number-of-victims-of-auschwitz&catid=11:english-content&Itemid=173&lang=en, 2017/06/25.

⁴ It is worthy of mention that this estimate does not include the high number of survivors who died after the bombing due to the symptoms of the *genbakushō*. Detailed info at AtomicArchive.com site, link: http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/MED/med_chp10.shtml, 2017/06/25.

both Jews and other minorities, among which were homosexuals, gypsies and political prisoners in the Nazi extermination camps.

Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*

Soon after the end of World War II, the literary field contributed to a massive production of testimonial and critical works on the theme of the concentration camps in an attempt to reveal and explain the true meaning of the Nazi's Final Solution program.⁵ Differing points of view among victims and scholars contributed to a climate of confusion and fueled the debate around the responsibilities in the extermination program; those concerns were then addressed during the Nuremberg Trials (November 20, 1945 – October 1, 1946).⁶ In this context, the Italian Primo Levi (Turin, July, 31, 1919 – April, 11, 1987) distinguished himself for his clear-headed testimonial accounts, which turned him into a first-line spokesperson for the victims of the Nazi Shoah; his literary production provides food for thought about the fundamental role of testimonies and the particular stance words take as a literary means to fight against oblivion.

The celebrated autobiographical work *Se questo è un uomo* ("If this is a man," 1947) was published for the first time only two years after Levi's release from the Monowitz concentration camp, a satellite camp belonging to the wider Auschwitz complex. Although it may be considered the most famous work by the author, *Se questo è un uomo* is only one among the many publications that Levi dedicated to the topic of Shoah in his commitment to bear testimony to the Nazi's persecution.

From lapsed Hebrew origins, Levi was deported to Monowitz at the end of 1943, after being arrested for helping a partisan group settled in Val d'Aosta; the author also served a brief time of five days in the Carpi-Fossoli camp before his final deportation to Poland (Segre, 1976, p. 185).

⁵ For a detailed historical explanation about this Nazi politic measure, please check again the USHMM at the following link: <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005151,2017/06/25>.

⁶ *Ibid.* at the link: <https://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007722,2017/06.25>.

The author's concern for the value of testimony shines clearly through the poem chosen as *overture* of his documentary novel. No particular name is given to the verses, which are likely to belong directly to the testimonial account of the deportation, as confirmed by the fact that the poem was written in January, 10, 1946, during the completion of *Se questo è un uomo's* drafting (Segre, 1976):

You, who live safely
 In your warm houses,
 You, who find, coming back in the evening
 Hot food and friendly faces:
 Consider if this is a man
 Who works in the mud
 Who does not know peace
 Who fights for a scrap of bread
 Who dies for one "YES" or "NO".
 Consider if this is a woman,
 Without hair and without name
 With no more strength to remember,
 Her eyes empty and her womb cold
 Like a frog during winter.
 Meditate that this came about:
 I commend you these words.
 Carve them in your hearts
 At home, along the streets,
 Going to bed, waking up;
 Repeat them to your children,
 Or may your house fall apart,
 May illness inhibit you,
 May your children turn their faces from you.⁷

⁷ Voi che vivete sicuri / nelle vostre tiepide case, / voi che trovate tornando a sera / il cibo caldo e visi amici: / Considerate se questo e' un uomo / che lavora nel fango / che non conosce pace / che lotta per mezzo pane / che muore per un si o per un no. / Considerate se questa e' una donna, / senza capelli e senza nome / senza più forza di ricordare / vuoti gli occhi e freddo il grembo / come una rana d'inverno. / Meditate che questo e' stato: / vi comando queste parole. / Scolpitele nel vostro cuore / stando in casa andando per via, / coricandovi, alzandovi. / Ripetetele ai vostri figli. / O vi si sfaccia la casa, / la malattia vi impedisca, / i vostri nati torcano il viso da voi. Translation is mine, from the original Italian. Please, take

The poem was published ex-post in the poetical collection entitled *L'osteria di Brema* ("The Brema Tavern," 1975) under the new title of *Shemà*, which sheds new light on the original version.⁸

Actually, at a first glance, the poem looks like the response of an Häftling (camp inmate) to the greeting message at the entrance of Auschwitz camp, the deceitful "Arbeit macht frei" ("Work makes you free") that became a world-famous emblem of the camouflaged Nazi's "Final Solution" program. Levi bids welcome to the reader to his own concentration camp – his own *Inferno*, as the article will show later – and the gravity of the words chosen reflect the scale of authorial experience to the extent that the poem serves as the epigraph of the literary account. Both the Nazi's and Levi's messages demand the reader to take action: In the case of "Arbeit macht frei" the intimation is evident: work or die. Levi, true to his literary predisposition, predicts a catastrophic future for those who avoid the imperative to testify about the Shoah experience.

This speculation was born from the new title of the poem – *shemà* – which represents the Hebrew prayer very close to the act of faith; its final verses urge to remember and perpetuate the very meaning of faith itself to the next generations: "these words / Carve them in your hearts / At home, along the streets / Going to bed, waking up," these verses are faithful to the quote of the original Hebrew oration (Segre, 1976, p. 185).

A more technical analysis reveals authorial familiarity with literary devices like alliterations, similitudes and chiasmus, all typical stratagems of the art of poetry. Notwithstanding, the poem presents a free verse with no rhymes, a stylistic solution that enables Levi to express himself openly without forcing his thoughts into a strict fixed format. Moreover, the choice of avoiding rhymes helps the readers to focus their minds on the message conveyed by the verses, without losing attention in the rhythmic repetitions of sounds. Alliterations, then, function as the reiterations of the same words, thus resulting in reinforcing the sense of the

note that all the translations used in this article are to be considered as mine, unless otherwise specified.

⁸ Please take note that *Shemà* is also the title used by Desmond Graham in his collection of international poetry after WWII. See Desmond, 1998.

poem, especially in the central verses (vv. 5–14) where the author describes the appearance of a man and a woman in a concentration camp (five verses each). The symmetry, which appears accurately constructed, can be interpreted as the attempt to restore equal dignity to both genders, both victims of an offence intended to dehumanize the personhood, undermine the identity, annihilate the individual. The chiasmus in the verse “Her eyes empty and her womb cold” (v. 13) is underlined by the similitude of the following verse, which depicts women at the camp like a pond frog: Glabrous, with very prominent eye sockets, thus drawing away from the classic ideal of feminine fecundity.

The first verses of the poem point out the receivers Levi chose for his message. The author does not pour out his hatred and resentment to Nazi persecutors but rather addresses his readers directly. He is talking to everybody who, by keeping in silence those atrocities, become guilty as much as the perpetrators. The implication is significant: Levi’s universal *monito* (warning) finally asks the question about everybody’s responsibility towards the Shoah.

For similar reasons, the final verses of the poem that I have earlier classified as Levi’s prediction for the readers’ future, can rather be interpreted as an authorial admonition. The author is not the powerless observer of the destruction of the reader’s house, nor the one who assists disarmed to a hopeless disease, neither the silent counsellor of broken family-ties; Levi is rather the active formulator of those curses. Although its outstanding scale, it is exactly a curse that Levi is spelling out toward the readers in case they deny the Shoah’s occurrence. The meaning is powerful: even though readers are supposed not to be directly involved in the persecution and deportation of millions of victims to the death camps, they can be blamed for it, if they pretend to ignore the truth or help with their incredulity to obliterate the facts. The author wishes a future of poverty, illness, and isolation for those guilty of this offence, a destiny that for some reason appears worse than death. The verse: “I commend you these words” (v. 16) echoes the series of imperative clauses: Consider (twice), Meditate, Carve, Repeat. They are the prelude of the final spell which strikes only those who do not respond to Levi’s imperative and on the contrary contribute with their attitude to obliterate history.

This critical analysis aside, further considerations should be addressed toward the role of memory in Levi's production. In the appendix of a school edition of *Se questo è un uomo* published for the first time in 1976, the author explained:

For these survivors to remember is a must: they don't want to forget, and moreover they don't want the world to forget about them, because they know their experience was not meaningless, and that Lagers weren't an incident, unexpected in History. (Levi, 1976, p. 166)

Levi's statement casts doubts also on the ethical implications that the testimony entails: The perpetuation of memory shall be a responsibility of both victims and spectators – in Levi's case, his readers. As we have seen in different ways until now, in the authorial perspective this is not a mere advice but rather a moral imperative. Testimony – in any form, oral or written – is the fundamental path to follow in order to keep the memory alive, even for future generations.

There is also another thought-provoking allusion in Levi's comment: The Shoah experience was not meaningless. Its occurrence does have to represent something, even though human beings are not supposed to understand its value. In *Se questo è un uomo* the author wisely comprehends that "our wisdom was not trying to understand," words that mirror the Nazi Kommando's "-Hier ist kein Warum,-" ("There's no 'why' here") and his inmates "Ne pas chercher à comprendre" ("Don't try to understand").

Back to the poem, the verse "Who dies for one "YES" or "NO" (v. 9) reflects the image that the Lager's life was established by chance: Illogical motivations and random decisions by the Sonderkommando, the special working units at the camps, constituted by selected Häftlinge who were asked to decide for the life and the death of the other inmates.

Levi seems to remark that eventually, to not be able to understand is not wrong: Humans actually cannot pretend to comprehend the horror of the Shoah. In the Appendix to the testimonial account the author declares:

Maybe what happened can't be understood, on the contrary, it doesn't have to be understood, because to comprehend almost

means to justify. [...] If understanding is impossible, knowing is necessary, because it happened therefore it can happen again, consciences can be seduced and obscured again: even ours. (Levi, 1976, p. 175)

Literature then becomes a useful way to convey testimony: The writing puts memories on paper both preserving them from oblivion and creating a documentary archive of historical data. “Memory as need and duty” adds Segre in the afterward to *Se questo è un uomo* (1976, p. 185) a task that even the most careless reader should take command of.

I began this investigation on the overture poem of *Se questo è un uomo* by giving an interpretation of the authorial decision to open his documentary account with the poem. The comparison with the “Arbeit macht frei” message reveals Levi’s attempt to welcome the readers to the reading of the novel, without making them comfortable. Actually, Levi’s poem has nothing to do with the classical lyricism traditionally associated with poetic production: there are no reference to idyllic places, seasonal changes, love affairs, all literary topoi typical – although not unique – of poetry. On the contrary, the effect provokes in the reader discomfort and pain: the same feelings Dante should have perceived in his encounter with *Inferno*’s door: “Abandon all hope — Ye Who Enter Here” (Dante, 1321, v.9). This message seems to reflect the Nazi’s “Arbeit macht frei.” Levi’s poem can be compared to the doors of *Inferno*: One-way, everlasting, hopelessness. And even though readers can approach the camp only through a literary journey, thus preserving them from a real death, Levi seems to allude to the soul’s death: the testimonial power of *Se questo è un uomo* affects the readers who cannot remain unperturbed.

The familiarity of the author with literature, which clearly shines through the verses of the poetry in the skillful usage of poetic and rhetoric devices, does not surprise his readers: it is not for a mere chance that *Se questo è un uomo* is addressed by many critics as a metaphor of Dante’s *Inferno*, the already mentioned Segre *in primis*; an allegory ingeniously constructed through many references to the *Divine Comedy* in the text (see for example the most quoted chapter “Ulysses song”). In Levi’s perspective literature assumes the essential task of dealing with the life of the camps. To recite poems becomes the means to fight

– and hopefully defeat – the Nazi executioners’ plan intended to humiliate and denigrate camp inmates. Literature is part of the cultural background of each individual and any memory, able to dig up part of that background, contributes to the recovery of the broken self: one’s roots are preserved from oblivion and the Nazi plan is undone.

Levi himself reflects on the role of words in his account:

And then, for the first time, we became aware that our language lacked in words to express the offence, the demolition of a man. [...] They will deprive us even of the name: and if we want to preserve it, we should find in ourselves the strength to do it, in order to preserve a part of us, what we were, beyond that name. (Levi, 1976, p. 23)

To perform any act of memory becomes the synonym of keeping one’s identity safe.

Tamiki Hara, *Kore ga ningen na no desu*

The Japanese poet and novelist Tamiki Hara (原民喜, Hiroshima, November 15, 1905 – Tōkyō, March 13, 1951) shared Levi’s historical period but his fate was different. Hara was taken by surprise by the atomic bombing on Hiroshima in the morning of August 6, 1945 and his literary production focuses mainly on the tragic experience as an *hibakusha* 被爆者 (a victim exposed to atomic bombing radiations). Extremely concerned about the employment of atomic bombs to resolve the US conflict with Korea in the 1950s, he committed suicide by throwing himself on the railways between Kichijōji and Nishi-Ogikubo stations; an act defined by the Nobel Prize winner Kenzaburō Ōe as a “mute gesture of resistance” (Treat, 1996, p. 74).

Hara was praised by the critic Kazuo Kuroko (1991, p. 388) for being a spokesperson (*kataribe* 語り部 in Japanese) of the anti-nuclear and pacifist movements that had exploded throughout the nation during the aftermath of World War II. Hara echoed Levi in the galvanization of the sensitivity of public opinion. In particular, Hara’s claim for the social awareness of the dangerous implications of the usage of nuclear energy with military purposes was always addressed to Japanese contemporary society as well as future generations; a belief the author frequently expressed

through the words *atarashii ningen e no kigan* 「新しい人間への祈願」 (“a plea towards new generations”; Hara, 1949).

A sense of indignation can be perceived throughout the literary production of the author. Actually, the *ikari no hyōjō* 怒りの表情 (“expression of anger”; Kuroko, 1991, p. 386) detected by Kuroko is a common feeling shared by many *hibakusha* authors towards the Japanese government; a blend of resentment for the tragical occurrence of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, along with the disillusion due to the Japanese surrender. This peculiar aspect should be considered as one of the differences between the testimonial approach to catastrophe shown by Hara and Levi. Tamiki Hara plays the role of the *hibakusha* author who lost, in a flash, any material ties with his homeland and, at the same time, he embodies the image of the betrayed and distrusted Japanese citizen who accused the government to be – at least partly – responsible for the national defeat in WWII.

Another difference with Levi, which is worth to mention, is the fact that Hara had already embraced a literary career when the atomic bombing of Hiroshima happened. The writer had been a professional poet and author of short stories since 1935. The event of the atomic bombing did not represent for him the occasion for starting to write, but rather the main cause for a marked shift in his literary production, which after 1945 was devoted only to the atomic bombing theme. Treat (1996, p. 167) writes that “Hara is also considered by many of those critics one of the founders of Japanese atomic-bomb poetry,” alongside the *genbaku shijin* 原爆詩人 (“atomic bomb poet”) par excellence, Sankichi Tōge.⁹

In particular, the poems gathered in the collection *Genbaku Shōkei* 『原爆小景』 (“Little Atomic Scenery,” 1950) offers a chance to reflect on the role of the literary testimony to portray the *hibakusha* experience. Among the nine poems classified according to a metonymic approach, the opening one stands for its unique content that is clearly reminiscent of Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo*, resulting in the comparison between the two poetic

⁹ Tōge, Sankichi, born Mitsuyoshi (峠三吉, 1917–1953) is considered the most important of these.

productions which is at the core of this study. The title is *Kore ga ningen na no desu* 「コレガ人間ナノデス」 (“This is a human being”) and reads as follows:

This is a human being.
 Please, have a look to the transfiguration due to the A-bomb.
 The body is tremendously swollen
 it changes man and woman in the same form.
 Oh, from the tumid lips
 burned face, illogically charred, a voice comes out:
 “Help me please” feeble, silent words.
 This, this is a human being.
 The face of a human being.¹⁰

A first remark should be made regarding the publication in which the poem appeared. Although chosen as the welcoming message for the collection of poems – a solution that mirrors the one of Levi – the literary work in question is not a testimonial account of his traumatic experience, like in the case on Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo*. Eventually, Hara wrote a piece of work about his exposure to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the well-known *Natsu no hana* 『夏の花』 (“Summer Flowers”) published in 1947. In this brief testimonial account, which lasts only thirty pages, the author also added a poem, using the same stylistic choices as in *Kore ga ningen na no desu*. This shows a similar response to the trauma Levi and Hara respectively experienced, which points out the urge for the authors to express themselves in poetry as well as in prose.

Hara’s *Kore ga ningen na no desu* belongs to the essay *Sensō ni tsuite* 「戦争について」 (“About War”) published for the first

¹⁰ コレガ人間ナノデス/原子爆弾ニ依ル変化ヲゴラン下サイ/肉体ガ恐ロシク膨脹シ/男モ女モスベテツノ型ニカヘル/オオ ソノ真黒焦ゲノ滅茶苦茶ノ/爛レタ顔ノムクンダ唇カラ洩レテ来ル声ハ/「助ケテ下サイ」/ト カ細イ 静カナ言葉/コレガ コレガ人間ナノデス/人間ノ顔ナノデス;

Kore ga ningen nano desu/Genshi bakudan ni yoru henka wo goran kudasai/Nikutai ga osoroshiku bouchou shi/Otoko mo onna mo subete hitotsu no katachi ni kaeru/Oo sono makkura koge no mechakucha no/tadareta kao no mukunda kuchibiru kara moretekuru koe wa/“tasukete kudasai”/to kabosoi shizukana kotoba/kore ga kore ga ningen nano desu/ningen no kao nano desu.

time in the September issue of the *Kindai Bungaku* 「近代文学」 (“Modern literature”) magazine, 1948. The main feature of the poem is the usage of the *katakana* phonetic syllabary combined with Japanese characters.¹¹ At a first glance the graphical effect contributes to create an estrangement feeling in the reader, a sense of astonishment due to the reading of the challenging syllabary. But although today *katakana*’s main use is the transliteration of foreign words, along with the need of highlighting brands, names, sounds (onomatopoeias), this syllabary was currently employed in official documents, together with the *kanji* ideographs, at least until the end of World War II. Its function was comparable to the role *hiragana* (Japanese phonetic alphabet) has today: even *okurigana* (the declensional *kana* ending) was normally written using *katakana* signs. If one considers the scholarly books of the time, usually written in *kanji* and *katakana*, the association of the two types of writing in poetry can also be interpreted as an attempt to render the poem more visible and readable to the general public. Similar observations have been made of Kenji Miyazawa’s (宮沢賢治, 1896–1933) work, whose celebrated poems in *katakana* are even now subject of study.¹²

Hara’s choice of *katakana* syllabary is thus anything but unique. However, nowadays any common Japanese-speaker may feel estranged by the cumbersome reading and this effect, although not deliberate, goes perfectly along with the contents of the poem, as to say, the description of a human being exposed to nuclear radiations. Eventually, Treat maintains that: “Hara’s resort to *katakana* makes the poem’s lines reverberate with an urgency and intensity beyond what its contents alone can achieve” (Treat, 1996, p. 149). The lack of marks of punctuation and orthography, the choice of unconventional and unfamiliar terminology and the authorial tendency to leave verses incomplete, represent all features that contribute to the unnatural expressivity of the poem.

¹¹ This discussion about the *katakana* syllabary use in poetry represents the fulfilment of other dissertations on the same theme that I had the occasion to offer arguments for in other articles, see De Pieri, 2016 and De Pieri, 2017.

¹² For further investigation on the usage of *katakana* script and a critical bibliography, please refer to De Pieri, 2018.

In addition, it is outstanding to notice the skillful wording of the first and last verses that converge the attention of the reader on the *hibakusha*. A sort of “circularity” can be detected in these verses, which present to the world a victim exposed to radiations. Hara focuses the attention on the human being and emphasizes the subject of his poem repeatedly, as if pointing out that, although unrecognizable, those verses refer without doubt to a man or a woman. This also represents the core of *Kore ga ningen na no desu*: verses 3–8 are dedicated only to the portrait of the victim. Transfigured, this body has no more gender: the atomic bomb has the atrocious power to deform the human condition to the extent that it also affects human reproductive ability. There is a subtle allusion beyond the line: the effects of radiation also undermine the health of future generations. The atomic bomb sickness known as *genbakushō* in Japanese is not a concern of the *hibakusha* of Hiroshima and Nagasaki only: it should be given universal attention for the scale of its harmful nature.

As Hara proceeds in his description, the reader is made aware of part of details about this burned and dying human. The estrangement created between what commonly is the image of a human being and Hara’s verses is totally overwhelming and it leaves the reader startled. This is the product of what Treat called “dislocation of expectations” (1996, p. 149): the reader feels dismay and rejection in front of what should be representing himself, a human being; but the *hibakusha* is furthest from looking like a human.

In the novel *Michi* 『道』 (“Streets”, 1985) by another *hibakusha* author, Kyōko Hayashi (林京子, 1930–2017), there is a dialogue between survivors of the Nagasaki atomic bombing. A professor Tanaka replies to the recent discovery of a colleague’s corpse by emphasizing how the face plays a fundamental role in the recognition of a person. More than any other detail, it is the face who confirms the identity of people and this is why Hayashi, as the *hibakusha kataribe* par excellence, has always been putting so much efforts in restoring the identities of those acquaintances who lost their lives during the atomic bombing aftermath, to prove they once were alive. It is a literary production dedicated to the active testimony of *hibakusha*’s experience, throughout her life.

Similar observations were made by the journalist Yōko Ōta (大田洋子, 1906–1963), victim of Hiroshima atomic bombing. Despite her literary commitment in reporting the real facts of what occurred during and after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, her *Shikabane no machi* 『屍の街』 (“City of Corpses,” 1948) underwent a strict censorship and was finally published only three years after its first draft in September 1945; it remains the first testimonial account ever written on the theme, although not enough evaluated. She was probably the first one who enumerated the symptoms of the radiation sickness, with a keen eyesight and professional approach typical of the reporter. Among those, she located a state of apathy she addressed as *muyoku ganbō* 無欲願望 (Ōta, 1948) a form of anhedonia (Krystal, 1995, p. 80).

These references to other *hibakusha* authors serve to stress the importance of the *hibakusha*'s face in Hara's verses, acutely inserted in the heart of the poem: that the nuclear weapon is responsible for the loss of the *hibakusha*'s identity, seems to be revealed to the author. Even his voice gets lost: the oxymoron “silent words” (v. 8) stands for a craving for water (read: help), which is also a demand for recognition. The identity restoration means the recovery of the dignity of the victim. Notwithstanding, Hara makes the survivor's appearance incomprehensible to a non-*hibakusha*. His words are silent, his voice inaudible. Again, the author seems to tell more than what he writes: the meaning beyond the verses refers to the unique experience the *hibakusha* witnessed; something difficult to recount and maybe impossible to fully transpose into words. Hara is the spokesperson for the unspeakable and his audience the listener of the inaudible, thus, confirming the critical stance that only trauma victims can share the true understanding of the facts.

The grotesque portrait of the victim of radiation provoke aberration: the title of the poem, *Kore ga ningen na no desu*, should have been the promise for a loyal portrayal of human beings; instead, it turned into the abominable image of a *hibakusha*. There is no lyricism in Hara's poem; no rhetoric or lexical embellishment which can be perceived as the intentional attempt to aestheticize Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Like Levi's poem, the free verse allowed by the *gendaishi* (“modern poetry”) appears

as the most suitable solution to convey the physical and moral mourning of the *hibakusha*, frequently echoed by the alliterations. Reiko Tachibana points out that reiterations of nouns and vowels “seems to function to assure himself [Hara] of being alive” and that this stylistic choice “dramatizes his sense of shock and associates him with all sufferers” (1998, p. 61). The technical-scientific matrix of the vocabulary Hara chose rather suggests authorial intent to be truthful to an objective description of the survivor and his sufferance.

Conclusion

The encounter with the *Se questo è un uomo* and *Kore ga ningen na no desu* poems offered an opportunity to reflect about the literary approach to human trauma. This brief analysis has detected some analogies and differences between the two poetic approaches to human annihilation, emphasizing in particular the common vision the authors shared about the disruption of the selfhood.

Both poems convey the need to give testimony to a traumatic event of a massive scale. The similarities are striking in the description of the victim, completely transformed by Lager life and radiation, to the extent that the human being is merely recognizable and deprived of any gender connotation.

Both authors turn their poems into the welcoming message of their literary works, prose and poetry respectively; this literary experimentation underlines the search for the best means possible to convey their traumatic testimonies.

Concerning the literary and stylistic solutions adopted by the authors, I noted that Hara was a professional author before 1945, while Levi was a chemist. One would expect this difference to be mirrored in the diverse authorial choices in style, but this is not the case. Levi appears more concerned about the artistic value of his production as shown by the occurrence of rhetorical and metaphorical figures. Hara, on the contrary, opts for a vocabulary selected from the scientific field, as if to prove that the atomic bombings do not allow any aesthetic representation of the *hibakusha*. His lexical choice also strengthens the contradiction between the scientific progress, represented by the atomic weapons, and

the effects this scientific development caused on humankind. Levi's choice would be the natural response for a man keen in literature and the classics, since his commitment as survivor of the Shoah would prevent him in any attempt to aesthetically embellish his experience.

Both authors show a preference for free verse, which fosters the incrementation of their expressiveness, while the choice of the harsh terminology enables them to create distance between the subject of the poem – and the author himself – and the reader.

The authors address the audience directly. According to Tachibana “Hara’s protest seems to be directed more generally toward the ‘absurdity of humankind’” (1998, p. 63). His feelings of resentment and anger are not shared by Levi, although the author stated that he would never forgive (read: accept) the culprits, at least unless they show a serious awareness of their sins (Levi, 1976, p. 159). His authoritative tone forces the readers’ attention to the truth disguised in the historical reports of the Shoah and urges the public to give testimony and perpetuate Häftlinge memories.

Hara’s approach is softer and turns politely the attention of the audience to the *hibakusha* portrait (“Please, have a look”, v. 2), perhaps conscious that the gap between the different register contributes to the estrangement feeling of discomfort of the poetry, a similar uneasiness perceived even in Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo*. In *Kore ga ningen na no desu*, this unpleasant sensation is stressed by the uncommon usage of the *katakana* syllabary, which assumes for a contemporary reader an unfamiliar connotation in poetry, although accepted in Japanese modern poetry. While Levi’s verses seem to share Auschwitz experience with the readers, Hara’s poem is circular, as to suggest that what the *hibakusha* experienced is neither sharable, nor understandable. This perception is detectable even in Levi’s production, although the author makes any effort to accustom the language in order to reach a wider audience.

Primo Levi reminds us of the great responsibility of the reader: to receive his testimony, to preserve it and perpetuate it to future generations. In the appendix of *Se questo è un uomo*, the author explains: “Only then the witness accomplishes his duty, which is to pave the way for the judge. The judge is you.” (Levi, 1976,

p. 157). This is a challenging task that involves the efforts of both victims and non-victims, together against the conniving *omertà* (“silence”) intended to obliterate history. In this sense, even though silence can often speak louder than words, it can also be perceived as a Hitlerian victory: if you are a speechless survivor, the possibility to recover and restore your self-identity becomes more troublesome, because the experience itself is felt as extraneous, totally unfamiliar and alien to the personhood. Memory and oblivion become then the double faces of the same coin. “To construct and preserve Auschwitz memory means for Levi to try giving a sense to that experience” (Sullam, 2010, p. 105). According to the author the value of testimony resides in its educative performance, not as a political controversy, religious sermon, or social critique. Levi’s literary production functions as “artificial memory” (Levi, 1976, p. 177) to stimulate the audience’s response. However, with “artificial” Levi does not mean imaginative or fictional: “Because the theme of the massacre is not open to revision and fiction. The few novels written on the topic are odious, they are disgusting to read.” (Levi quoted by Sullam, 2010, p. 108)

The refusal of any fictive production does not deny an authorial attempt to elaborate and process memories in order to convey them in a revised literary form; as noticed in this brief study, despite of the seriousness of the theme touched by the author, his poem is steeped in a lyricism that actually enables the reader to sympathize with the Häftlinge. Levi’s stance is rather addressed merely to fictional products: only the documentary novel is considered the loyal testimonial account of the facts.

The literary production on the atomic bombings seems, by its very nature, to agree with Levi’s viewpoint. The nuclear weapon itself is ambiguous because it celebrates the technological progress of humankind, but it is, at the same time, aimed for human annihilation. Only documentary works like historical reports, scientific inquiry and survival’s journals and diaries are acceptable as testimonies of these atrocities. The language implied to bear those memories is as detailed and deprived by baubles as possible. “That moment of ‘forgetting’ permitted by metaphor is a moment that lets one be ignorant at the same time” (Treat, 1996, p. 166). To forget is even more inaccessible to *hibakusha* because

they are forced to live everyday with the fear that the symptoms of the *genbakushō* could appear; an anxiety well reframed by Kyōko Hayashi's words "Everyday is August, 9," referring to the atomic bombing of Nagasaki.

To conclude, Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* and Hara's *Kore ga ningen na no desu* are remarkable examples of how effective testimonial literature can be to transpose into a universal language the individual trauma of the survivors and, in doing so, in going beyond any boundaries: national (Italy/Japan), historical (Nazi's deportation/atomic bombings), traumatic (status of *Häftlinge/hibakusha*) boundaries are subdued to the imperative to give testimony of the brutal consequences of humanity in extremis. A comparative reading of these literary products reveals how, even though those atrocities were meant to divide human beings, they rather enable a mutual understanding of individual trauma, thus transforming it to a value that is a collective one, thanks to a metonymic transposition of human suffering. Hence, the therapeutic value of this testimonial narrative should not be underestimated. Leveraging human empathy in the wake of catastrophe, literature reveals once more its persuasive power to re-connect and re-established human bonds by re-constructing both individual and collective identity.

References

- Adorno, T. (1955). *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Angröss, W. T., Cooper, B., Schoenberner, G., & Schoenberner, M. (2002). *The Wannsee Conference and the Genocide of the European Jews: Guide and Reader to the Permanent Exhibit in the House of the Wannsee Conference*. Berlin: House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial and Educational Site.
- Caruth, C. (1995). *Trauma, Exploration in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dante, A. (1321). "Inferno, Canto III," in *Commedia*. Firenze.
- Dayton, T. (2000). *Trauma and Addiction. Ending the Cycle of Pain through Emotional Literacy*. Florida: Health Communications Inc. Publishing.

- De Pieri, V. (2016). “Wagō Ryōichi’s Net-Poetry and the Revolutionary ‘Shared Literature,’” in *Annali*. Venice: Ca’ Foscari University.
- (2017). “Wagō Ryōichi’s Net-Poetry: Tradition and Innovation,” in *Conference Proceedings of the 1st International Conference Comparative Studies of Language and Culture – Tradition and Innovation*. Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University.
- (2018). “New Media Communication and *Net-Poetry*: The Uses of Katakana Script in the Aftermath of the Triple Disaster in Japan,” in *Eajs International Conference 2017 Proceedings*. Lisbon: Eajs Publishing.
- Desmond, G. (1998). *Poetry of The Second World War*. London: Pimlico.
- Hara, T. (1947). *Natsu no hana*. Tōkyō: Mitaka Bungaku zasshi.
- (1948). “Sensō ni tsuite,” *Aozora Bunko*: July 20, 2002. Available at: http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000293/files/4785_6740.html, (Accessed: 11 June 2012).
- (1949). “Shi to ai to kodoku,” *Aozora Bunko*: July 20, 2002. Available at: http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000293/files/4772_6670.html, (Accessed: 11 June 2012).
- (1950). “Genbaku Shōkei,” in *Kindai Bungaku* August issue. Tōkyō: Kindaibungakusha.
- Kuroko, K. (1991). “Genbaku to kotoba,” in Odagiri H. (ed.) *Genshiryoku to bungakusho. Hara Tamiki kara Hayashi Kyōko made*. Tōkyō: Tōkyō Nihon Tosho sentā.
- Krystal, H. (1995). “Trauma and Raging: A Thirty-Year Follow up,” in Cauth, C. (ed.) *Trauma, Exploration in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- LaCapra, D. (2001). *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lemkin, R. (1946). “Le crime de génocide: June 16 2000.” Available at: <http://www.preventgenocide.org/fr/lemkin/legenocide1946.htm>, (Accessed: 25 June 2017).
- Levi, P. (1975). *L’Osteria di Brema*. Milano: All’insegna del pesce d’oro.
- (1976). *Se questo è un uomo*. Torino: Einaudi.

- Ōta, Y. (1948). *Shikabane no machi*. Tōkyō: Chūoukōronsha.
- Segre, C. (1976). “Auschwitz, orribile laboratorio sociale,” in *Se questo è un uomo*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Sullam, S. L. (2010). “Elie Wiesel e Primo Levi, memorie divise di Auschwitz,” in *Oltre la Notte. Memoria della Shoah e diritti umani. In occasione degli 80 anni di Elie Wiesel*. Firenze: Giuntina.
- Tachibana, R. (1998). *Narrative as Counter-Memory: A Half-Century of Postwar Writing in Germany and Japan*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Treat, J. W. (1996). *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Young, J. (2003). “Between History and Memory: The Voice of the Eyewitness,” in Douglass, A. and Vogler, T. (eds.) *Witness and Memory. The Discourse of Trauma*. London: Routledge, p. 275–285.

CULTURAL TRANSFER

Between Zurich and Romania: A Dada Exchange

Amelia Miholca

Arizona State University

Jewish-Romanian Identity

Why has the Jewish-Romanian identity of the Dadaists Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Arthur Segal been overlooked or critically unexamined in art historical discourse? Until recently, this significant and complicated identity warranted a brief mention in biographical and Dada studies, such as in those of Robert Motherwell (1951), George Hugnet (1971) Harry Seiwert (1996) and François Buot (2002), which gave prominence to the three Dadaists' ties to Switzerland, France, Germany. Romania, their country of birth, was mentioned briefly to indicate the international character of the Dada movement in Zurich, for besides the Romanians, the Dada group comprised of artists from Germany, Russia, Sweden, and France, among them, the main contributors Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Richard Huelsenbeck, Hans Richter, Hans Arp, and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. Their country of origin was also used in the description of Zurich and its international, intellectual scene during the war. Their Jewish upbringing and religious and cultural affiliation are even less acknowledged.

Tom Sandqvist's book *Dada East* from 2006 is the most comprehensive study of the Jewish-Romanian aspect of Dada. Sandqvist traces the Jewish and Romanian sources that he claims influenced Dada performances. My analysis builds on Sandqvist's claims, but rather than presenting a coherent line of influence between the artistic practices of Tzara, Janco, and Segal, and their shared Romania and Jewish background, as Sandqvist attempts

How to cite this book chapter:

Miholca, A. 2021. Between Zurich and Romania: A Dada Exchange. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 123–144. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.f>. License: CC-BY 4.0

to do, I would like to position the three elements of their Jewish-Romanian identity—Romanian folk culture, Hasidic ritual, and the Jewish Purim festival—within an ambivalent relationship that communicates Dada's paradoxical approach to primitivism, spirituality, and nationality. The three elements, moreover, exemplify the Dadaists' engagement in a cultural exchange between Zurich and Romania. The Dadaists transferred, across physical and political borders, the oral and visual traditions of Romanian and Jewish cultures to their Dada stage where they blended these traditions with the avant-gardist tactics of disrupting and subverting the status quo in Zurich. The city was a site of not only cultural exchange but of marked difference as the Dadaists, through their art and poetry, conjured their displacement from their country of origin and their alienation from their own multifaceted identities as Romanian Jews.

In his article "Dada and Mysticism: Influences and Affinities," Richard Sheppard (1978, p. 93) explains why the Dadaists were ambiguous about religion. He argues, "Dada sought to formulate its insights obliquely and in unfamiliar idioms precisely so that it might be harder for them to be assimilated and hence deprived of their subversive force." Applying Sheppard's understanding of Dada's affiliation with religion to Tzara's, Janco's, and Segal's intricate relationship with their Jewish-Romanian identity, we can understand their relationship as not one of assimilation wherein this dual identity is fused and assimilated in their Dada practice, but a relationship of distance and tension that retains its power to subvert nationality and the Christian, industrial, and bourgeois culture of Western Europe. In the words of Marcel Janco (1971, p. 36), the Dadaists "lost confidence" in Western culture—"everything had to be demolished." In their performances and visual works, Tzara, Janco, and Segal evoked the spiritual and mysterious Other while using folk and Jewish elements not in a personal manner, but from a distance. For them, the Other was simultaneously familiar and foreign.

Tzara's inner conflict with his identity, as a Romanian expatriate and a Jewish intellectual in Zurich and then Paris, is evident in his 1931 poem "The Approximate Man" (*L'homme approximatif*) in which he expresses a sense of alienation and a search for

his identity, in lines such as: “I speak of the one who speaks who speaks I am alone/I am only a little sound I have several sounds in me” (2005, p. 27). Perhaps in the latter line he is referencing his Dada performances of simultaneous poetry and manifestos from his Zurich days. Who is Tristan Tzara? He is an “approximate man...complete in the only element of choice your name” (p. 29). Although Tzara assigns this designation of “approximate man” to people in general, who are “like me like you reader and like the others ”(p. 29), who grapple with the mystery of the self and of life and death, it is undeniable that he is describing his own labyrinthine search to understand himself and to take control of his identity, like in his decision to change his name from Samuel Rosenstock to Tristan Tzara. But Tzara is not interested in one fixed identity. According to the poem, one true self does not exist: “facing others you are another than yourself/at each turn of the road you change into another” (p. 34). What one presents to others is not the same as what one is in private; similarly, Samuel Rosenstock, before Dada, is not the same as Tristan Tzara of Dada, and Tristan Tzara of post-Dada is not the same as the first two. Anxiety and melancholy plagues the approximate man, for he lives alongside “many parallel paths/those we could have taken/ and not have come into the world/or have already left it long ago so long ago” (p. 27), with death always around the corner. In the poem, Tzara does not refer explicitly his Jewish identity but remains under the surface, joining his other selves to form an approximate man in his endless journey. The poem’s evocation of pilgrimage and exile can be traced to the Jewish predicament of exile and wandering, as in the Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States and Western Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth-century.

The Dadaists of Zurich

Tristan Tzara was born in 1896, in Moinesti, Romania. His extensive promotion of Dada Zurich led to its heightened reputation in Europe and the United States. Marcel Janco, originally named Marcel Iancu, was born in 1895 in Bucharest, Romania. Janco worked closely with Tzara to develop Dada’s visual style. Arthur

Segal, named Aron Sigalu, was the oldest of the three. Segal was born in 1875 in Iași, Romania. He exhibited his prints and paintings at Cabaret Voltaire and Galerie Dada, though his role in Dada was less significant than those of Janco and Tzara.

The Dadaists of Zurich are most famously known for Cabaret Voltaire, located at the Meierei restaurant where the group staged performances and art exhibitions. Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings initiated Cabaret Voltaire on February 5, 1916. The first week of Cabaret Voltaire had a full schedule of absurd performances. Tzara picked random poems from his coat pockets and gave them to the audience. Four men walked on stilts in grotesque masks created by Marcel Janco, while they made bewildering hissing sounds (Sandqvist, 2006, pp. 31–32). It is believed that Marcel's two brothers Georges and Jules also participated. From the very beginning of Cabaret Voltaire, there was tension between the performers and the audience. This was one of the goals of the Dadaists—to set the onlookers on edge with unexpected, insurgent acts that veered on the irrational.

In his 1916 “Monsieur Antipyrine’s Manifesto,” Tzara (2011, p. 1) proclaims: Dada is “for and against unity and definitely against the future” and “we spit on humanity.” Tzara’s manifesto testifies to Dada’s inclination towards paradox, humor, and disruption. The act of spitting on humanity conveys the desire to dismantle Western humanistic thought that dates back to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The Dadaists’ unified revolt against the dominant social values, among them morality and beauty, echoes Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s 1909 “Manifesto of Futurism.” However, Tzara and the Dadaists did not share Marinetti’s confidence in the triumph of war and the progressive future. According to Tzara’s “Dada Manifesto of 1918” (2011, p. 13), Dada aims “to respect all individualities in their folly of the moment.”

Moreover, the Dadaists were enthralled with the past, in the form of Egyptian and Byzantine art, and “primitive” African art. Tzara and Richard Huelsenbeck were particularly inspired by African poetry. They adapted the poetry into “Negro songs” for their Cabaret Voltaire performances. The art of the past goes hand in hand with Romanian folk culture and Jewish traditions. Although the two traditions are based on different religions, they both evoke a type of mysticism distinct from modern life, with

rituals that connect the present with ancient spiritual forces. In a 1984 French interview with Francis Naumann (2005, p. 172), Janco states that the main purpose of Dada Zurich was “to destroy the past and invent a new artistic language,” and in doing so, “maybe liberation among men could exist.” I would argue that Dada did not necessarily destroy the past; rather, the movement reinvigorated cultures, which Dadaists altered in their artistic experiments, with enduring traditions that did not prescribe to Western beliefs and values.

The Dadaists blamed Western nationalism for the catastrophic World War I. With a diverse group of artists whose home countries were battling each other, their Dada collaboration hoped to promote “friendship among people and countries” (Naumann, 2005, p. 165). The concept of international collaboration, to which Tzara, out of all the Dadaists, subscribed the most, was conceived in Tzara’s 1920 *Dadaglobe*—an anthology with images and text by fifty contributors, such as Man Ray, Hannah Hoch, and John Heartfield, across Europe and the United States that meant to showcase the extent of Dada’s reach, but was never published due to financial constraints (Sudhalter, 2016, pp. 41–50).

Homelessness and Trauma in Dada Poetry and Performances

Tzara’s poem “The Admiral Searches for a House to Rent” (*L’amiral cherche une maison à louer*) exemplifies a Dadaist concern with dislocation and displacement. Tzara, Janco, and Huelsenbeck performed “The Admiral Searches for a House to Rent,” which they termed a “simultaneous poem,” on March 30, 1916 to a baffled audience. In the words of Hugo Ball (1996, p. 57), this type of poem “is a contra puntal recitative in which three or more voices speak, sing, whistle, etc., at the same time in such a way that the elegiac, humorous, or bizarre content of the piece is brought out by these combinations.” Tzara, Janco, and Huelsenbeck manifest the state of uncertainty and anxiety of the homeless admiral with brusque words such as “schnell” (quickly), “le train” (the train), and “dwelling” spoken in multiple languages over each other (*Cabaret Voltaire*, 1916, p. 7).

The disorientation of the words, switching from German, to French, to English, back to French and so on, is poignant. In its chaos, the story of the admiral's search is disjointed but not entirely obscured as the poem explains the reason for the admiral's predicament: the apartment that he was renting was sold and, unlike in Bucharest where "one will depend on my friends," he has nowhere to go and no one to help him. The poem ends on the line, sung by all three Dadaists, "the admiral found nothing." Rather than a linear, comprehensible recitation, the simultaneous poem relies on the repetition of sounds to create what T.J. Demos (2003, p. 13) calls a "fractured phonetic experience." This phonetic experience, however, is lost in the printed version of the poem that appeared in the Dadaists' *Cabaret Voltaire* magazine after the March 30 performance, despite the inclusion of the onomatopoeias "ooooo" and "rrrrrrr." The poem's performance highlights the cacophonous sounds that break into disorder, which disassemble any attempt on the audience's part to piece together the national identity of the admiral and his story because the Dadaists speak, yell, and sing too quickly for the audience to comprehend what is happening, not to mention the clattering sounds of their instruments that accompany the performance.

Homelessness and trauma intertwine in Dada. After Cabaret Voltaire's closure, the Dadaists organized several big soirées in Zurich, with larger audiences of up to 300 people for each event. During the July 14 soirée, Tzara read his first Dada manifesto "Monsieur Antipyrine's Manifesto." But the main act, one that would resonate throughout the art world years later, was Ball's bishop episode, in which he read the poems "Karawane" and "Gadji beri bimba." Demos (2003, p. 8) interprets Ball's poems as an expression of Ball's trauma incurred when he visited the war front in 1914. The repetition of words parallels the repetition of the traumatic event in the victim's memory. The poem escapes coherent meaning as the nonsensical words dissolve into sound, in a way that the traumatic event hides in the dark recess of one's memory, leaving behind only its affect.

Jill Bennett's theory (2005, pp. 34–37) of affect defines the traumatic memory in artmaking as "embodied sensation . . . not anchored by character or narrative." This embodied sensation is

outside the realm of speech and even emotion and is connected to both the body of the viewer, who physically feels the traumatic wound represented in the artwork, and the body of the artist, who physically engages with the artwork's medium. Ball, inhabiting a white cylinder contraption resembling a straitjacket, i.e. the bishop costume created by Janco, encapsulates the embodied sensation of trauma through the inter-dependent relationship between sound and body. Without the costume and its materiality, his recitation would not be nearly as affective in transporting the listener from the realm of the stage into the realm of the unknown, where intelligible words are unnecessary, or downright detrimental, to experiencing the lingering affect of trauma.

Neither Tzara, Janco, or Huelsenbeck wore costumes in their performance of "The Admiral Searches for a House to Rent" but the materiality of the poem, its unsettling sensation, is conveyed through the transference of disjointed sound from one speaker to another. The poem gains its materiality not on the written page, but in the overlap of words and in the varying voice frequencies. Homelessness and trauma are, therefore, joined in a performative poem, which non-linearly communicates the jarring repetition of trauma and the dislocation of identity caused by trauma, in a format that reverberates in the ears and minds of the viewers long after the performance has ended.

Romania, Switzerland, and Anti-Semitism

The sense of homelessness speaks to Tzara's, Janco's, and Segal's hesitant acceptance of their Jewish identity. Janco, Tzara, and Segal came from Jewish families in Romania, but their embrace of their Jewish identity varied between the three. Janco emigrated from Romania to Israel in 1941. He was instrumental in advancing a distinct, modern Israeli art at his Ein Hod artist colony in Israel. Tzara's family was not very religious but the town of Moinesti where they lived had a large population of Hasidic Jews. According to Marius Hentea's Tzara biography (2014, p. 7), he maintained a "mysterious aura about his origins." His non-committal position regarding his Jewish identity and Jewish faith is comparable to Arthur Segal's weariness of attending the

synagogue and of speaking Hebrew and Yiddish in the town of Botosani where he grew up (Sandqvist, 2006, p. 292). Although Romania did not grant its Jewish population full citizenship until 1923, it still required military conscription of Jewish men. The Dadaists, thus, fled from Romania's military conscription before Romania entered the war in 1916. And they relocated to a more modernized country with new names that assigned them Western identities in keeping with the French and German colleagues of Cabaret Voltaire.

Anti-Semitism in Romania at the start of the new century manifested itself acutely in the Peasant Revolt of 1907, which was partly directed towards Jewish farmers and business owners whom the peasants blamed for their poor conditions. The Nationalist-Democratic Party, established by A.C. Cuza and N. Iorga, and its inquest into the "Jewish problem" fueled the peasants' animosity towards the Jews. The party's program of 1910 demanded the "elimination of the Jews" in all spheres "over which we (non-Jewish Romanians) alone have ethnic and historical rights of possession" (Iancu, 1996, pp. 147–163). But anti-Semitism in Romania did not gain extensive ground until the rise of the Iron Guard in the late 1920s. Burdened by discrimination and economic immobility, many Jews emigrated to places like New York in the first decade of the twentieth century. The wealthier Jews who stayed in Romania sought assimilation or participation into the Social Democratic Party that was initiated in 1910.

Tzara, Janco, and Segal, in keeping with the Dada's politically uncommitted agenda, did not address anti-Semitism in their work during their time in Zurich; however, the three artists' left leaning political beliefs, manifested in their political and artistic associations before and post-Dada, were related to the vocal criticism of Romania's alarming anti-Semitism among all classes of society. Many Jewish artists—the initiators of modernism in Romania—either supported the socialist ideology or were part of the Communist Party, which diverged from the Social Democratic Party in 1921 (Enache and Iancu, 2010, pp. 25–28). For instance, artist Iosif Iser and Arthur Segal developed German Expressionism in Romania in the years prior to World War I and concurrently published in leftist magazines: Isner with *Facla* (The Torch) in

Bucharest and Segal with *Die Aktion* (The Action) in Berlin (Sandqvist, 2006, p. 184). In 1922, Marcel Janco and Ion Vinea, with whom Janco and Tzara collaborated on their *Simbolul* (The Symbol) magazine pre-Dada, founded the leading Romanian avant-garde magazine *Contimporanul* (The Contemporary). During the magazine's run, between 1922 and 1932, articles and illustrations, including one illustration of police beating the oppressed, voiced the artists' outrage and condemnation of the Romanian government's treatment of Jews (Mansbach, 1998, p. 552).

In No. 30 of *Contimporanul*, Ion Vinea (1923) penned the article "Culture and Anti-Semitism," in which he deplored the government's closure of universities as "a high morality lesson for minorities" and the "de-intellectualization" of students, particularly Jewish students, as a "defeat of culture," meaning a deterioration of Romania's higher education system that contributes to the creation of Romanian culture. This hostile, anti-Semitic environment in Romania differed from the intellectually thriving community in Zurich where Janco had easy access to a university education, during the 1870–1914 period when Jewish students were permitted to attend universities in Zurich, Berne, and Geneva (Mahrer, 2013, p. 15). Steven Mansbach (1998, p. 536) argues that, in response to how Romanians viewed Jews as non-citizens, Romania's Jewish artists "advocated a culture whose very experimental and cosmopolitan cast would affirm their outsider status." The "experimental and cosmopolitan" avant-garde owned a great deal to Dada Zurich. By working on the Dada magazines, Janco learned how to manage a critical review and how to capitalize on his Jewish/foreigner status to critique the dominant political system and its social structure from the outside. With their anti-establishment cry, the Dadaists fought against modernity in the same manner that Romanian Jewish artists then fought against a changing country that, with its burgeoning nationalism, strove to align itself with Western modernity while hanging tightly to an unwavering Romanian identity.

Even in Zurich, though, Tzara, Janco, and Segal still retained their outsider status; Zurich was not the intellectual and refugee safe haven that its image deceptively evoked. By 1917, the majority of Jewish people in Switzerland lived in Zurich. Stefanie

Mahrer (2013, pp. 13–19), in her study “Les Russes: The Image of East European Jews in La Chaux-de-Fonds and Zurich,” depicts an indubitable cultural and economic division between the Jewish communities who settled in Zurich in the nineteenth century and new Jewish arrivals. The 7,997 East European Jewish immigrants in Zurich were of low economic status and more religious compared to the bourgeois Swiss Jews. The third Jewish group, Jewish students such as Tzara and Janco, tended to be anti-bourgeois regardless of Jewish background but unlike the Jewish immigrants, their residency in Zurich only extended till the end of their university years. The Swiss Jews, already established in Switzerland since their emancipation in 1862, looked down on immigrant Jews and their poor status, and on the non-conformist students. Meanwhile, Swiss society, as a whole, exhibited anti-Semitism in response to incoming Jewish immigrants whom they thought “unfit to assimilate.”

Because the Dadaists did not belong to the poor Jewish refugees, nor to the Swiss Jewish bourgeoisie, they would have had a difficult time assimilating and remaining in the country after the end of Dada, had they so wished to do. In his memoir, Huelsenbeck (1969, p. 12) declares: “I was a foreigner, and I wanted to remain one.” Tzara, Janco, and Segal undoubtedly shared Huelsenbeck’s resolution to maintain their foreignness. The Dadaists had no intention of making Zurich their permanent home or of turning themselves into Swiss citizens. For three years, the city was a launching base from where Dada was dispersed to other geographical points across the globe. Timothy O. Benson (2014, p. 20), writing on “Dada Geographies,” designates “Dada’s relation to other locations that might themselves be construed as Dada” as a “social geography” through friendships with other artists, such as Tzara’s collaboration with Barcelona and Paris-based Francis Picabia, or the Dadaist’s relocation from Zurich to Berlin, as in the case of Richard Huelsenbeck.

However, in the midst of war, Zurich had the most suitable conditions for Dada to materialize. Its society was predominantly conservative but with a foreign, youthful segment. This dichotomy gave the Dadaists something to rebel against while finding an enthusiastic audience for their insurgent overtures. The Swiss police did not shut down Cabaret Voltaire; yet, the Dadaists were

unable to keep it open late into the night because the Swiss law at the time prohibited public establishments from staying open past ten in the evening (Naumann, 2005, p. 171). The Swiss law's restriction, in a city where citizens were not entirely welcoming of strangers, contributed to the Dadaists' urgent need to create an alternative way of life that would accept those misunderstood and ostracized.

Modern Jewish Theater and Purim

In addition to simultaneous poems, Tzara translated poems from Africa and Oceania. Writing about Tzara's translations of *poèmes nègres*, Cosana Eram (2015, pp. 2–3) contends that Tzara experienced a “double process” of becoming a Western European while extending his identity to distant places where he never traveled or lived. Tzara's involvement with African and Oceanic poetry and art is beyond the scope of my analysis; but his French translations of *poèmes nègres*, from their already translated German format, testify to his ability to mold distinct cultural and artistic elements into a Dada product. His translations, which are translations of translations, are far from accurate to the originals. Instead, they accentuate the performative quality of the poems.

Eram (2015, p. 3, p. 12) equates his translations with Torah incantations and Romanian oral blasphemies. Sandqvist (2006, p. 316) also posits that Tzara's simultaneous poems, such as the “*L'amiral cherche une maison a louer*,” with the “emphasis on the oral sound values of the words” and “use of endless repetitions,” originate from the Jewish song tradition in Romania. These repetitive songs of Hasidic rituals, along with dances performed by the Jewish community, mocked the righteous with comedic and absurd text, and evoked the ecstatic devotion to God and its divine presence. The comedic undercurrent is likewise present in the Jewish theater of the absurd of the 19th century. Avrom Goldfaden founded the modern Yiddish Theater in the city of Iasi, Romania in 1876. Goldfaden could be considered a predecessor to Tzara and the Dadaists. He wrote books of Yiddish poetry, and he combined song and text in his plays, which ranged from tragedies based on Jewish history to vaudevilles and burlesques plays (Berkowitz, 2004, p. 12).

Modern Jewish theater developed from the Purim festival. During the Purim festival, performers would dress up in costume and enact plays in Yiddish. The Purim holiday celebrates the Jewish Queen Esther and her protection of the Jewish people from the extermination plans of the Persian viceroy Haman. In his essay “Ritual Space as Theatrical Space in Jewish Folk Theater,” Ahuva Belkin (2009, p. 19) describes the theatrical celebrations of Purim during the Purim festival as comprised of several temporal and spatial phases. First, the performers, disguised in masks and costumes, would sing and dance, and ride hobbyhorses on village streets. Next, they would relocate to individual homes, where the performances were centered more on text than the visual and musical. Within the homes, “actors deliberately created chaos as if to emphasize the inverted world of the festive play,” with the spectators actively participating in the performances (Belkin, 2009, p. 20).

Although the Dadaists did not recite religious text, nor did they produce historical tragedies like Goldfaden’s, they did blur the roles between performer and spectator. For example, on the first night of Cabaret Voltaire, the spectators’ loud outrage almost drowned out the on-stage productions. During the Dada Soirée on April 9, 1919, the spectators formed a mob and marched on stage. Furthermore, the Dadaists continued the Purim festival tradition of combining music, dance, and text to shake one’s stupor of ignorance through a disruption and questioning of everyday life.

Janco’s Masks, Primitivism, and Romanian Folk Culture

The resemblance between the Purim festival and Romanian folk festivals is not surprising, considering the close proximity of Jewish and Christian communities and their cultural exchange. I would argue that Dada, from the standpoint of the three Romanian Dadaists, is at the center of this exchange. Tzara provided the theatrical text-based performances at Cabaret Voltaire and at the Dada soirées, in keeping with the Purim festival’s text-based enactments; meanwhile, Janco underlined the visual value of the folk festivals.

At first glance, the formal qualities of Janco’s masks, *Untitled (Mask for Firdusi)* and *Untitled (Portrait of Tzara)*, resemble those

of African masks: the narrow form of the elongated face further abstracted by the angular nose and distorted eyes. Similarities also exist between Janco's masks and the mask-like faces of the women in Picasso's painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. African masks certainly inspired Picasso's formal experimentations and the same could be said of Janco's grotesque masks when placed within early twentieth-century primitivism.

Decades after the end of Dada Zurich, recalling the Dada collages, reliefs, and sculptures, Janco (1971, p. 37) acknowledged that these artworks were created "through an understanding of prehistoric art, children's art, primitive art, folk arts, through long nights of discussion about abstract art," which led to the epiphany "that the crusade for the return to the Promised Land of creativity was Dada's most important discovery." Besides the Dadaists, modern artists exalted the "primitive" art of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas and borrowed its abstract forms in their effort to revolt against Western culture and its aesthetic traditions through a reversion to what they thought was a more spiritual, archaic, and hence, nature bound, artistic forms. But, as Kirk Varnedoe (1999, p. 209) reminds us, "Primitivism is first and foremost a story about us, not tribal peoples." Artists, such as Picasso, Matisse, and Brancusi, used objects from indigenous people to formulate new artistic styles and techniques, which advanced their art to the forefront of high modern art. Primitivism also constitutes a transformation of an artist's identity through the appropriation of indigenous cultures and exploration of the Other. Janco, for instance, engaged with the ritual, folk masks of Romanian peasant culture, which arguably signified the Other for him on account of the division and hostility between the major peasant culture and minor Jewish one. In the process of working with the folk masks, not only did his art change but also his relationship with his Romanian identity may have strengthened, albeit still remaining unstable.

For the Dadaists, peasant folk culture was familiar and foreign, given their Jewish upbringing in a country whose folk culture of was widely celebrated as representing the Romanian nationality. By the end of the 19th century, widespread anti-Semitism operated on the belief in national culture safeguarding "the traditions,

customs, and racial individuality of the nation” (Razvan, 2007, pg.357). For the Romanian intellectuals, national culture was “rural, communitarian, agrarian, idealist, conservative, rooted in country soil, Christian, endangered by the expansion of modern society” (Razvan, pg.359)—all of which define peasant culture. The Jews were seen as a threat to the national, peasant culture. Regardless of the fact that Jewish communities existed in rural areas, the Jew became synonymous with the cosmopolitan, “atheist” foreigner whose modern lifestyle and “socialist” politics threatened the national culture rooted in the peasantry (Volovici, 1991, pg. 362). In the words of Romania’s most celebrated poet Mihai Eminescu, Jews “are not, and cannot be Romanians” (Volovici, pg.13). University Professor I. C. Catuneanu reiterated Eminescu’s hatred of Jews in his article on the “Fear of Jews” (1924, pp. 1–2), in the nationalist magazine *Acțiunea Românească* (The Romanian Action). Catuneanu compares the major Jewish problem to “an open wound in our nation’s body” and divides and positions the “Israeli race” against Romanians.

Before Zurich and after his return to Romania, Janco, as a cosmopolitan, well-educated Jew active in the leftist, avant-garde circle in Bucharest, was a foreigner in Romania among Romanian intellectuals and particularly within peasant folk culture. With anti-Semitism taking a more dangerous turn in the 1930s and during Romania’s wartime alliance with Germany, Janco moved to Israel in 1941 to “live on my own proper land” (Naumann, 2005, pg.174). That Janco did not think of Romania as his “proper land” is indicative of his support of Zionism and also of his ultimate alienation from Romanian culture. If he indeed experienced such alienation in Romania, why did he integrate the aesthetic of Romanian folk masks into his art? I think that in primitivizing peasant folk culture and transforming it into the Other, he confronted his problematic Romanian identity, possibly for the purpose of coming to terms with the culture’s rejection of his Jewish identity.

Romanian folk art does not have African art’s ubiquitous presence in the history of early twentieth-century primitivism. Nonetheless, in Constantin Brancusi’s sculptures, arguably named the first modern sculptures, Romanian folk art prevails in their iconography and, most importantly, in their affinity to

wooden gates and cemetery posts located in Romanian villages. Yet, Brancusi's sculptures in wood are likewise associated, and rightly so, with African sculpture. Should one influence take precedent over the other or can both retain equal significance within an artist's oeuvre? Eric Shanes (1989, p. 8) is of the latter opinion, arguing, "By assimilating some characteristic forms of African art, Brancusi was merely broadening a stylistic range that already encompassed Romanian, Egyptian, and Oriental sources."

In "Dada Geographies," Timothy Benson (2014, p. 29) only associates Janco's masks with African masks. Benson interprets Janco's masks, along with Tzara's and Huelsenbeck's Negro poems and performances, within an anthropological context wherein the Dadaists, playing anthropologists, dissected "surrounding rituals and artifacts to create new contextualizations." According to Michaela Oberhofer (2016, p. 32), in her article for the exhibition catalog *Dada Africa: Dialogue with the Other*, Janco's masks elude categorization: his masks are "characterized more by a regional and stylistic pluralism," comprised of Oceanic and African sculpture, the Lotschental masks that he may have seen at the Landesmuseum in Zurich, and Romanian folk masks.

While I believe these sources do have aesthetic and cultural significance in Dada and should not be neglected, Janco's choice of material and technique of making his masks is what aligns him more with the ritual masks used in Romanian festivals. Although some African masks have pieces of fabric on the upper portion of their head, African masks are primarily made of durable wood. Janco, however, assembled his masks with painted cardboard, paper, and twine. Fellow Dadaist Jean Arp (1971, p. 27) described Janco's masks as "terrifying...daubed with bloody red." The masks used in the Colinde festival, for example, likewise possess a terrifying quality, largely due to its crude materials: fabric of different colors specify round eyes, pointy nose, and a sinister smile, with fiber hair protruding from its chin. The Colinde festival is held in the winter, around Christmas and New Year's. The festival, dating back to pre-Christian days when peasants celebrated the winter solstice, is comprised of young men who parade through the village dancing and singing colinde (ritual hymns) while wearing devil masks, to scare away evil spirits, and animal

masks, such as that of a goat, horse, or bear. In addition to symbolizing the close relationship between humans and nature, the masks represent the return of the spirits of ancestors (Senn, 1982, pp. 206–207).

The Colinde masks are often paired with body masks that envelop the entire body in sheepskin, such as the sheepskin coats worn by Romanian shepherds (Institutul de Istoria Artei, 1969, p. 638). When the Colinde participants dance, they move either the body mask or the head mask in rhythm with the music. The bells and tinsel that adorn the head masks make a clamorous sound, which, in addition to the sheepskin and facial features, activate the embodied animal spirit. The sound element, along with disguising the entire body, is present in Dada. Taeuber constructed her marionettes with brocade, bells, and feathers—similar, decorative materials ubiquitous in folk culture.

Joyce Suechun Cheng (2014, p. 292), in her analysis of Dada objects as toys, argues that Sophie Taeuber’s marionettes, Ball’s bishop costume, and Janco’s masks evoke a “dehumanization” of the performer because they constrict the movement of the body and the performer’s potential to express her or his identity. For example, Janco’s mask of Mr. Firdusi, who was a character, played by Ball, in Oskar Kokoschka’s play, is a big mask that glowed from the electric light that was embedded inside the mask. Comparable to Ball’s Bishop costume, the Firdusi mask is “an edifice to be inhabited” (Cheng, 2014, p. 282). Moreover, Hugo Ball (1996, p. 64) describes how, upon donning the masks, the Dadaists began composing new movements because “the masks simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance.” In their delirium, they felt “the motive power of these masks.” Thus, while Janco’s big costumes and masks may have been overwhelming on the body, disguising the wearer’s identity, the masks also impelled the wearer to create new, unknown identities through the body’s movements.

Colinde is not the only festival in Romania to utilize masks. In the regions of Moldova, Muntenia, and Banat, the Day of the Cuckoo is held on the last day before the Easter fast commences. Villages celebrate the day by donning “cuci” masks. These masks, resembling Janco’s *Untitled (Mask for Firdusi)* and *Untitled (Portrait of Tzara)*, caricaturize human faces: they have rabbit fur,

decorated with little mirrors, for the mask's beard, a long, exaggerated nose, and a bouquet of flowers of multi-colored paper that sits atop the mask (Institutul de Istoria Artei, 1969, p. 639). Dada's carnivalesque tendency for humor and outrage may also have its roots in the Căluș: a Romanian ritual that drives away the evil spirits from the peasants who are cursed with sickness for working on the holy week of Rusalii, when the spirits of dead family members, along with evil spirits, are believed to make contact with the living (Kligman, 1981, pp. xi–2).

A group of male dancers, called the Călușari, perform the Căluș, with the figure of the mute having great responsibility in the theatrical part of the ritual. Among the performers, only the mute wears a mask and only the mute is not permitted to sing and shout; he must converse through comedic gestures. Sociologist Gail Kligman (1981, 103) labels the mute “society's antiphilosopher par excellence.” Like the Dadaist, the mute “takes the burden of society upon himself” and “explores the socially structured role sets and status sets by which everyday life operates and presents his findings to and for the benefit of all.” The mute's two main responsibilities are to discipline the other Călușari for their mistakes during the ritual and to provide villagers with comedic relief when the Călușari take a break from the ritual. In this latter part, the mute acts as the “anti-Vataf”—the authoritative, straitlaced Vataf is the leader of the Călușari—by executing humorous scenarios that address taboo topics of sexuality, death, and disobedience of authority (Kligman, 1981, 85–87). One can easily imagine Tzara, in the role of the mute, reciting his manifestos in front of villagers, with the rest of the Dadaists prancing around in masks indicative of Colinde and Day of the Cuckoo. It is impossible to know whether Tzara was aware of the Căluș ritual, for there is no mention of it in his writings. With that said, he certainly would have been exposed to the folk culture and its folk rituals, if not one particular ritual, growing up in a provincial environment where folk culture dominated religious and communal life, alongside Yiddish culture.

Conclusion

Marcel Janco, Tristan Tzara, and Arthur Segal incorporated their background of a Jewish upbringing in a country infused with a

rich folk culture; simultaneously, they refused to identify solely with their Romanian nationality and Jewish heritage in favor of an international, free art practice that would surpass borders. Their complicated relationship with their home country and their Jewish identity is in keeping with the paradoxical character of Dada. The anti-Semitism of Romania and Switzerland in the first two decades of the twentieth century foreshadowed the more pernicious anti-Semitism of the 1920s and 1930s, which the Romanian avant-garde confronted, using Dada techniques. The anti-Semitism, and World War I, incited the sentiment of trauma and homelessness that I believe is evident in Tzara's "L'amiral cherche une maison a louer." In the spirit of Dada, traveling from one country to another in search of a permanent home and a concrete identity would plague the three Jewish-Romanian Dadaists well after Dada left the stage in Zurich.

Dada in Zurich ended with Tzara's move to Paris in 1920 to join André Breton for their Dada venture. Segal returned to Berlin and Janco returned to Bucharest to initiate *Contimporanul* and his architecture firm with his brother Iuliu Iancu. From Zurich, Dada crossed geographical borders to places like Germany, where it became an official movement, and Hungary, the Netherlands, and Croatia, where Dada-inspired magazines sprang up. In Romania, Dada fused with Constructivist, Futurist, and Expressionist literature and visual art that were influenced by Romanian artists' contact with foreign avant-garde ideas, as in the case of Janco.

Dada traversed geographical and cultural borders and transcended the East Europe-West Europe dichotomy. It may be easy to assume that Dada was predominantly Western European oriented, considering that the birth of Dada occurred in Switzerland, the Dada magazines were written in French and German, and the Zurich Dadaists continued their activities mainly in Berlin and Paris. But such a simple assumption overlooks Dada's Jewish and Romanian origins. Tzara and Janco resided between East and West, and merged the two, demonstrating the inclusive intellectual exchange that occurred among avant-garde artists of different nationalities across the East-West divide. Furthermore, Tzara and Janco used the alienation that they experienced in Romania and later in Zurich to affirm their foreignness and outsider status, which heightened their experimental Dada work and placed Dada

on the fringe of Western culture and among the most innovative of the avant-garde art movements.

References

- Academia Republicii Socialiste România (ed.) (1969). *Arta Populară Românească*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România.
- Jean, A. (1971). "Dadaland," in Lucy R. Lippard (ed.) *Dadas on Art: Tzara, Arp, Duchamp, and Others*. New York: Dover Publications, pp. 23–27.
- Ball, H. (1996). *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*. John Elderfield (ed.). Ann Raimes (trans.). Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles, CA; London, UK: University of California Press.
- Belkin, A. (2009). "Ritual Space as Theatrical Space in Jewish Folk Theater," in Edna Nahshon (ed.) *Jewish Theater: A Global View*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, pp. 15–25.
- Bennett, J. (2005). *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Benson, T. O. (2014). "Dada Geographies," in David Hopkins and Michael White (eds.) *Virgin Microbe: Essays on Dada*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, pp. 15–39.
- Berkowitz, J. (2004). "Avrom Goldfaden and the Modern Yiddish Theater: The Bard of Old Constantine," *Pakn Treger Magazine of the Yiddish Book Center*, 44, pp. 10–19.
- Buot, F. (2002). *Tristan Tzara: L'homme Qui Inventa La Révolution Dada*. Paris: Grasset, 2002.
- Cabaret Voltaire* (June, 1916). "L'amiral cherche une maison à louer." p. 7.
- Cheng, J. S. (2014). "Cardboard Toys and Dancing Marionettes: Play, Materiality, and Agency in Zurich Dada," in David Hopkins and Michael White (eds.) *Virgin Microbe: Essays on Dada*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, pp. 275–309.
- Cuteanu, I. C. (November 1924). "Fear of Jews," *Acțiunea Românească*, 2, pp. 1–2.

- Demos, T.J. (2003). "Circulations: In and Around Zurich Dada," *October*, 105, pp. 147–158.
- Enache, M. and Iancu, V. (eds) (2010). *Destine La Răscruce: Artiști Evrei în Perioada Holocaustului*. Bucharest: Muzeul Național de Artă al României.
- Eram, C. (2015). "Lost in Translation?" Tristan Tzara's Non-European Side," *Dada/Surrealism*, 20 (1), pp. 1–26, (Online). Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/dadasur/vol20/iss1/> (Accessed: 8 March 2017).
- Hentea, M. (2014). *TaTa Dada-The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara*. Cambridge, MA; London, UK: The MIT Press.
- Huelsenbeck, R. (1969). *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press.
- Hugnet, G. (1971). *L'Aventure Dada (1916–1922)*. Paris: Editions Seghers.
- Iancu, C. (1996). *Jews in Romania, 1866–1919: From Exclusion to Emancipation*. Carvel de Bussy (trans.). Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs; New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kligman, G. (1981). *Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Janco, M. (1971). "Dada at Two Speeds," in Lucy R. Lippard (ed.) *Dadas on Art: Tzara, Arp, Duchamp, and Others*. New York: Dover Publications, pp. 36–38.
- Mahrer, S. (2013). "Les Russes: The Image of East European Jews in La Chaux-de-Fonds and Zurich," in Tamar Lewinsky and Sandrine Mayoraz (eds.) *East European Jews in Switzerland*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, pp. 13–33.
- Mansbach, S. A. (1998). "The "Foreignness" of Classical Modern Art in Romania," *The Art Bulletin*, 80 (3), pp. 534–554.
- Naumann, F. M. (2005). "Janco/Dada: Entretien Avec Marcel Janco," in Henri Béhar and Catherine Dufour (eds.) *Dada, Circuit Total*. Paris; Lausanne: Éditions L'Age d'Homme. pp. 163–175.
- Oberhofer, M. (2016). "Our Belief in a Direct, Magical, Organic and Creative Art: Marcel Janco's Masks and Designs," in Ralf

- Burmeister, Michaela Oberhofer, and Esther Tisa Francini, (eds.) *Dada Africa: Dialogue with the Other*. Zurich: Scheidegger and Spiess, pp. 29–35.
- Razvan, P. (2007) “Culturalist Nationalism and Anti-Semitism in Fin-de-Siecle Romania,” in Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling (eds.) “*Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940*.” New York; Budapest: CEU Press.
- Ribemont-Dessaignes, G. (1989). “History of Dada (1931),” in Robert Motherwell (ed.) *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*. Cambridge, MA: London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, pp. 101–122.
- Sandqvist, T. (2006). *DADA East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*. Cambridge, MA; London, UK: The MIT Press.
- Seiwert, H. (1996). “Marcel Janco,” in Brigitte Pichon, Karl Riha, and Stephen C. Foster (eds.) *Dada Zurich: A Clown’s Game from Nothing, Vol. 2*. New York: G.K. Hall & Co.
- Senn, H. (1982). “Romanian Werewolves: Seasons, Ritual, Cycles,” *Folklore*, 93, pp. 206–215.
- Shanes, E. (1989). *Constantin Brancusi*. New York: Abbeville Press.
- Sheppard, R. (1978). “Dada and Mysticism: Influences and Affinities,” in Stephen C. Foster and Rudolf Kuenzli (eds.) *Dada Spectrum: Dialectics of Revolt*. Iowa City: University of Iowa, pp. 91–114.
- Sudhalter, A. (2016). “Tristan Tzara’s ‘International of the Mind:’ Dadaglobe (1920–1921),” in David Hopkins and Michael White (eds.) *Virgin Microbe: Essays on Dada*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, pp. 40–70.
- Tzara, T. (2011). *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*. Barbara Wright (trans). London, UK: Alma Classics.
- Tzara, T (2005). *Approximate Man and Other Writings*. Mary Ann Caws (trans). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Varnedoe, K. (1994). *A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern*. New York: H.N. Abrams.

Vinea, I. (February 1923). "Cultura si Anti-Semitismul," *Contimporanul*, 2 (3).

Volovici, L. (1991). *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*. Oxford; New York; Seoul; Tokyo: Pergamon Press.

From the Secular to the Sacred: The Influence of Sufism on the Work of Leila Aboulela

Billy Gray

Dalarna University

Critique is most powerful when it leaves open the possibility that we might be remade in the process of engaging another world-view, that we might come to learn things that we did not already know before we undertook the engagement.

Saba Mahmood (2005)

Islam as a religion is the unwelcome guest at the feast of Western secularism.

Geoffrey Nash (2012, p. 15)

Prominently viewed as, alternatively, an Arab, African, Muslim or diasporic woman writer, Leila Aboulela has contributed significantly to the emergence of a form of literature which, according to Dalla Sarnov, is “neither Arabic nor English but is linguistically and culturally hybrid, discursively multidimensional and literarily heterogeneous” (2014, p. 70). Since the publication of her first novel, *The Translator*, in 1999, her fiction has attempted to decode the culturally unfamiliar and represents the embodiment of what has been termed “insider” narratives originating from Arab or Islamic sources. Arguing that Aboulela’s texts represent “an acculturation to globalisation conducted from within the territory of the dominant discourse,” Geoffrey Nash defines her work as a prominent example of contemporary transnational literature, as it “embodies the issue of the transportation of

How to cite this book chapter:

Gray, B. 2021. From the Secular to the Sacred: The Influence of Sufism on the Work of Leila Aboulela. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 145–168. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.g>. License: CC-BY 4.0

specific Arab/Islamic ideologies into a literature composed for a non-Arab/Islamic audience" (2007, p. 4). The "transportation" Nash refers to here can be viewed as a conscious attempt to facilitate the type of cross-cultural awareness that is such a significant element within contemporary Anglo-Arab Women's writing. However, while such writers undoubtedly share a certain commonality in relation to their use of transnational literary frameworks, it is evident that within Anglo-Arab women's writing there exists a variety of positions in relation to the questions pertaining to nationalism identity, feminism, etc., and Nash has argued that, in terms of Arab migrant literature, Leila Aboulela's fiction can be said to "represent, more or less, a school of one" (2012, p. 44). This singularity resides in the fact that, in her fiction, the religious framework functions not merely as a term of reference or a representative aspect of cultural and social norms, but is deliberately presented as a faith; moreover, it is a faith which is ultimately positioned as a viable alternative to secularism and specific elements of Western modernity. While adopting an archetypal Western fictional form, Aboulela's texts embody a specific Islamic moral and religious terrain and promote the legitimacy of what can be termed "a faith-based subject position." (Dimitriu, 2014, p. 120). This religiosity includes numerous elements which go beyond the political, cultural and ethnic markers of identity commonly found in Anglo-Arab fiction and functions as "an antidote to hegemonic materialism and existential emptiness." (Nash, 2007, p. 136). Essentially uninterested in portraying Muslim identity as a cultural or political artefact, she depicts the psychology and moral imperatives of individuals who embrace religious certitude. This desire to incorporate characters who are practising Muslims into contemporary English language literary fiction and produce novels that are infused with traditional Islamic aesthetics, necessarily entails the charting of a new literary space as there currently exist remarkably few examples of such characters in contemporary literature. As Mahmudul Hasan has noted, those fictional representations that do exist invariably conform to the ubiquitous crass stereotyping increasingly evident in media discourses, such as "the Islamic terrorist," "the oppressed Muslim woman," or alternatively, liberal secular Muslims whose lifestyles are not noticeably different from those of non-Muslims (2015, p. 93). What is undeniable is that Aboulela's desire to write sympathetically

about individuals who embrace faith in a modern secular world and her desire to create fictional worlds which, in her own words, “follow Islamic logic” (Santesso, 2013, p. 7), serve to distance her work from numerous contemporary critical discourses. Christina Phillips contends that religious belief – regardless of the specific religious denomination of affiliation which is being articulated – has been essentially eradicated from the contemporary literary canon and argues that while it is permissible for literary texts to contain religious themes, characters and imagery, it is invariably the case that “if they want to be taken seriously by critics, these must be secularised” (2012, p. 166). The fact that Aboulela’s characters embrace a specifically Islamic religious identification can also be viewed as an additional handicap as after the events of 9/11, both critical and popular discourses have predominantly focused upon Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, resulting in an increasing marginalisation of moderate Muslim religious subjectivities. Ashi Nandy is one observer who has noted the tendency of secular states to perceive the followers of the Islamic faith as “demonic others that need to be deforged” (Nash, 2012, p. 15). In relation to literature, Tariq Ali has employed the term “the belligerati” to describe writers such as Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie and John Updike, who associate religious belief – and in particular, Muslim religious belief – as indicative of a form of cognitive paralysis, a delusional psychology deeply embedded in, and inextricably connected to, political radicalism and intolerance. In addition, “faith-based fiction” has invariably constituted a domain that resides outside the established nostrums of post-colonial theory, which has been distinguished by an unmediated, aggressive form of secularism. Nash has bemoaned what he describes as “the dearth of useful post-colonial theoretical material germane to the issue of religion or the sacred as a key conceptual category” (2012, p. 5), and writer Sara Mahood has evinced frustration with Post-colonialism’s stubborn denial of what she terms “valuable forms of human flourishing outside the bounds of a liberal, progressive imaginary” (Dimitriu, 2014, p. 124), which includes a disdain for non-Eastern, non-secular modes of agency.

Aboulela has herself directly alluded to some of the recurring difficulties she faces when attempting to write sympathetically about individuals who embrace religious faith in an antagonistic secular world:

I want to write about faith but it is so difficult to talk about this when everyone else is talking about the political aspects. I'm concerned that Islam has not just been politicised but that it is becoming an identity. This is like turning religion into a football match, it is a distraction from the real thing. (Edwin, 2013, p. 58).

This raises the important question of what Aboulela actually means when, in the above quotation, she refers to “the real thing.” Equally, in what respects can her fiction be said to embrace Muslim aesthetics and how are these aesthetics given literal representation in her texts? In general terms, the religious imperative she describes is essentially a voluntarist one, as she articulates the lifestories of Muslim women who are neither victims nor escapees of Islam but willingly committed to their faith.¹ She also challenges one of the major misconceptions about Islam currently held in the West, which perceives the Sharia as a legal prerequisite enforced by a government to the moral conduct of the individual, a desire to follow the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings as well as a recognition of the validity of this teachings legal precepts. Equally noteworthy is how these same protagonists view the concept of Jihad as a theological legitimation of their internal struggle against spiritual atrophy and imperfection rather than an obligation to eradicate apostasy or engage in gratuitous acts of violence against non-believers. It is my contention that a detailed reading of Aboulela's fiction reveals how these perspectives, and indeed other, less overt elements contained within her texts are profoundly influenced by what can loosely be termed “Sufi dialectics,” as many of her protagonists embark upon spiritual journeys characterised by experiences strikingly similar to those embedded in traditional Sufi practices. The aim of this essay, therefore, is to delineate how Sufism's perspective on the relationship between esotericism and exotericism, its views on the necessity of a spiritual guide, its belief in the value of spiritual submission, together with its emphasis on the importance of prayer, have all exercised an

¹ In the current political climate, this is an unusual position to take. For example, in an essay on immigrant Muslim writers in Germany, George Stock points out that a desire to distance oneself “from Islam is a constantly recurring theme for female characters who are often treated by women immigrant writers.” See Nash, 2012, p. 64.

unmistakable influence on Aboulela's desire to create characters who attempt to live Islam fully in all of its various dimensions.²

Sufism: Outer and Inner Manifestations

What then is Sufism? Max Weber once described it as “an orgiastic collectivistic fanaticism,” and several decades later, F.A. Tholuck wrote that, in comparison to Christian mysticism, Sufism was “a primitive spirituality” (both quoted in Greaves et al., 2009, p. 1). Although the question of Sufism's relationship to Islam is one of the most contested issues within contemporary Islamic discourse, and the belief that Sufism and Islam are distinct and separate entities is common in the West, in reality, as Eric Geoffrey has indicated, there is ample evidence to suggest that Sufism lies at the heart of Islamic culture and is far from being a marginal or deviant phenomenon in relation to Muslim belief (2010, p. xvii). It is said by its adherents to be peculiarly resistant to any form of systematic or external study as its very diversity prevents it from being schematised in a static or permanent manner. What can be said with certainty is that the Sufis often depict their activities as the operation of a form of cognition which is linked with human spiritual

² It is important at this juncture to note how all the textual evidence suggests that Aboulela has been influenced by what can be termed “traditional Sufism,” rather than the variant commonly taught in the West and frequently referred to by scholars, somewhat contemptuously as “Neo-Sufism.” “Neo-Sufism was essentially popularised by figures such as the Greek-Armenian George Gurdjieff (1866–1949), the Russian mathematician and philosopher Pyotr Ouspensky (1878–1947), Alfred Richard Orage (1878–1934), editor of the influential *New Age* magazine, J.G. Bennett (1897–1974), a British scientist and suspected spy and, most recently, Idris Shah (1924–1996), believed to have been the foremost exponent of Neo-Sufi ideas in the West. Limited space prohibits a detailed explication of the various ways in which Neo-Sufism differs in its essentials from Sufism in its classical form; in general terms, it can be described as propagating a psychological system rather than a faith-based theological exegesis and is essentially non-denominational in nature, unlike traditional Islam, which is inextricably linked to Islam. James Moore has claimed that the type of Sufism popularised by Idris Shah is “without self-sacrifice, without self-transcendence, without the aspiration of gnosis, without tradition, without the Prophet, without Islam and without God. Merely that.” See Moore, 1986, p. 7.

development and that a major component of Sufis is that there exists an Absolute of which ordinary, perceptible things are to be regarded as local concretizations. They contend that Man is essentially a reflection or emanation of this Absolute Being and that all multitudinous forms of phenomena which exist in the temporal world are merely manifestations of this Being's various attributes. The material and the metaphysical are therefore linked in a form best regarded as a continuum and the eternal and phenomenological planes of reality are two complementary aspects of what the Sufis term the "One." A Sufi dictum is "Man is the microcosm, creation the macrocosm – the unity. All come from one" (Arasteh, 1980, p. 19). Humanity is part of an eternal whole from which everything is derived. However, although Man began life in an unconscious union with such forces, he separated from nature in his process of evolution, thereby experiencing pain, time and space. Despite appreciating what his purpose was before assuming human form, Man forgot what this consisted of at the time of birth. The Sufis believe, however, that the individual can ultimately reunite with his origins. Authentic Sufism, therefore, is played out in a harmony which the initiate must continually restore between the body and the spirit, and between institutionalised religion as it was established on earth and its inner reality. This is why one of the goals of Sufism is to pierce the opacity of this world in order to contemplate the spiritual realities that lie beyond simple faith and the Sufi undertakes "labours", in order to reach a condition of spiritual realisation. Thus, Sufism is essentially an initiatory path which enables the transmission of spiritual blessings, referred to as "Baraka." The aspirant progresses along the path in order to go beyond the limits of individuality – potentially or in actuality – and to reach spiritual understanding.

In an early Sufi manual entitled *Kitabitt-Luma* (*The Book of Flashes*) by Abu Nasr Al-Sarra (d. 988), Sufis is defined as "the science of openings," as God wills the process of "opening up" the human heart to divine inspiration (Elmarsafy, 2012, p. 2). This is achieved by an "unveiling" of the spiritual realities that define our existence, and for the Sufis, this "unveiling" represents the principal mode of access to the supra-sensible world. Following long inward effort, the initiate will have access to spiritual realities thanks to the progressive lifting of the veils which mask the

realities of his condition. Sufi practice initiates the raising of the veils which the world of the senses throws over Man, thus allowing him to reach the world of the spirit. This “unveiling” leads to the direct perception of spiritual certainties and is an essential part of Sufi epistemology.

This emphasis upon “unveiling” implies that Sufis look beyond mere form and it is true that Sufis distinguish between the “World of Testimony,” i.e. the perceptible world, and the “World of Mystery” (the Ghayb), the latter being defined by “that which is not accessible to sight” (Geoffrey, 2010, p. 2). Traditional Sufi literature emphasises the transformative power of the inner dimensions of the Revelations given to Muhammad and contains numerous warnings that many ritual acts have no essential meaning or effect if performed without the requisite intention. In this respect, dogma and conventional liturgy operate as bases not ultimates and religious truth does not reside in the replication of mere form. Sufis point out that, in the Koran, God represents Himself as, concurrently, the Outer (al-zahir) and the Inner (al-Batin), and while not denying the literal meaning of the Holy Book, they impress upon the appellant the importance of discovering other, hidden meanings which a Koranic verse may, consciously or otherwise, conceal (Geoffrey, 2010, p. 1). Each act of worship includes an aspect which is apparent and another which is hidden, representing in the words of the great Sufi philosopher Al-Ghazi “the peel and the pulp” and while the particular form of an external act is never glossed over, it is viewed as a support, rather than an essential component of, spiritual realisation. To the Sufi, “Reality is hidden within the law as butter is hidden within milk,” and they contend that human consciousness must penetrate beyond the outer forms if the real meaning of religion is to be understood. The famous Persian poet Rumi has explained this belief in the following words:

Split the shell, so that you may arrive at
 Meaning’s pith; cleave through the flotsam
 and jetsam that floats, along with the foam,
 on the surface of the sea to arrive at the
 purity of the sea’s depth. (Lewis, 2000, foreword).

This advice is reiterated in the words of the Sufi teacher Khawaya Pilad of Erivan, who advises the disciple to “Penetrate beneath the outward message of the symbol or you will put yourself to sleep. Within the symbol there is a design which moves. Get to know this design” (Shah, 1982a, p. 43).

It is important to emphasize, however, that this essential component of Sufi dialectics has given rise to several popular misconceptions regarding both the aims, and the origins, of Islamic mysticism. For some, Sufism is perceived as something akin to a new age philosophy and its suprarational – as opposed to irrational – character is commonly believed to have been conceived as a reaction to the narrow legalism of Orthodox Islam. In reality, traditional Sufism does not deny the outward meaning of the Koran or the world of conventional religious observance; rather, in the same way that Islam preaches the importance of balancing the realms of matter and spirit, Sufism recognises Islam in both its exoteric and esoteric dimensions. Eric Geoffroy writes “Having the Koran as its source, Sufism is based on the example of the Prophet. Therefore, it in no way rejects either the law or the rights of Islam. On the contrary, it ultimately illuminates them from within” (2010, p. xvii). Sufism, a specific path intended to develop the higher states of consciousness, begins with daily life and the world of forms and rites. The external forms of worship – such as the Five Pillars of Islam – are, above all, ways to move towards spiritual realities and primary function as “symbols put into action.” To the Sufis, formal and institutionalised religion fulfils an essential function and they believe that religious symbolism operates as a reflection of what they perceive as objective truth. Each act of worship includes a component which is visible and one that is hidden, and the Sufis, when illustrating the fundamental compatibility of the external and internal elements of their teachings, often refer to the Prophet Mohammad’s comment that “The law is my word, the Path my acts and reality my inner state” (Geoffrey, 2010, p. 60). Within the realm of Sufi action, therefore, exist both inner and outer activities, each of which is given equal significance and the external form of religious observance is believed to function as a support for spiritual awakening. The inextricable connection which exists between the esoteric and the exoteric aspects of Sufism is confirmed by Rumi in the following words: “the

law of religion is like a candle that shows the way; without that candle we cannot even set foot on the spiritual path. Once the way is lit with the light of the law, the wayfarer begins his spiritual quest which takes place on the Sufi path” (Lewis, 2000, p. 87). The Iraqi Sufi scholar Alusi (1853) echoed these sentiments when he wrote: “He who claims to know the secrets of the Koran before having mastered the exoteric commentaries of the Book can be compared to he who claims to have reached the innermost part of a house without having passed through its door” (Geoffrey, 2010, p. 41).

Sufism in Aboulela’s Fiction

Interestingly, in a recent interview, Leila Aboulela spoke openly about her belief in a faith based upon both mystical and legal precepts. When asked whether she views Islamic mysticism as a separate entity from a more Orthodox interpretation of the Koran, she replied:

No, I see them both together as being one. . . Laws without any feelings are lifeless. You’re just doing them because you have to do them. The result might look good on the outside, but inside the heart is dead. [Then there are] people who do everything out of love for God, yet who have rejected the Shariah. . . as Muslims we have to put the two sides together. (Rashid, 2012, p. 620).

A detailed reading of Aboulela’s fiction reveals the extent to which the “outer” and “inner” aspects of Sufi religious practice are visible in her texts. On an overt level, there are numerous explicit references to Sufism in her narratives and the latter reveal both a strong knowledge of, an interest in, several prominent Sufi Orders and esteemed historical figures who have been active within the Sufi tradition. *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015) contains an epigraph accredited to an “anonymous Sufi Saint of the twentieth century,” and the novel itself contains a fictionalised account of the life of Iman Shamil (1797–1871), an important Muslim political and religious leader from the Caucasus, who was a prominent Sheikh in the Sufi Naqshbandi Order. Another influential Sheikh from the same Order, Malanna Abdullah Ed-Dagestani, originally from Turkey, is mentioned in the same novel, and in *Lyrics Alley* (2011) the central protagonist, called Badr is said at one point

to be reading Iman Ghazali's classic Sufi text *The Revival of the Sciences of Religion* (p. 124). *The Translator* (1999) contains an extract from the controversial writer Abs Nawar (751–814), a historical figure commonly believed to have lived the final years of his life as a Sufi and whose poetry is deeply impregnated with Sufi mysticism. In the short story “Days Rotate” from her *Coloured Lights* (2011) collection, the two main protagonists are said to listen to a diwan of Sheikh Al'Alawi, who was a Sufi Sheikh active within the classic Darqawi Shadhili tradition. Moreover, a number of Aboulela's characters reveal a detailed knowledge of Sufism, and at certain points come into contact with the more visible aspects of its teachings. In *The Kindness of Enemies*, Natasha attends a Sikr which is said to be performed by the same Sufi Tariquat that Iman Shamid belonged to; in Sufi devotions, Zikr – meaning “remembrance of Allah” – embodies both a solemn ritual and a spiritual state of mind. In *Minaret* (2006), Najwa participates in a Tafsee class, which implies that she is being exposed to a form of Sufi exegesis usually relating to the inner meaning of a specific passage in the Koran. In the same novel, Najwa asks Tamer's mother whether she has listened “to the programme on the radio about Sufism?” (p. 270). In *The Translator*, Rae's uncle, who has gone to Egypt in a military capacity, is said to have “become interested in Sufism [and] converted to Islam” (p. 17), and in *The Kindness of Enemies*, Malak's teenage son, Oz, addresses her as “a Sufi,” to which she responds “Am I a Sufi? Do you see me as such? Then you are doing me a great honour” (p. 9).

These numerous references to Sufism, classical Sufi texts and important historical figures within the movement itself, can be said to represent the “outer” or more visible manifestation of Aboulela's knowledge of Sufism; a closer and more attentive reading, however, reveals the extent to which she has accepted the validity of its “inner” dimension. Indeed, her characters' desire to embrace what can be termed “the living heart” of Islam leads them to undergo a spiritual transformation that bears a strikingly similarity to the experiences undergone by the so-called Sufi traveller on the road to self-realisation. This is partly manifested in the manner by which several of her central protagonists become involved in what can only be described as a “spiritual journey.” As Mark Sedgwick has noted, many Sufis themselves, when asked

to define what actually constitutes a Sufi, will invariably use a phrase such as “a traveller on the path back to his Maker” (2003, p. 5), and Al-Ghazali has referred to “the adept [who] *travels* on his way towards God” (my italics, Sedgwick, 2003, p. 29). As the most important goal of Sufism is to return Man to his original state of purity, where he was not yet separated from the spiritual world, this implies that the seeker is obligated to follow what can usefully be described as “an inward path.” As Ansari Harawi (d. 1089) has written in his classic text *The Stages of Travellers towards God*, as the Sufi progresses on his journey, he is believed to ascend a double ladder of “initiatory stations,” and “spiritual states.” The former are defined as the fruits of spiritual discipline, while the latter are divine favours which are granted freely to the mystic. Tariq Ramadan defines the Sufi “journey” in the following terms:

God in his Oneness put into the heart of each human being an original breath, a natural longing for the Transcendent, for him. Muslim spirituality is the work . . . the believer does on the self in order to be liberated from all forms of the worship of things other than the Transcendent and to find a way [back] to this original breath and purity. (Greaves et al., 2009, p. 107).

Perhaps the most widely known Sufi text where the motif of “a journey” or a “quest” is employed as an analogy of the successive stages of human soul in search of perfection is Farid ud-Din Attar’s famous *The Parliament of the Birds* (1169), in which, by employing illustrative biography, fables and maxims, the specific stages in human spiritual development are described. Two other important figures in Sufi history have employed similar terminology; Ibn Arabi frequently mentioned the concept of the Warid – literally translated as “the arriver” – in his literature and Rumi argued how, as Sufism can be defined as a process of mystical awakening, the wayfarer must begin his spiritual quest by embarking upon what he terms “the Sufi path,” with the hope that “at the end of the journey, one arrives at truth” (Lewis, 2000, p. 7).

Aboulela uses a similar nomenclature in *Lyrics Alley* when describing Badr’s search for both greater self-understanding and a closer relationship with true spirituality. Faced with economic penury and the burdens of taking care of an elderly and increasingly

senile father, his encroaching despair leads him to question whether his suffering serves a deeper purpose:

Badr's tumultuous, humdrum life. What was it all for, where was it heading? The answer peered at him now as it had done before and would do again. His life was a journey. A journey towards the day when Allah Almighty would look at him, look through him, inside him, know him and then would call him by his name. Ya Badr. (p. 23).

Subsequently, when he visits the Umdurman district and ponders the myriad, unforeseen directions that his life has taken, he confesses how “it felt like a journey with its own hardships and elation; its anxieties and weaknesses, its greed for God's mercy, its yearning for blessings, its departure point and graceful arrival” (p. 133). The “graceful arrival” referred to here implies a potential restoration of Man's original state, when he was not yet separated from the spiritual world. In *Minaret*, Najwa confesses how she “yearned to go *back* [my italics] to being safe with God,” and in Aboulela's fiction the concept of “Home” is not exclusively related to the experience of diaspora in a literal physical sense or the tribulations attendant upon voluntary or enforced exile; rather, her use of the term transcends the idea of a physical space and implies a spiritual “homecoming” where, after overcoming numerous obstacles, the seeker achieves a spiritual reunion with God. To arrive “Home” involved embracing the inner dimensions of the Revelation given to Mohammad and developing the ability to, as Natasha in *The Kindness of Enemies* expresses it, “delve into the hidden truth behind the disguise” (p. 107). In *The Translator*, for instance, the narrative implies that if Rae, a Scottish academic fascinated by Middle Eastern politics, is to truly understand Islam, he must relinquish a fascination with its cultural manifestations and actively embrace the inner dimensions of the faith. As Sammar comments “He would not understand it [Islam] until he lived it” and she is insistent that he “look beyond the causes to the First, the Real” (p. 102).

The Teacher-Disciple Relationship

The difficulty which several of Aboulela's characters face is that they cannot access “the Real,” without guidance from spiritual

teachers who have supposedly transcended ordinary limitations and embraced the imperatives of esoteric knowledge. This is why her texts are replete with protagonists who act as spiritual mentors – and in certain instances, self-proclaimed Sufi teachers – for the aspiring individual who desires to penetrate beyond the nominal significance of meaning. The recurrent motif of the teacher-pupil dynamic in Aboulela’s fiction can be directly traced to the influence of Sufism on her work as, in their proper application, Sufi teaching techniques depend upon an interrelation between the Master and his disciples. In relation to both the history and praxis of Sufism, a system of discipleship to spiritual teachers originated which involved the aspirant developing his spiritual proclivities under the supervision of a guide. This guide operates as a link between the disciple and his objective and is ultimately responsible for organising and shaping the inherent flexibility of the Sufi work. By practising a variety of structured activities, the teacher endeavours to transmit to the pupil the “Baraka” – an impalpable force imparted to people, situations, places and objects for a specific reason – he receives from his own master. This Baraka impacts upon the pupil according to the time, place, need and the circumstances in which he finds himself. As Idries Shah notes: “To be a Sufi and to study the Way is to have a certain attitude. This attitude is produced by the effect of Sufi teachers, who exercise an instrumental function in relation to the seeker” (Shah, 1982b, p. 24).

The conviction that spiritual guides are essential and exercise an instrumental function in relation to the seeker is prevalent in many of Aboulela’s texts, not least in two specific stories contained within her *Coloured Lights* collection. These stories – entitled “Radia’s Carpet” and “Days Rotate” respectively – are particularly significant in relation to the “teacher-disciple” dynamic and both resonate with a detailed Sufi symbiology. In “Radia’s Carpet,” Dia, the thirteen-year-old boy of the narrative, is engaged in a formal competition to win a carpet which supposedly contains magical qualities. The suggestion is that Dia must first achieve a degree of spiritual awareness if he is to be deemed a worthy inheritor of one of the seven carpets which are passed on only when their owners die. In order to acquire the necessary self-awareness, Dia is instructed by a spiritual teacher, who informs him that he will only win the esteemed prize if he rejects the base emotions of

greed, envy and self-interest. We are told how “the Teacher talked and Dia absorbed,” and the latter is advised to “Reign in your ego, ride it, don’t let it ride you” (p. 147). It is only by acknowledging how his “ego is as big as the moon and just as familiar,” that Dia, through instruction from an appointed spiritual guide, can be said to have achieved the degree of spiritual maturity necessary to be able to take his place within the community of believers.

Similarly, in “Days Rotate,” a futuristic, post-apocalyptic narrative which shares some superficial similarities to the concluding sections of Doris Lessing’s novel *The Marriages of Zones Three, Four and Five*, – a text which, interestingly, is also permeated with Sufi dialectics, – Aboulela’s protagonist is a young girl who is engaged in a perpetual, seeming never-ending, physical ascent of an unnamed geographical terrain. Set in a time period when “all struggles [have] become spiritual struggles,” the adolescent narrator is accompanied by a guide, an older male accomplice, who frequently instructs her to “empty yourself.” Bemoaning that this is impossible as she is “covered in a thick rubbery skin, like an elephant” (2011a, p. 32), she beseeches her guide and teacher to “carry me.” The physical ascent is symbolic of the protagonist’s spiritual evolution and her journey is concluded when she, like her teacher, transcends human limitations and can literally “fly.” This spiritual breakthrough, made possible by the guidance of her teacher is described as resembling a condition of nirvana-like consciousness: “why did I think I could never make it [that] I could never reach this place? Here was what I had always wanted, every colour and every sound” (2011a, p. 139).

Aboulela’s interest in the teacher-disciple dynamic is taken a step further in *The Kindness of enemies*, through the parallel narratives of Shamil and Natasha, whose interrelated stories are separated by a timespan of over two hundred years. The former’s spiritual teacher is called Sheik Jamal-el Dinal Husayni, “the gentle Sufi scholar,” and we are informed that Shamil “had soaked up the Sheikh’s Sufi teachings, eager for enlightenment, eager for the grace and strength that came from the Creator” (2015, p. 161). Together with his friend Ghazi Muhammad al-Ghimrawi, “they had known that perfection could not be reached without the instructions of a Master; they were seekers and Sheik Jamal el-Din

their spiritual guide” (2015, p. 161). Natasha, a modern, intellectual and avowedly atheistic young woman, has embarked upon a research project relating to Shamil’s role as a rebel leader engaged in resisting Russian imperial expansionism, and her exposure to his Sufi beliefs begins to have an increasingly resonance in her own life. She is introduced to a mysterious actress called Malak through her relationship with the latter’s son, nicknamed “Oz,” who has an abiding interest in Islam and the political ramifications of Jihad. This somewhat complicated tripartite configuration is partly used by Aboulela as a means of exposing current debates relating to secularisation, assimilation and Islamophobia; more importantly, however, it soon becomes clear that Malak is assuming the role of a spiritual guide, both to Oz, and in particular, Natasha. Moreover, it soon becomes clear that Malak’s guidance is explicitly predicated on specific Sufi principles. For example, in an early passage of the novel Natasha writes in a notebook how Malak has informed her that “Sufism is based on the belief that the seeker needs a guide. Even Muhammad, on his miraculous night’s ascent through the seven heavens needed Gabriel as his guide” (2015, p. 107). Natasha’s initial reluctance to embrace the role of a spiritual novice is partly based on her fear of abrogating individual agency and also related to a sense of confusion regarding exactly how a teacher-disciple relationship is initiated. She asks herself “If I ever started to seek the kind of knowledge that couldn’t be found in books, who would I want as a guide? Does the student seek the teacher or the other way around?” (2015, p. 107). She subsequently comes to a realisation that Malak has already been performing the role of teacher without her, Natasha, being fully aware of exactly how this spiritual knowledge has been transmitted. Eventually she perceives that Malak “had orientated me towards the unexpected and guided me to what could never be written down in history” (2015, p. 69). She continues by adding “I had come to her today, needing to connect . . . perhaps it was time to acknowledge that what I was after was spiritual. She was ready to be a guide and I would fight my weaknesses in order to follow” (2015, p. 314).

For characters such as Natasha and Shamil, the willing acceptance of the role of supplicant within the confines of a

traditional teacher-disciple relationship, involves a reassessment of commonly held beliefs relating to the value of autonomy and free will. Aboulela's fiction suggests that submission, both to the dictates of a spiritual guide and an omnipotent Higher Power is a fundamental prerequisite if the aspirant is to experience spiritual enlightenment. Likewise, Sufism emphasises that to truly become a disciple the individual must embrace a condition in which one has voluntarily given away one's freedom in certain areas to those better fitted to guide one than one is oneself. This involves the aspirant practising what is termed "trusting self-abandonment in God". To the Sufi, secular ideas relating to "freedom" are only a convenient chimera, as they contend that the average individual is controlled by his/her lower instincts – referred to as the *nafs* or "secondary self" – which negate the possibility of genuine free choice. The function of this "secondary self" is to interpose a wedge between objective reality and the real essence of the individual and the teacher-disciple relationship is best understood as a practical programme designed as a means of controlling the "*nafs*." The most obvious sign that the "secondary commanding self" has been brought under control is that the disciple "achieves ontological servitude while at the same time putting himself at the service of Men" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 27). As Ahmad Mustafa Sarmouni suggests, this condition implies freedom from choice: "freedom is one of the factors that most confuse and undermine you. It gives you full play for your neuroses, your surface reactions and your aberrations" (Lefort, 1971, p. 110).

This ontological servitude is a position to which several of Aboulela's characters aspire. Shamil, for example, asks himself whether he has the spiritual strength to oppose "those who claim they're acting in the name of Islam and at the same time don't follow the principle of submission" (2015, p. 176). His son Jamaledin, who is also involved in a spiritual quest reflects upon how "Sins were like dirt, they could be washed off. More serious was the core submission, the foundation of belief." In *The Translator*, Sammar, on a temporary visit to her Sudanese homeland, comments approvingly on "the feelings all around of surrender" and while resident in Scotland she explains her views in more detail: "My fate is etched out by Allah Almighty, if and

who I will marry, what I eat, the work I find, my health, the day I will die are as He alone wants them to be. To think otherwise was to slip down, to feel the world narrowing, dreary and tight” (1999, p. 171). Perhaps not surprisingly, Aboulela’s emphasis on submission as being an essential component of religious life has proven to be somewhat problematical for certain critics, who view Sammar’s and, in particular, Najwa’s seeming retreat from hard-won Western freedoms as evidence of a regressive mindset. In *Minaret*, Najwa’s burgeoning spiritual awakening, accompanied as it is by a parallel interest in the accretions of conventional religious attire, has been viewed with scepticism by some commentators, who have expressed impatience with what they interpret as “the topography of withdrawal” seemingly evident in Aboulela’s fiction. One academic has gone so far as to accuse Aboulela’s texts of reinforcing “the clichés of Islam as oppressive, anti-feminist and anti-individualistic” (Santesso, 2013, p. 103). Eva Hunter has expressed disquiet concerning what she terms “Minaret’s quietist solution” for Najwa and Sadia Abbas contends that “Aboulela’s novels when most committed to religion and Islam, reveal themselves as most in line with the idea that religion is a brand of socio-psychic tranquilizer” (Abbas, 2011, p. 453). Such criticisms, while doubtless valid on their own terms, are predicated on a secularist, supposedly “progressive” ethos where the perception of “submission” in any shape or form is viewed as synonymous with subjugation and even oppression. If approached from the perspective of Sufi philosophy, however, Aboulela’s belief that within the sphere of spirituality, submission and individual agency are by no means incompatible, acquires greater legitimacy and contextualisation. Whereas a critic such as Esra Santesso states unequivocally that “At the end of *Minaret*, Najwa is unquestionably less free than she was at the beginning” (2013, p. 104), Aboulela’s views on the so-called sanctity of freedom when divorced from submission to God’s will are aptly summarised in the following quotation by the Sufi Pir David: “Do you know, can you comprehend what freedom it gives you to have no choice? Do you know what it means to be able to choose so swiftly and surely that to all intents and purposes you have no feed choice?” (Lefort, 1971, p. 110)

Intentional Suffering

For the Sufis, submission, both to a teacher and to the will of God, is inextricably linked to the experience of conscious or intentional suffering, and they view the latter as symbolising not only the essence of the human condition, but also a kind of “litmus test” of the disciple’s commitment to the religious path. This belief is aptly summarised by the Sufi dictum “Sometimes He gives while depriving you” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 112). In the same way that physical austerity, correctly used, operates as an antidote to irrational desire, an element of stress or suffering in one’s immediate circumstances acts as a catalyst for spiritual renewal and regeneration. The experience of suffering can be inherently beneficial, as absolute contentment deflects the individual away from the desire to attain spiritual advancement. It exists, not as something to be avoided, or as wanton punishment, but as an opportunity for the disciple to confirm his strength of faith. This is why, as Eric Geoffrey explains, “true Sufis, who are in search of excellence or Ihsan, often take upon themselves greater burdens than do other Muslims” (2010, p. 61).

This tenet of Sufi philosophy has had a significant influence on Aboulela’s fiction and is exemplified in the manner by which many of her characters are, when faced with diminished material and emotional circumstances, obliged to reassess their situation and the ultimate value of adhering to an overtly secular perspective on life. In *The Translator*, Sammar’s husband dies suddenly in a car accident and this traumatic experience, allied with a prolonged period of suffering, proves conducive to a process of spiritual rebirth. In *Minaret*, Najwa, who is originally from an established and respected upper middle-class family with important connections to the privileged echelons of Sudanese society, is forced into exile where, in order to survive economically, she accepts employment as a maid to a prosperous Middle Eastern family. This reversal in fortunes erodes her sense of self-worth while simultaneously acting as a catalyst for her subsequent appreciation for the religious way of life; as she comments, “slowly, surely, I was setting at the bottom . . . and there buried below was the truth” (2006, p. 240). It is in *Lyrics Alley*, however, where this theme acquires greatest significance as the characters of Badr serves as

a fictional vehicle for Aboulela's desire to investigate the intimate relationship between suffering and faith. Intermittently employed as a teacher and private tutor, Badr and his ever-growing family of dependants live in a cramped domestic abode which becomes even more crowded when he assumes responsibility for his increasingly confused, ill and elderly father. A deeply religious man, Badr's faith is frequently tested by a series of seemingly inexplicable misfortunes, affecting both himself and others, and he begins to question the value of suffering in a world where compassion is ignored in favour of political manoeuvring and financial greed. Ultimately, he comes to the conclusion that suffering exists, not as a punishment for spiritual transgressions, but as a trial and a way "of being drawn into the company of the Lord" (2011b, p. 167). When his best-laid plans are thwarted or suffer a major setback, he asks himself the question "why do bad things happen?" and remembers how the Prophet Muhammad "peace be upon him, said 'When Allah loves a people, He tries them'" (2011b, p. 167). He surmises that: "Perhaps the shortest journey to Allah is through the disliked, uncomfortable choices. The seeker asks "where shall I find the Divine? The answer is 'Come close to illness, poverty and oppression. Dwell for enough time (too long would be counter-productive) in those shadows where laughter does not come easily to the lips" (2011b, p. 214).

In the above quotation, Badr describes the relationship between the seeker and God as an interactive one, based on enquiry and guidance. To the Sufis, this dialogue is often characterised as governed by what they define as "illuminations" and "revelations." The Egyptian poet Abu Al-Sabur (1931–81), in his commentary on the key Sufi text entitled *The Risala*, discusses the existence of what he terms "openings" and suggests that they can be viewed as "glimmers," "dawnings" and "flashes" which can live on in the course of an individual's identity (Elmarsafy, 2012, p. 2). J.G. Bennett relates these experiences to the Sufi concept of Djarkhom, the correct application of which results in the disciple being subjected to what he calls "a powerful and unexpected illumination" (1984, p. 78). It manifests itself in a form of "spontaneous waking" which, according to Bennett, functions as "the foundation of all our possibilities of transformation" (1984, p. 78). Tariq

Ramadan goes further and links these experiences to the concept of dhaki (literally translated as “Remembering”), whereby specific Islamic practices, in particular that of repetitive prayer, can be perceived as a means of reconnecting with the unity which once existed between God and Man” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 38).

Prayer as Ritual

A belief in the act of prayer as a conduit to a different dimension where temporal barriers between the individual and God are dissolved, is fundamental to Aboulela’s perception of the spiritual possibilities that lie within the domain of religious observance and ritual. On one level prayer acts, not only as a solace in a world partly defined by suffering and emotional pain, but also as an antidote to personal fragmentation, a reminder as it were, of an alternative space where existential anguish is replaced by spiritual possibilities. In *The Kindness of Enemies*, we are told how “prayer lulled Jamaledin to spaces where the pain subsided” and in *The Translator*, Sammar reveals how the sense of certitude she experiences when engaged in ritual prayer leads to “the splinters inside her coming together” (1999, p. 61). In *Minaret*, mere observance of worshippers engaging in the act of prayer, without actively participating in the ritual itself, draws Najwar’s attention to what she terms “that hollow space,” where she feels a bleakness defined by emotional numbness. Frequently prompted by Waafa – her friend and mentor – to reengage with the ritual act of prayer as an external symbolic representation of her increasing orthodoxy, Najwa ponders that “perhaps that was where the longing for God was supposed to come from” (2006, p. 135). When she subsequently begins to attend her local mosque on a regular basis and becomes increasingly exposed to both prayer and the importance of the Koran, she confesses to experiencing “a breakthrough in my understanding” (2006, p. 185). It is significant that Najwa defines this breakthrough as “a learning, fresh as lightening” as this description is strikingly reminiscent of the “flashes” and “glimmers” described by the Sufis as symbolic manifestations or “markers” of the disciples increasing connection with the spiritual realm. Moreover, other important characters in Aboulela’s fiction are said to experience similar illumination

while engaged in the ritual of prayer and are able to enter into contact with the “cracks and transparencies through which that other world could, at times, be sensed.” Sammar, in her attempt to guide Rae towards a fuller appreciation of Islamic practices, turns to prayer as a means of purging herself of the selfish motivations she harbours for wishing to facilitate his conversion. Her success is defined by the fact that “the more she prayed for him” the more she experiences “vivid, sudden moments of illumination” (1999, p. 189). In *Lyrics Alley*, Badr, when joining a throng of pilgrims intent upon answering the call to prayer, is said “to experience the thinning of the barriers,” whereby he is able to sense the intimate connection that exists between the living community of believers and the invisible realm of the dead. As he takes his position in the front row of the mosque:

he sensed the congregation swelling with invisible worshippers. So palpable was their presence that it was as if the barriers separating their world from that of Mankind had thinned and become transparent. Badr felt himself slide into another dimension. It was unexpected and unasked for. A dip into an alternative state where he was weightless and free and his concerns, valid and pressing only minutes ago, slackened and moved away. (2011b, p. 58).

Badr defines this “dip into an alternative state” as a co-mingling of two separate dimensions: “All that had happened was that two worlds, the spiritual and material, had touched each other briefly before moving on, each faithful to its own orbit” (2011b, p. 79).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to show how Leila Aboulela’s fiction contains numerous thematic concerns which are essentially based on elements of Sufi dialectics and argues that the comingling of seemingly separate realms, in this case the spiritual and the material, is reflected in the ways her novels combine elements of both the secular and the sacred. Specific components of Sufi thought and belief, such as the importance of the Teacher-Disciple relationship, the value of intentional suffering and the spiritual significance of prayer have been shown to hold particular significance for many of her characters. This raises the issue of Aboulela’s intentions and

whether her fiction, influenced as it is by traditional Sufism, can be viewed as embodying a kind of literary equivalent of preparatory Sufi teaching materials, whereby the Western reader is exposed to a “glimpse” or an approximation of the objective Sufi experience. It would be remiss not to mention, however, that according to the Sufis themselves “Sufism can only be studied by means of itself,” and any exposition of Sufi principles – be through the genre of literature or otherwise – will inevitably fail to encapsulate the true essence of what it is they teach. Daggash Rustari has written: “Knowledge comes from experience and cannot be learned from a book. You can read the great ones, Rumi, Jami, Hafiz, Saadi, but their writings are only the salt of the bread. To taste the loaf you must eat the loaf, to experience the salt in tis intimate relationship with the flour, the yeast and the water” (Lefort, 1971, p. 104).

Aboulela’s texts do, nonetheless, provide the reader with a thoughtful and nuanced perspective on a mystical path which has increasingly, at least within the context of contemporary Western popular culture, become almost totally decontextualized from its Islamic roots. In this respect, her fiction fulfils the criteria of “Transcultural literature” as outlined by Jamal Mahjoub, who argues that such literature

demands more, both of the reader and the writer. It does not have the support of those cheering, waving crowds, who would like you to be European or Third World, Black or African or Arab. It can rely on that thin crack of light which lies between the spheres of reader and writer . . . gradually that crack grows wider and wider and where there was once only monochrome light, now there is a spectrum of colours. (Quoted in Nash, 2007, p. 11).

Aboulela’s ability to articulate the intimacy of faith, the experience of worship and the validity of traditional Islamic mysticism to a Western audience, certainly contributes to “the spectrum of colours” outlined by Mahjoub as representative of transcultural literature and, for this reason alone, her fiction can legitimately be said to represent a uniquely fascinating body of work.

References

- Abbas, S. (2011). “Leila Aboulela, Religion, and the Challenge of the Novel,” *Contemporary Literature*, 52(3), pp. 430–461.

- Aboulela, L. (1999). *The Translator*. Grove Press.
- (2006). *Minaret*. Bloomsbury.
- (2011a). *Coloured Lights*. Polygon.
- (2011b). *Lyrics Alley*. W&N.
- (2015). *The Kindness of Enemies*. W&N.
- Arasteh, R. (1980) *Growth to Selfhood: The Sufi Contribution*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bennett, J.G. (1984). *Talks on Beelzebub's Tales*. Turnstore Press.
- Dimitriu, I. (2014). "Crossing and dwelling": home as a state of mind in Aboulela's *Minaret* and Gordimer's *The Pickup*" *Scrutiny* 2, 19(1), pp. 119–134.
- Edwin, S. (2013). (Un)Holy Alliances: Marriage, Faith, and Politics in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 9(2), pp. 58–79.
- Elmarsafy, Z. (2012). *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel*. Edinburgh UP.
- Geoffrey, E. (2010). *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam*. World Wisdom.
- Ron Greaves, R., Dressler, M. and Klinkhammer, G. (eds.) (2009). *Sufism in Western Society*. Routledge.
- Hasan, M. (2015). "Seeking Freedom in the 'Third Space' of Diaspora: Muslim Women's Identity in Aboulela's *Minaret* and Janmohamed's *Love in a Headscarf*", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 35(1), pp. 89–105.
- Lefort, R. (1971). *Teachers of Gurdjieff*. The Octagon Press.
- Lessing, D. (1980). *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five*. Jonathan Cape.
- Lewis, F.D. (2000). *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalla al-Din Rumi*. Oneworld.
- Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton UP.
- Moore, J. (1986). "Neo-Sufism: The Case of Idries Shah," *Religion Today*, 3(3), pp. 4–8.

- Nash, G. (2007). *The Anglo-Arab Encounter in Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English*. Peter Lang.
- (2012). *Writing Muslim Identity*. Continuum.
- Phillips, C. (2012). “Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator*: Reading Islam in the West,” *Wasafiri*, 27(1), pp. 66–72.
- Rashid, C.E. (2012). “Islamic Individualism and the Logic of the Narrative,” *Interventions*, 14(4), pp. 613–624.
- Santesso, E. (2013). *Disorientation: Muslim Identity in Contemporary Anglophone Literature*. Macmillan.
- Sarnov, D. (2014). “Narratives of Arab Anglophone Women and the Articulation of a Major Discourse in a Minor Literature,” *Journal of International Studies*, 16(1), pp. 65–81.
- Sedgwick, M. (2003). *Sufism: The Essentials*. The American University in Cairo Press.
- Shah, I. (1982a). *A Perfumed Scorpion*, The Octagon Press.
- (1982b). *Seeker After Truth: A Handbook*. The Octagon Press.

Inscribing Difference: Code-Switching and the Metonymic Gap in Post-Colonial Literatures

Katalin Egri Ku-Mesu

University of Leicester

Scholarly opinion is divided on what does or does not constitute post-colonial literature. In a broad sense, Ashcroft *et al.* (1989, p. 2) use the term “‘post-colonial’ [...] to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.” In this sense, the literatures of all formerly colonised countries as well as the literatures of what is now seen as the metropolitan centre belong to this body of literature. My interest, however, lies in literatures which have “emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (Ashcorft *et al.*, 1989, p. 2). My particular research concerns West African anglophone writing, but it has relevance to other anglophone, francophone, lusophone and hispanic literatures.

To the study of code-switching in literature, the African novel¹ is of particular interest: at the intersection of languages and

¹ “African novel” is a generalisation in the same way as African literature, African writer, African art, African culture, African heritage, African studies are. On the one hand, it reflects a Eurocentric view of the world, in which Sub-Saharan Africa figures as a homogenous entity; on the other hand, it emphasises a similarity and unity of experience among Africans. It has been adopted and widely used by Western (e.g. Zabus,

How to cite this book chapter:

Ku-Mesu, K. E. 2021. Inscribing Difference: Code-Switching and the Metonymic Gap in Post-Colonial Literatures. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 169–188. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.h>. License: CC-BY 4.0

cultures, it stands as a hybrid product. Unlike other literary genres, it has no “predecessor” in the oral traditions of the peoples of Africa; it is a relatively recent and completely foreign import into the African literary scene. As Zabus (2007, p. 4) observes, the African novel is “looking ‘inward’ into African orature and literature and ‘outward’ into imported literary traditions. It is language, however, that has deflected the African novel [and by analogy, African euphone creative prose writing] from its inward course.” When an African writer – or a writer in a similar sociolinguistic context in other parts of the world – decides to employ a historically alien language for literary creation, they are bound to be confronted by a conflict inherent in such a choice. The consequence for the written literary code is the African writers’ attempt to mould the foreign language so that it can convey their cultural and linguistic experience, “thereby redefining and subverting its foreignness” (Zabus, 2007, p. 4), while operating “outside the boundaries of either [their] own society or that of [their] adopted language” (Nkosi quoted in La Pergola Arezzo, 1988, p. 40).

The process of moulding the European language, in our case English, to express African, Indian, Caribbean or other culturally and linguistically non-Anglo-Saxon vision is identified by Kachru (1982) as nativisation and by Zabus (1991, 2007) as indigenisation of the European language. It is “a process of linguistic and sociolinguistic change through which an external language becomes part of the culture of a community that uses it as an additional language, while it still retains many features of the language as it is used by [its] native speakers” (Owusu-Ansah, 1997, p. 24). In Ghana, for example, in the spoken language a continuum exists from the unmixed Ghanaian languages at one end to the unmixed English at the other end, both used in highly formal situations (e.g. the Asantehene’s address to the state or board

1991, 2007; Ker, 1997; Booker, 1998) and African scholars and writers (e.g. Abiola Irele, 2009; Achebe, 1988) alike as a superordinate term to refer collectively to novels written by writers from Sub-Saharan Africa in a European language. The problematic nature of such generalisations is acknowledged here, but its examination falls outside the scope of the current discussion.

meetings, respectively), with mixed varieties in between. In the written language, however, Ahulu's (1992) research suggests that indigenisation is a distinctive feature of the language of literature.

While "nativisation has been used to refer to the unconscious collective process of a speech community as well as to the conscious choice of an individual writer" (Egri Ku-Mesu, 2003, p. 83), Zabus (2007, pp. 3-4) defines indigenisation as

the writer's attempt at textualizing linguistic differentiation and conveying African concepts, thought-patterns, and linguistic features through the ex-colonizer's language. [...] For, when indigenized, it is no longer metropolitan French or English that appears on the page but another register reminiscent of the dominant European language, whether it be a Nigerian pidgin vaguely suggestive of a variety of English or a French that has 'something African about it'.

Although Kachru and Zabus use different terminology, they essentially describe the same processes that work in the text and in the context:

Kachru's (1986) nativisation

Nativisation of context:

text overloaded by cultural and historical presuppositions different from the traditionally expected cultural and historical milieu for English literature

Nativisation of cohesion

and cohesiveness: redefining the native English users' concepts of cohesion and cohesiveness, which affects lexicalisation (direct lexical transfer, hybridisation, loan translation), collocational extension and the use/frequency of grammatical forms

Zabus's (1991, 2007) indigenisation

The use of Pidgin

Code-switching

Relexification: calquing (loan translation); "textual violence" (morpho-syntactic relexification – e.g. subjectless sentences, omission of function words, reduplication, tag questions, the use of the progressive aspect for mental processes, thematisation of complements and adjuncts; and lexico-semantic relexification – collocational innovation, repetition); ethno-text (e.g. proverbs, rules of address, riddles, praise names, dirges, prayers, greeting formulae, culturally-bound insults)

Nativisation of rhetorical

strategies: transfer to English of strategies corresponding to patterns of interaction in the native culture of the author

Linguistic realisation of thought patterns:

non-linear (spiral-like or circular) paragraph structure and non-sequential logic manifested in English

Cushioning: the juxtaposition of an African-language word/expression and its English equivalent to provide an immediate explanation or clarification

Contextualisation by inference:

the embedding of an African-language word/expression in a context that is suggestive of its meaning or in a dialogue to let the characters explain its meaning

My particular interest here is in code-switching, under which the use of pidgin and relexification will be subsumed. I will follow Myers-Scotton (1993, p. 3), who stipulates that “code-switching may take place on any level of linguistic differentiation,” i.e. between languages, styles, dialects or registers, and I will examine three characteristic examples of code-switching between languages taken from modern Ghanaian anglophone fiction which illustrate how code-switching as an authorial device is used for a particular purpose and to achieve a particular effect. Although I will be dealing with written language, I will not be analysing morphosyntactic procedures. Nonetheless, Myers-Scotton’s (1993) Matrix Language-Frame Model presents itself to be a suitable framework in that it considers code-switching to be “the selection by bilinguals or multilinguals of forms from an embedded variety (or varieties) in utterances of a matrix variety during the same conversation” (Myers-Scotton, 1993, p. 3). The matrix language is the main language in code-switching, and the embedded language is the other language that participates in code-switching, but with a lesser role. Myers-Scotton (1993) also considers embedded language material of any size as code-switching material.

Applying Myers-Scotton’s Matrix Language-Frame Model loosely, I will consider English, the dominant language in which these hybrid literary works are written, as the matrix language, which is the unmarked, expected language choice for this type of text. Embedded code-switched language, on the other hand, is the authors’ marked choice, whose aim, as will be demonstrated, is to install cultural distinctiveness.

Code-Switching between English and Nzema

So the people waited. That long wait that destroys a people's confidence in themselves. At last, one spoke. A deity spoke. Unheralded, he thundered through the village. He looked fierce, angry and weird. He tossed his head sideways, muttering incoherent things to the air. He threw his powerful *bodua* into the sky and caught it several times. Brown amulets and dark bracelets were fixed tightly around his powerful arms (Agovi, 1989, p. 6).

By virtue of their having been produced with an audience in mind, Ghanaian writers' English-language texts studied here can be considered, in Sperber and Wilson's relevance theoretical framework, as products of ostension, in which the writers "make manifest an intention to make something manifest" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, p. 49). Being visible traces of the mother tongue or the most dominant language of the writer, African words in the English language text make it manifest that, indeed, such texts are, to use Zabus's metaphor, palimpsests and that "behind the scriptural authority of the European language, the earlier, imperfectly erased remnants of the African language can still be perceived" (Zabus, 2007, p. 3). They signal at least bi-, but in most cases multilingualism, and "a linguistic stratification, i.e. a multi-tiered system that differentially distributes the European language, the African language(s) and the languages in contact" (Zabus, 2007, p. 3).

The insertion of an African language word or expression in the English text without any authorial assistance provided is significant because it becomes an ostensive stimulus that the writer has found most relevant in order to communicate the set of assumptions he intends to make manifest to the reader in a manner that is relevant enough to make it worthwhile for the reader to process this ostensive stimulus (cf. presumption of optimal relevance, Sperber and Wilson, 1995, p. 158).² The function of such an authorial device is the distancing of the mother tongue culture of the writer and

² *Presumption of optimal relevance*

(a) The set of assumptions I which the communicator intends to make manifest to the addressee is relevant enough to make it worth the addressee's while to process the ostensive stimulus.

(b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one the communicator could have used to communicate I (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, p. 158).

the other tongue culture represented by the language chosen for creation. In the space between, a gap is created, along which, as we shall see later, we can expect readers to be divided.

Code-Switching between English and Pidgin

‘Massa, you tink you go like fried fillet of calf? Or a braised lamb liver? Yes, here a good one. An escalope of veal with onions and fried potatoes.’

‘Zirigu, whom did you say you were going to cook for?’

‘Yourself, Massa.’

‘But that is not the food I eat.’

‘But ‘e be white man chop.’

‘Zirigu, I no be white man. And that is the second time this morning I’ve told you that. And if you do it again, I’ll pack up and leave.’

(Aidoo, 1970, p. 16)

In Ghana, Pidgin is predominantly an urban phenomenon, and it is not as widespread as in other English-speaking West African countries, for example, in Nigeria (Cripser, 1971, p. 4; Huber, 1999, p. 156). It is usually associated with illiteracy and with the uneducated section of society, and as such, it is stigmatised (Huber, 1999, p. 140, 148, 154–63; Zabus, 2007, p. 56).

Because of its inferior status, Pidgin in Ghana is rarely used in the printed or electronic media or in films. When it occurs, it is spoken by uneducated characters, or its association with a certain jocularly is exploited for popular humour. Some of the more political magazines use mock Pidgin in satire. In Ghanaian novels, Pidgin is statistically more infrequently and more episodically represented than, for example, in novels in Nigeria (Zabus, 2007, p. 56).³ Prevalent sociolinguistic prejudice is complemented

³ Nigerian novelists have demonstrated a lack of prejudice in their treatment of Pidgin. Some of the most well-known novels exploiting this linguistic variety are Cyprian Ekwensi’s *People of the City* and *Jagua Nana* – “the first full-fledged Pidgin creation in West African Fiction” (Zabus, 2007, p. 72), Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, and Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*. So far the most conscious and sustained linguistic experiment – comparable in a way to Okara’s *The Voice*

by technical difficulty. Being primarily a spoken medium, Pidgin has no written or orthographic tradition, so scripting it for use in literature may well prove demanding for the writer. Agheyisi (1984) demonstrates the various levels through which its written representation progresses to become what Zabrus calls an “artefactual dialect” (2007, p. 194):

Level 1: Andrew kari yu ɔbu trɔbu komot fo de. Yu no si se na wok i de du. hEn! wetin yu de tok? ... if yu hiE di moni we dEn tek bayam yu go ron.

Level 2: Andrew, kari you trobu komot fo de. Yu no si se na wok i de du. Hen! Wetin yu de tok? ... If yu hear di moni we den tek buyam yu go ron.

Level 3: Andrew, carry you trobu comot fo dere. You no see say na work i dey do? Hen! Wetin you dey talk? ... If you hear de money wey dem tek buy'em, you go run.

Level 4: Andrew, carry you trouble come out for dere. You no see say na work he dey do? Hen! What ting you dey talk? ... If you hear de money which dem take buy'em, you go run.

Level 5: Andrew, carry your mischief come out from there. You no see that is work he doing? Hen! What thing you talking? ... If you hear the money that they paid, you go run.

Level 6: Andrew, cut out your mischief from there; can't you see that she is busy? Ha, what are you saying? ... If you heard how much they paid for it, you would run.

(Agheyeshi, 1984, p. 217)

Even at the risk of stripping Pidgin of its essentially African elements and making it look like just a corrupted version of Standard English, for the sake of intelligibility the writer may opt for Level 3, which offers maximum accuracy of transcription with a moderate approximation to English. However, the transcription of Level 3 “may tax the patience even of a well-meaning local or international reader” (Mair cited in Zabrus, 2007, p. 195),

– with non-standard speech is Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*.

so most writers settle for the “interlanguage” of Level 4, whose intermediate approximation to English does not jeopardise ease of comprehension by a reader who is literate in Standard English. The writer’s competence in Pidgin may also influence the way in which it is represented in a literary text.

The use of pidgin involves the novelist’s departure from the current oral usage and the creation of an artistic medium in which such an “artefactual dialect” (Zabus, 2007, p. 194), rather than reality in West Africa, is manifested. Pidginisation is meant to establish a character rooted in his or her supra-national or urban identity, as well as to represent attitudes towards pidgin speakers, solidarity and power relationships. The exchange quoted above between Zirigu, the middle-aged general keeper and cook of a government rest house and his only guest, a young medical doctor, spells out an intricate power and solidarity semantic.

Zirigu’s pidgin signals both his lower education and his lower social status. For him the young doctor is not only the guest to whose service he is assigned, but the doctor’s education reflected in his impeccable English and the status given to him by his highly valued profession make him a “big man” comparable to the former white colonisers. The doctor’s attempt to neutralise the inequality between the cook and himself by changing to Zirigu’s code fails perhaps because his standard English is a constant reminder of their different social standing and of the complexities of historical, political and cultural causes that lead to such a situation. Nevertheless, his changing to pidgin is significant because the “speaker can use codes for an identity shift: to obscure one identity and bring into the foreground another” (Kachru, 1984, p. 187). “*Zirigu, I no be white man*” not only separates the young doctor from the white race – with which he is identified by virtue of his education and status, but with which he disclaims all association because of the immediate connotations it has with colonisation and its consequences – but also renounces identification with the black masters who followed suit in exploiting their fellow black compatriots after independence. Using pidgin for this particular statement marks the young doctor’s identification and solidarity with common people like Zirigu and emphasises his Africanness and his attachment to his cultural roots and heritage.

Code-Switching between English and an African Language in the English Medium

Next to the girl another, older seller wakes to her missed chance and begins to call out, 'Big man, I have fine bread.'

'I have bought some already.' The voice of the suited man had something unexpected about it, like a fisherman's voice with the sand and the salt hoarsening it forcing itself into unaccustomed English rhythms. Why was this necessary? A very Ghanaian voice.

'My lord,' comes the woman again, 'my big lord, this bread is real bread.'

Inside the big car the pointed female voice springs and coils around, complaining of fridges too full to contain anything more and of too much bread already bought. Outside, the seller sweetens her tones.

'My own lord, my master, oh, my white man, come. Come and take my bread. It is all yours, my white man, all yours.'

The car door opens and the suited man emerges and strides slowly toward the praise-singing seller. [...]

'Mammy, I can't eat all of that.'

'So buy for your wife,' the seller sings back.

'She has enough.'

'Your girl friends. Young, beautiful girls, no?'

'I have no girl friends.'

'Ho, my white man, don't make me laugh. Have you ever seen a big man without girls? Even the old ones,' the seller laughs, 'even the old men.'

(Armah, 1988, pp. 36–37)

Code-switching in post-colonial literary texts is perhaps most exciting when it happens between the coloniser European language, in this case English, and a colonised non-European language and is rendered in the medium of the European language. Embedded in the unmixed, hence unmarked, English of the author is the dialogue between a bread seller and a politician. It is enacted in the restricted code (Bernstein, 1964) of a bargaining relationship, in which the choice of linguistic code is determined by the social relationship of the participants. This relationship not only constrains the options available to them, but it also makes the status aspect of the relationship salient. The expressions the bread seller is using are, however, different from what would be expected in a bargaining routine taking place in a culturally and linguistically

Anglo-Saxon context and, therefore, reflect the writer's marked choice to signal difference. Zabus calls the transference of such indigenous speech and thought patterns relexification and defines it using Loreto Todd's formulation: "the relexification of one's mother tongue, using English vocabulary but indigenous structures and rhythms' – best describes the process at work when the African language is simulated in the Europhone text... [It is] the making of a new register of communication out of an alien lexicon" (Zabus, 2007, p. 112). Although it is related to notions of "transposition," "paraphrase," "translation," "transliteration," "transference" and "transmutation," it differs both from translation and auto-translation in that these take place between two texts – the original and the translated version – whereas relexification is characterised by the absence of an original. Relexification takes place between two languages within the same text. It is also defined in terms of power relationships:

Although these two languages [the European language and the African language] are unrelated, they interact as dominant vs. dominated languages or elaborated vs. restricted codes, as they did and still do to some extent in West Africa where the European language is the official language and the medium of prestige and power. As it hosts such warring tendencies, relexification is a strategy *in potentia* which transcends the merely methodological. On the methodological level, it stems from a need to solve an immediate artistic problem: that of rendering African concepts, thought-patterns and linguistic features in the European language. On the strategic level, relexification seeks to subvert the linguistically codified, to decolonize the language of early, colonial literature and to affirm a revised, non-atavistic orality via the imposed medium (Zabus, 2007, pp. 118–119).

The method of relexification, by virtue of conveying specific African thought and linguistic patterns, anchors a character firmly in a specific ethnicity. The use of English to convey this ethnicity may, however, conceal from the Western reader,⁴ who is not acquainted with the cultural and social relationships depicted, that

⁴ "Western reader/readers" is understood in this work to refer to a reader/readers who inhabit the Western world and share its essentially Judeo-Christian cultural heritage. In my 2003 study, the Western readers came from Belgium, Britain, Canada, Greece, Russia and the US. They were all

the bread seller in the above dialogue is not speaking English – as was the case with a group of Western, specifically British, literature students I analysed this dialogue with. This highlights the fact that the lack of cultural knowledge may prevent the Western reader from noticing the difference the African writer intends to install when relexifying African language expressions into English.

Authorial Intervention

The reader of African literature – and, by the same token, the reader of other post-colonial literatures – is involved in a double guessing game: the interpretation of literary texts within which there is the interpretation of culture-specific concepts expressed either in an African language or in English. In order to make his or her text linguistically accessible to the reader, the writer may choose to employ various methods of authorial assistance such as cushioning, contextualisation, ethnographic explanation and providing a glossary.

Cushioning is an authorial strategy whereby African-language words or phrases describing culturally bound concepts, objects and occurrences in a literary text are juxtaposed with their English equivalents to provide immediate explanation or clarification. It aims at “naming and identifying the – metonymic – gap between mother tongue and other tongue without necessarily bridging it” (Zabus, 2007, p. 7) as the short English tag may neither accurately convey the meaning of the African word nor fully encompass its cultural significance:

I see my uncle among people who are dancing ... Their movements are virile as they jump up and down, each man only covered by a small cloth as he would borrow from his wife or sister, tied around his waist over his shorts, leaving the torso bare. The drums and the *adawuro* (gong-gongs) are more intense in their rhythmic beating than I have ever heard them before ... (Duodu, *The Gab Boys*, 1969, p. 51)

I bought her a bottle as well as some of the shampoo soap which makes the hair longer. When she used the soap, her hair turned violet and everybody laughed at her and said her hair looked like *mmefe* – palm nut husks. (Duodu, *The Gab Boys*, 1969, p. 99)

bilingual or polyglot, and at the time of the study, none of them had been to Sub-Saharan Africa.

Contextualisation is another authorial intervention whereby African-language words or phrases describing culturally bound concepts, objects and occurrences are embedded in an immediate context which provides clues as to their meaning, or sometimes in a dialogue, with the aim of letting the characters explain their meaning. The reader is involved in a guessing game and is expected to infer the meaning from the context. Similarly to cushioning, contextualisation identifies the gap between mother tongue and other tongue, but it does not necessarily bridge it:

Once when the man was traveling to Cape Coast three different policemen had stopped the little bus and asked the driver for his quarter license. The driver had not bought it yet, and each policeman had said to him, in front of everybody, ‘Even *kola* gives pleasure in the chewing.’ In each case the driver had smiled and given the law twenty-five pesewas, and the law was satisfied. There was only one way. (Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, 1988, p. 95)

The *ethnographic explanation* of African-language words referring to culture-specific objects and concepts in the English-language literary text is considered by Zabus (2007, pp. 8, 176) to be the ancestor of contextualisation. The reason behind such a rather intrusive authorial device is the need African writers feel to explain African culture to a Western readership and to correct previous misrepresentations of African culture:

He, on the other hand, was sitting on his *bampa*. This was what some people slept on. It was part of the floor specially raised for sleeping. A reed quilt covered with plantain thrash and rags served as a mattress. (K. Aidoo, *Of Men and Ghosts*, 1991, p. 57)

Providing a *glossary* either as footnotes or at the end of a book is the least frequently used assistance to readers. Very often it is not an authorial but an editorial intervention which the writer may have little control over. While cushioning, contextualisation and the ethnographic explanation are textual strategies that leave no choice for the readers to avoid them, a glossary is an extra-textual device giving the readers the freedom to use it when and only if they want to.

The research I conducted (Egri Ku-Mesu, 2003) on 20 volumes – novels and short stories – of Ghanaian fiction has shown that

these authorial strategies and the usually editorial device of inserting a glossary all have some benefits for some of the readers in different reader groups – the Ghanaian, non-Ghanaian African and the Western. Eventually, however, none of them proves to be efficient because they all try to cater for the needs of a mixed, ill-defined readership.

The Metonymic Gap and its Consequences

In their seminal work, *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. (1989, p. 72) identify code-switching between two or more codes in post-colonial literary texts as “the most common method of inscribing alterity.” Ashcroft (2001) further develops the idea of installing cultural distinctiveness in the text and posits that, together with a wide range of other linguistic devices (e.g. neologisms, ethno-rhythmic prose), the use of code-switching – whether between the variants of the same language or between languages – has a metonymic function to inscribe cultural difference. According to him, language variance in the English text creates a metonymic gap, which is

that cultural gap formed when appropriations of a colonial language insert unglossed words, phrases or passages from a first language, or concepts, allusions or references which may be unknown to the reader. Such words become synecdochic of the writer’s culture – the part that stands for the whole – rather than representations of the world, as the colonial language might. Thus the inserted language ‘stands for’ the colonized culture in a metonymic way, and its very resistance to interpretation constructs a ‘gap’ between the writer’s culture and the colonial culture. The local writer is thus able to represent his or her world to the colonizer (and others) in the metropolitan language, and at the same time, to signal and emphasize a difference from it (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 75).

Indeed, when I asked the group of Western readers in my study to explain the meaning of African-language words for which no authorial assistance is provided in the text (Egri Ku-Mesu, 2003), the data gathered provided evidence which supports Ashcroft’s claims. These Western readers’ inability to understand untranslated/unglossed words, or their uncertainty about being able to infer the meaning of these words from the context

confirms the cultural distance between them and the writer: they live in a different world with different experience, traditions, habit, understanding and expectation. Applying Sperber and Wilson's (1995) relevance theoretical framework, the set of facts the writer has in his cognitive environment is not manifest to these Western readers – they do not share the writer's cognitive environment either mutually or partially. The explanations they provide, none of which is consistent with the writer's intended meaning, confirm that in the inferential process Western readers rely, as all readers would do, on *their* cognitive environment – a cognitive environment from which the writer's physical, social, cultural and linguistic reality is absent. As the set of assumptions manifest to them is different from that of the writer's, they do not have encyclopaedic schemata, for example, about African deities, Ghanaian means of transport or the people associated with them. They may have some marginal, but by no means specific, knowledge of the "kind of thing," which is evidenced by explanations that come closest to the intended meaning (e.g. "a kind of taxi driver," "taxi drivers" for *aplankey* – bus conductor). The fact that drawing on assumptions in their cognitive environment cannot lead them to fully correct explanations confirms their cultural difference and distance from the writer. This distance and difference locate them on the other side of the metonymic gap, as shown in Figure 1 below.

While the concept of the metonymic gap is plausible, the suggestion that the inserted unexplained African language words resist interpretation seems to have less validity. On the one hand,

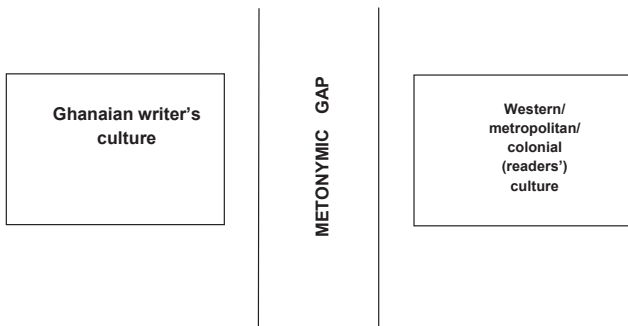


Figure 1: The metonymic gap

such a point of view takes account only of a readership which excludes those who share the author's cultural and/or linguistic background, thereby tacitly agreeing that modern English-language African literature is, indeed, written for and read by a non-African audience. On the other hand, although the Western reader may find such words unintelligible and incomprehensible as defined by Enkvist (1991, pp. 7–8),⁵ the very fact that she recognises them as synecdochic of the writer's culture and as signals of an intricate linguistic reality proves that she is able to build a text world around them in which they make some kind of sense, albeit not necessarily literal sense.

Further investigation of a Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian African readership reveals a complexity that Ashcroft's original concept does not account for. In my study (Egri Ku-Mesu, 2003), Ghana is identified both as a multitude of ethnic groups and also as a supra-ethnic national entity, and the Ghanaian readers in my survey come from seven ethnic groups and are bi-, trilingual or polyglots. Relative to each individual writer's background, there are readers who share the writer's physical, cultural and linguistic environment – they share a cognitive environment, which implies that they are capable of making the same assumptions. Readers who do not belong to the writer's ethnic group do not share a mutual cognitive environment with the writer. However, because of similarities of their physical environment, overlaps in culture and their linguistic knowledge, the cognitive environments of these readers can still intersect with that of the writer, i.e. they will share sets of facts that are manifest to them all.

⁵ According to Enkvist (1991, pp. 7–8),

“a piece of text is intelligible to those who can recognize in it phonological, lexical and syntactic structures. Intelligibility thus presupposes pattern recognition, the correct perception of structures. A text is comprehensible to those who can assign to it a definite meaning, a semantic structure. And a text is interpretable to those who can build around that text a scenario, a text world, a set of states of affairs, in which that text makes sense. [...] Intelligibility is thus the syntactic component of interpretability (which includes phonology, lexis, and syntax); comprehensibility is its semantic component including syntax plus semantics; and interpretability its pragmatic totality involving pragmatics as well as semantics and syntax.”

Indeed, my research findings confirm that there exists a multi-tiered distribution of Ghanaian readers. At the supra-ethnic national level, they all share cultural and linguistic experience with the writer(s) and each other. This is the level which embraces them all and situates them on one side of the metonymic gap – the writer’s. At the level of ethnic groups, subdivisions occur according to cultural and linguistic proximity to the writer. There are readers who are both culturally and linguistically distant – they share experience with the writer at the supra-ethnic national level. Readers who know the writer’s language but are not fully conversant, or not familiar at all, with his culture are able to share in the writer’s experience to the extent their linguistic and encyclopaedic knowledge allows. This highlights the overriding importance of cultural knowledge in communication between different ethnic groups even within the same national boundaries. Full appreciation of the writer’s meanings is shown only by those readers who share both the writer’s cultural and linguistic experience. Figure 2 below illustrates this complex situation.

By virtue of sharing a common African heritage (see Note 1), it is reasonable to expect that the non-Ghanaian African reader would exhibit some affinity, if not with the Ghanaian writer’s linguistic experience, at least with his cultural experience. Like the Ghanaian reader group, the non-Ghanaian African readers are all polyglot, although none of them speaks either Akan, Ga

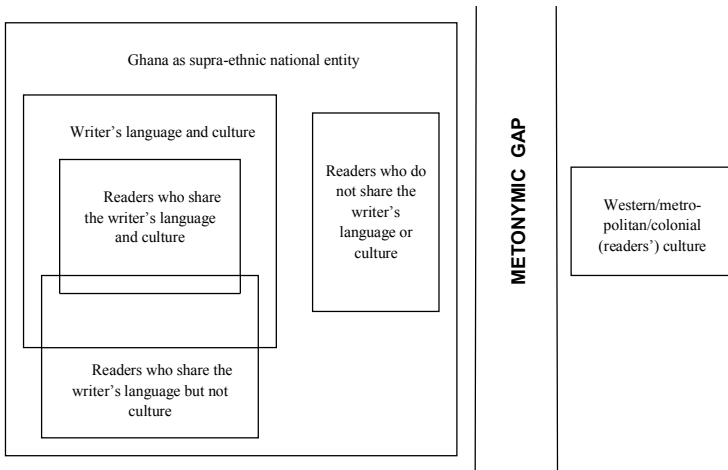


Figure 2: Position of Ghanaian readers in relation to the metonymic gap

or Pidgin, or any other indigenous Ghanaian language. Although the smallest reader group in my study, its members represent East, South, Central and West Africa – they come from six ethnic groups which are distant from the writers'. While it is obvious that these readers cannot share a fully mutual cognitive environment with the Ghanaian writer(s), the similarities of their physical environment and overlaps between their cultures make it possible for them to have some sets of facts that are manifest to them all, with regard to which they are able to make the same assumptions as the writer(s).

My findings provide evidence that, for the non-Ghanaian African readers, the lack of linguistic knowledge may well be a barrier to activating and accessing cultural knowledge. At the same time, similarly to those Ghanaian readers who share neither the writer's cultural nor her linguistic background, when working out the meaning of the untranslated/unglossed words, the non-Ghanaian African readers rely not so much on the context as on their existing cultural knowledge. Information in the texts triggers off these readers' schemata in their encyclopaedic memory about such concepts, for example, as deities, vehicles used for transporting people and their crew, which get filled in with their assumptions based on their knowledge of their own culture and on their knowledge of other African cultures. The fact that non-Ghanaian African readers are able to provide either good approximations of the intended meaning or they indeed provide the intended meaning of the untranslated/unglossed words is evidence that their cognitive environment contains assumptions about the writer's physical and social reality, i.e. they share cultural knowledge with the writer and they are capable of making the same assumptions as the writer. That this cultural knowledge is accessed by the members of the non-Ghanaian African reader group who represent a wide ethnic and regional variety testifies to such cultural knowledge being supra-ethnic, supranational, pan-African in nature. As Figure 3 shows, this cultural knowledge places the non-Ghanaian African reader on the same side of the metonymic gap as the writer.

Such a picture clearly shows that the metonymic gap is not a simple bi-polar concept between coloniser and colonised culture but a multi-layered entity where the readers' position in relation to

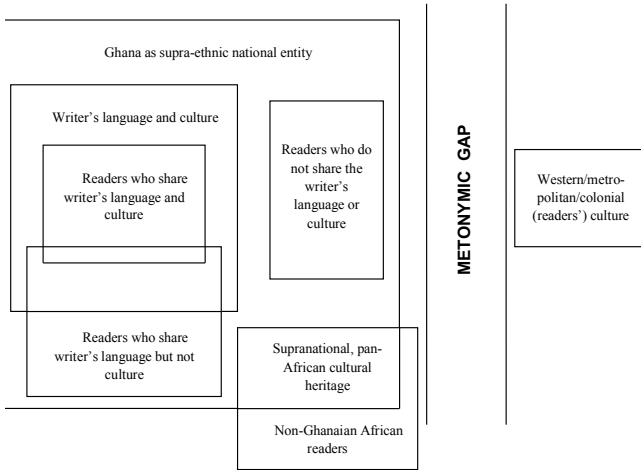


Figure 3: Position of non-Ghanaian African readers in relation to the metonymic gap

the gap is indicative of their ability to interpret the untranslated/unexplained words.

Leaving these words without any authorial assistance to the reader, the writer makes it manifest that she concedes “the importance of *meanability*, the importance of a situation in which meaning can occur” (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 76; italics as in original) and opts for the inscription of difference, distance and the absence of writer and metropolitan reader from each other as a result of them being located in different cultures. The readers’ position in relation to the gap thus created is indicative of their ability to interpret these untranslated/unexplained words. For the majority of the Western readers in my study who may be able to cross the metonymic gap partially, these words do remain symbols of the writer’s difference of experience, while the Ghanaian and other African readers can access their culture-bound meaning fully or to varying degrees depending on the similarity of their cultural experience to the writer’s. Whether the reader understands these words or not is not crucial for the understanding of the story – if it were, there would probably be an authorial strategy present in the text to assist the reader. Such words become synecdoches for the writer’s culture. Their function is to signal cultural difference and to contribute to the creation of the Africanness of the text.

References

- Abiola Irele, F. (2009). *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Achebe, C. (1974). "Thoughts on the African Novel," *Dalhousie Review*, 53(4), pp. 631–637.
- Agheyeshi, R. N. (1984). "Linguistic Implications of the Changing Role of Nigerian Pidgin English," *English World-Wide*, 5(2), pp. 211–233.
- Agovi, K. (1989). *A Wind from the North and Other Stories*. Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation.
- Ahulu, S. T. (1992). *English in Ghana*. PhD. University of Cambridge.
- Aidoo, A. A. (1970). "A Gift from Somewhere," in Aidoo, A. A. *No Sweetness here*. Harlow: Longman, pp. 75–86.
- Armah, A. K. (1988). *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Ashcroft, B. (2001). *Post-Colonial Transformation*. London: Routledge.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. (1989). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.
- Bernstein, B. (1964). "Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences," *American Anthropologist*, 66(6) Part 2, pp. 55–69.
- Booker, M. K. (1998). *The African Novel in English: An Introduction*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; Oxford: James Currey.
- Egri Ku-Mesu, Katalin (2003). *Cultural Reference in Modern Ghanaian English-Language Fiction: Ways of Encoding, Authorial Strategies and Reader Interpretation*. PhD. University of Edinburgh.
- Enkvist, N. E. (1991). "On the Interpretability of Texts in General and of Literary Texts in Particular," in Sell, R. D. (ed.) *Literary Pragmatics*. London/New York: Routledge, pp. 1–25.
- Kachru, B. B. (1982). "Meaning in Deviation: Toward Understanding Non-Native English Texts," in Kachru, B. B. (ed.) *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 325–350.

- (1984). “The Alchemy of English: Social and Functional Power of Non-Native Varieties,” in Kramarae, C., Schulz, M. and O’Barr, W. M. (eds.) *Language and Power*. Beverly Hills, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- (1986). *The Alchemy of English: The Spread, Functions and Models of Non-Native Englishes*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Ker, D. I. (1997). *The African Novel and the Modernist Tradition*. New York: Peter Lang.
- La Pergola Arezzo, E. (1988). “The English Language as a Means of Expressing African Culture: A Conflicting Issue,” *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata*, 20(3), pp. 37–50.
- Mair, C. (ed.) (2003). *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizons in Postcolonial Cultural Studies*. Cross/Cultures 65, ANSEL Papers 7. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (1993). *Duelling Languages: Grammatical Structure in Codeswitching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (ed.) (1998). *Codes and Consequences: Choosing Linguistic Varieties*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Owusu-Ansah, L. K. (1997). “Nativisation and the Maintenance of Standards in Non-Native Varieties of English,” in Kropp-Dakubu, M. E. (ed.) *English in Ghana*. Accra: The Ghana English Studies Association, pp. 23–33.
- Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1995). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Zabus, C. (1991). *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel*. Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi.
- (2007). *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel*. 2nd enlarged edn. Amsterdam-New York, NY: Rodopi.

“Dangerous” Beauty: Imagining the Other in the *Noh* Play *Sesshōseki*

Dunja Jelesijevic

Northern Arizona University

Nasu district in Japan’s Tochigi prefecture represents a major tourist draw, owing to its picturesque scenery of the Nasu volcanic mountain range, Nikkō National Park, and the popular complex of sulfur hot springs, collectively known as the Eight Springs of Nasu (Nasu Hachiyu). The latter, in particular, evokes an association with a local tradition about a rock that emits noxious gases causing all living beings who come close to it to perish.¹ The legend of the murderous rock was at one point married with another, pan-Asian, folk motif, that of a fox enchantress, and a tale was spun of possession, punishment, and redemption that cuts across genres of medieval and early modern Japanese literature, finding its way onto the *Noh* stage in the fifteenth-century play *Sesshōseki* (“The Killing Stone”).

Drawing on multiple strands of the varied retellings, the *Noh* play weaves its narrative together by positioning two distinct voices opposite (but not against) each other: on the one hand, the spirit of the stone, which moves through multiple identities, shifting shape and traversing time and space, and on the other, an itinerant Buddhist monk tasked with identifying and appeasing the spirit, thus providing the narrative with resolution and completion. However, as is frequently the case in *Noh*, the resolution and

¹ The rock believed to be the legendary “Killing Stone” still exists today and represents a local tourist attraction. Even a cursory internet search will yield a plethora of results on commercial travel-related web pages, personal blogs, and the like, showing that local tourist organizations continue to capitalize on the legend of the “Killing Stone.”

How to cite this book chapter:

Jelesijevic, D. 2021. “Dangerous” Beauty: Imagining the Other in the *Noh* Play *Sesshōseki*. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 189–206. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.i>. License: CC-BY 4.0

completion in *Sesshōseki* are anything but straightforward. The two protagonists have more in common than it seems, while their (op)positioning vis-à-vis one another is revealed to be of a different kind than initially presented. Both figures are carefully discursively constructed as occupying and negotiating liminal spaces as well as liminal modes of being. They are both creatures of movement and transformation, engaged in crossing, transgressing, transcending, and reestablishing various sets of boundaries (spatial, temporal, and ontological). By presenting its protagonists in this way, *Sesshōseki* questions and upsets the overlapping orders (social, political, and religious) within which it takes place. I suggest that exploring the motifs of movement and transformation as particular modes of boundary-crossing in *Sesshōseki* provides insight into how the concept of boundary-crossing is utilized by the text to bring about and respond to these questions and upsets. In turn, such exploration illuminates some peculiar ways in which the very act of boundary-crossing is being narratively and discursively negotiated through the medium of *Noh* theater. This analysis of *Sesshōseki* provides a case study of how, through patterns of both following and subverting the generic conventions, *Noh* play ritualizes those crossings, thus becoming a locus for exercising and working through multiple layers of boundary crossing, and I suggest that observing how *Noh* ritualizes these processes offers novel ways into looking at the very nature of boundary-crossings and the modes of their actualizations.

Mover and Shaker: Woman, Fox, Demon, Goddess

In the *Noh* canon, *Sesshōseki* is a fifth-category demon play² of uncertain authorship.³ Following the typical structure of a

² The five-category structure of *Noh* plays (*gobandate* 五番立; God, Warrior, Women, Miscellaneous, Demon) is codified sometime in the Edo period (1600–1868). When performed as entertainment in official setting (before the Shōgun etc.), the full program would consist of five plays, one category each, plus the *Okina* piece and four *Kyōgen* comical plays (Brazell, 1999, p. 530).

³ The authorship of the play is most frequently listed as anonymous, but one source attributes it to the playwright Saami (佐阿弥) (Sanari, 1930, p. 1633).

mugen-Noh play,⁴ it opens with a *michiyuki*, a travel sequence, introducing a Buddhist priest Gennō,⁵ who is passing through Nasu-no-hara in Shimotsuke province. There he notices birds falling to the ground as they fly over a particular stone in the field. While he ponders this curiosity, a woman mysteriously appears, warning him not to get close to the stone as it causes death to all living creatures who approach it. Prodded by Gennō, the woman proceeds to narrate the legend of the stone. The story is about Lady Tamamo (Tamamo no Mae), an exquisitely beautiful, sophisticated, and learned lady of the court and a favorite of the emperor Toba.⁶ Following an extraordinary event in the imperial palace, where Tamamo’s body miraculously began emitting light, the emperor fell ill. Abe no Yasunari, the court *onmyōji*,⁷ realizes that the two events are related, whereupon he identifies Lady Tamamo as the incarnation of an evil fox-spirit. She is then hunted down in her vulpine form and killed, but the spirit of the fox possesses a stone in the field. From that point forward, the stone

⁴ *Mugen Noh* (夢幻能) translates to “dream *Noh*” or “fantasy *Noh*.” It is a type of *Noh* play situated in a supernatural or dream world. A *mugen Noh* play typically begins with a religious figure visiting a significant locale. There, he encounters a local person whose words and demeanor signal that there is something extraordinary or significant about them, and it is hinted that they are somehow connected to the locale and its history. The end of the first act concludes with the local person revealing their true identity as the ghost associated with the place, upon which they disappear. It is then usually hinted that the priestly figure will spend the night at the locale (hence “dream” *Noh* – it is deliberately left ambiguous whether the events of the play take place in actuality, or in a dream-world), and during the night the ghost returns, asking for rites of repose.

⁵ Gennō Shinshō 源翁心昭 (1329–1400), Buddhist monk of the Sōtō Zen lineage.

⁶ Emperor Toba 鳥羽天皇, reigned 1107–1123; held the office of the retired emperor.

⁷ Yin-yang diviner; practitioner of *Onmyōdō*. *Onmyōdō* 陰陽道, translatable as “The Way of Yin and Yang,” refers to a system of beliefs and practices based on the Chinese yin/yang philosophy that was in Japan supplemented with teachings and rites from Esoteric Buddhism, as well as local, Kami-worship-associated beliefs and practices. While the Abe family was historically in charge of *Onmyōdō* activities at the Japanese court, Abe no Yasunari is a fictitious character. For more on *onmyōdō*, see Butler (1996).

starts to exhibit its deathly effect and comes to be known as the “Killing Stone (*sesshōseki*).” The mysterious woman completes her story and reveals, as she disappears, that she is the ghost of Lady Tamamo.

The second act follows Gennō as he conducts a memorial service for the spirit of the stone in order to lead it onto the Buddha’s Path. The Killing Stone splits open, and the spirit of the fox appears from within the stone in its demonic form. The spirit then recollects its past, revealing herself as a malevolent force that throughout centuries caused empires to crumble by taking on a form of a beautiful woman and seducing their rulers. Her cathartic narrative ends in a solemn promise to abandon her evil ways, leaving the stone behind as a symbol of the firmness of her decision. Due to Gennō’s prayer, the spirit is appeased.⁸

On the surface, *Sesshōseki* is a straightforward tale of Buddhist conversion. It is framed as a triumph of the Buddhist religious regimen over the ultimate Other, a danger from Without who had bended time and space with the intention of bringing an end to both human and divine orders. The ghost of Tamamo herself states as much in the denouement of the play:

What should I hide now? In India, I was the tomb deity worshipped by the crown prince Hanzoku; in China, I appeared as Hōji, the consort of King Yū; in our realm of Japan, I became Lady Tamamo, consort of the emperor Toba. Intent on toppling the imperial and the Buddhist law, I transformed into a beautiful woman [...] having remained in this field, having become the killing stone, I claimed people’s lives for many a year. Today, however, having received Buddha’s Law, I shall cease committing evil deeds. The stone remains as a symbol of my firm promise to you, reverend priest, and the form of the demon is gone.⁹

Tamamo’s concluding monologue brings together two main narrative threads at the basis of the play: her history as the destroyer of kingdoms which culminates at the court of the emperor Toba, and her subsequent destiny of being discovered as the fox spirit and ending up trapped inside the Killing Stone.

⁸ For this essay, I consulted two versions of the play, Sanari Kentaro’s text in *Yōkyoku taikan* and Ito Masayoshi’s annotated version in *Yōkyokushū*.

⁹ Translation mine. (Sanari, 1930, p. 1644)

As a stand-alone narrative, the former thread has been reproduced in a series of retellings, one of the earliest being in the fourteenth-century historical chronicle *Shinmeikagami*, and then later in several versions of short-story collections *Otogizōshi* (Yokoyama & Matsumoto, 1981, p. 13–58), but it is itself a combination of several thematic units from earlier sources. The tale of the seduction of King Yū of China which brings his reign to ruin is in Japanese sources found in the thirteenth-century *Jikkīnshō* (“A Miscellany of Ten Maxims”) and the fifteenth-century *Genpei jōsuiki* (“The Record of the Rise and Fall of the Genji and Heike Clans”) a variant text of the Kamakura period (1185–1333) epic *Heike monogatari* (“The Tales of the Heike”). In his analysis of the worldviews of *Jōsuiki*, Minobe Shigekatsu suggests that the telling of the legend of king Yū and his fatal consort in this work parallels and, thereby, has the function of framing the downfall of Taira no Kiyomori in a very specific way. Kiyomori was the leader of the ill-fated Taira (Heike) clan, tragically defeated in the Gempei War (1180–1185), which marked a seismic shift in Japanese history, completely reconfiguring the social, political, and cultural landscape of Japan at the time. *Jōsuiki*, Minoru argues, shows how the narrative of the *Heike* is placed in a religious framework of an attempt to reorient the court-sponsored worship from old gods to new, depicting Kiyomori’s worship of an “alien” deity, which, the text implies, may have caused his demise that precipitated the dramatic transformation of the entire realm (Minobe, 1982, p. 220–231). The deity in question takes the form of a fox and is known in Japan as Dakiniten, but is originally a part of the South Asian Tantric (both Buddhist and Hindu) traditions (Faure, 2015, p. 117–122).

The original tale of Yū’s consort as given in Chinese sources¹⁰ does not contain references to foxes, but in Japanese texts such as

¹⁰ Yū is the Japanese pronunciation of the name of the King You of Zhou 周幽王 (781–771 BCE). The earliest records of You and his consort are found in *Shu-king* (“The Book of Documents”), while Ssu-ma Ch’ien gives the account in *Shih chi* (“The Grand Scribe’s Records”), in which king You’s consort Pan-ssu is described as contributing to the fall of Eastern Zhou by enchanting the king with her beauty and causing him to become reckless and negligent.

Jōsuiki, it is blended with other traditional Chinese tales involving fox enchantresses, and the implied association is rendered explicit in the legend of Lady Tamamo.¹¹ The account of “seduction” of Hanzoku in India and its inclusion in the Tamamo narrative rests on similar logic. In this story inspired by *Ninōgyō* (“The Benevolent King Sutra”), the spirit does not materialize as a beautiful woman, but is actually the deity Tsuka no Kami (lit. “god of graveyards”) worshipped by the prince.¹² This deity is identified with the same Dakiniten worshipped by Taira no Kiyomori and purported to be both the cause of his ascent and his extraordinary downfall. Therefore, just as King Yū fell to his demise after being seduced by a supernatural fox, Kiyomori was likewise “seduced” by a fox deity, an alien – Other – force, while Hanzoku succumbed to the promise of power and might by a beastly deity of graveyards, whose domain literally is Other (world). In Japan, Emperor Toba falls prey to the incarnation of the same mysterious supernatural force, enticed both by the beauty and the power of a mysterious lady who materialized in his court seemingly out of nowhere. It is not only his reign that is endangered, but his very life, and only upon the intervention of the powerful *onmyōji*, Abe no Yasunari, is the threat, seemingly, mitigated. It is worth noting

¹¹ Of course, the nexus between rulership, foxes, and female sexual potency was not simply conjured by Japanese retellings of Chinese narratives. In her study on fox cults and the history of their development, Kang Xiaofei notes that since the Han period (206 BCE – 220 CE) various Chinese sources had recorded association between fox cults and rulership, as well as foxes and sexually alluring women (and men). Over time the two motifs converged, particularly in folk tales and anecdotes written by the literati. These ideas were, in fact, so prevalent, Kang notes, that “[P]eople from all walks of life consciously manipulated gendered images of the fox to negotiate the moral and political order in the family and local community and to construct the relationship between state and society” (Kang, 2006, p. 5).

¹² Hanzoku 斑足太子 is the Japanese rendering of the Indian legendary king Kalmapasada, featured in the apocryphal Benevolent King Sutra 仁王經 (full title: Benevolent King Perfection of Wisdom Sutra 仁王般若波羅蜜經). He worshipped a graveyard deity who required him to sacrifice one thousand kings. Having slain nine hundred ninety-nine kings, the final of his chosen victims performed a Buddhist chant about the truth of impermanence causing Kalmapasada to reach enlightenment and spare the lives of all would-be victims. (Ito, 1983, p. 228)

that Emperor Toba from the Tamamo stories and *Sesshōseki* was one of the key players in the succession dispute that led up to the Hōgen rebellion (1156), which in turn paved the way to the aforementioned Gempei War and the collapse of the aristocratic rule in Japan replaced by the dominance of the warrior class – the samurai (Goff, 1997, p. 68). That would mean that, even though Toba’s life in the story was spared, Tamamo was successful in exerting her nefarious influence and planting the seed of the damage she sought to cause. Furthermore, the various *Otogizōshi* versions of the tale end in a subtle portend of the ruin of the Heike,¹³ further tangling together Toba’s and Kiyomori’s destiny. Thus, in all three narrative strands (Indian, Chinese, and Japanese) the seduction by a vulpine enchantress is equated with an ambition of a powerful foreign/Other deity, dramatically affecting the destiny of both the imperial (human) and religious (divine) orders.

The literary lore weaves a legend around Lady Tamamo and constructs her identity with deliberate and careful amalgamation of themes following a specific logic. Her character is pieced together by pulling from Japanese, Chinese, and Indian traditions,

¹³ In *Tamamonomae monogatari*, which predates *Sesshōseki*, thus safe to assume to have at least been known to the playwright if not directly used as a source, several objects associated with either imperial reign or religious worship are found in Tamamo’s vulpine body after she was killed by the royal archers Miuranosuke and Kazusanosuke. Some of these are then gifted to the men responsible for killing her, among which a red needle and a white needle found in the fox’s tail were presented to Kazusanosuke. Having an unexplained grudge with the Taira clan, Kazusanosuke ends up gifting one of the needles to Minamoto no Yoritomo, who led the Minamoto successfully against the Taira in the Gempei war. While *Tamamonomae monogatari* is vague on this, a later variant, *Tamamonomae sōshi* explicitly states that “[I]t was because Yoritomo gained possession of this needle that he mounted a rebellion and chastised the Taira [...]” (trans. Laura Nuffer, in Kimbrough & Shirane, 2018). In her analysis of the *Otogizōshi* Tamamo tradition, Iwagi Yoriko suggests that the demise of Tamamo at the hands of the royal archers, who represent the up-and-coming samurai class, not merely foreshadows the shift in power from the aristocratic lineages and the Taira to the Minamoto, but that the fox hunt and its killing are a ritual purification of a malevolent force, which directly challenges not just political but also the religious authority of the emperor (Iwagi 2005, pp. 47–48).

drawing associations with the fox motif in its multifaceted and ambiguous character of being both demonic and divine, both dangerous and enchanting.¹⁴ Furthermore, the trajectory of her temporal and spatial border-crossing (India through China to Japan), places Tamamo squarely within the framework of the history of Buddhist transmission in East Asia, with its teleological conclusion in Japan. Posited as the mysterious Other intent on taking down the Three Kingdoms one by one, she is simultaneously a threat to Buddhist order as such. True to her own words, her movement across space(s) and (life)time(s) destabilizes both the imperial law and the Buddhist law, and this is precisely how it is phrased in play. This way the Tamamo legend combines elements from differing sources to consolidate a narrative of boundary-crossing and order-disrupting, sealing this development in *Sesshōseki* by placing that narrative into Tamamo's own first-person voice. This rhetorical move creates a discursive framing within which Japan provides the stage (both metaphorical and literal) for diegetic and performative integration and completion of the narrative development that the entire Tamamo legend represents. It has Tamamo herself re-appear and narrate a reminder of her (mis)deeds when all of their implications have actualized, which cements the legitimacy of the tale for the Japanese audiences.

Tamamo, however, does not merely move across borders; she transforms across them as well, and her spatial and temporal movement is coupled with transformation and/or potential for multiple transformations. This is significant because, as Michael

¹⁴ In Chinese sources all these facets of the fox are present; the folk tales and anecdotes written by the literati are more sympathetic, and the local beliefs paint foxes in a positive light, while Buddhist (particularly Ch'an) and Daoist texts emphasize the demonic side of the fox (see Kaifeng, 2006). In Japan similarly, the fox is viewed as both benevolent and malevolent, both divine and demonic. For example, in the Japanese native Shintō tradition, the fox is the object of worship in the powerful Inari cult, while the "Wild Fox Kōan" was an influential object of meditative practice in Zen Buddhism (see Smyers, 1998, Heine, 2000, and Sakaita, 1996). Finally, many of these characteristics of the fox are not only present in the East Asian tradition, but across the globe. For a detailed discussion on fox motif in world literature and folklore, see Uther (2006).

Bathgate points out, “[A]s a boundary-crosser, the actions of shapeshifters like Lady Tamamo appear to challenge some of the most fundamental social and ontological categories within which we live our lives” (Bathgate, 2003, p. 12). Tamamo is an animal and non-animal; she is human and non-human; she is a god(ess) and a demon; and, eventually, in the form of the murderous stone, even animate and inanimate, all at the same time. In this context, casting the protagonist as the fox, whose very nature can be defined as being a boundary-transgressor, makes an obvious choice, and this aspect of her character is all the more compelling and significant. In fact, the act of shape-shifting and transformation is boundary-crossing *par excellence*, but it does not come without consequences for the crosser. That is, the transformation (actual or figurative) cannot actuate crossing without affecting the crosser. Moreover, “...the metamorph’s (b)order crossing frequently works to highlight, even reinforce, the very boundaries it transgresses” (Bathgate, 2003, p. 11). The way this is achieved in the play is by first allowing Tamamo to freely shift identities from spirit to fox to woman and back, and then denying her that ability. She is ultimately forced into her most dramatic and, arguably, most order-upsetting “crossing,” being transformed into a shapeless, lifeless, mundane, immovable mass – everything so wholly opposite to who she originally is. However, even this transformation is not finite. In fact, this is where the *Noh* play picks up the story, focusing on Tamamo’s afterlife, and places it into a new framework by introducing the monk Gennō and having the malevolent fox spirit of Tamamo interact with him.

This return of Tamamo, the embodiment of a subversive force that caused political instability and brought about misfortune and danger to the Japanese imperial state that symbolized the unity of the socio-political order and Buddhist regimen, is a terrifying reminder of the ever-lurking danger she brings. As the *Noh* convention would have it, the only one who can truly subdue her is the representative of the Buddhist order. However, it is Tamamo who approaches Gennō the priest, it is she who wants to be enlightened: the demon assumes agency by approaching the priest in search of salvation and is in control of the process.

Hammer of the Buddha: Breaking the Stone, Finding the Jewel

The discussion so far has focused on the main protagonist of the play, Lady Tamamo. Most scholarly treatments of *Sesshōseki* and the Tamamo narrative tradition, in fact, have done the same.¹⁵ It is not difficult to imagine why – apart from simply being a more narratively rich, interesting, and provocative character, she neatly fits into discourses of gender and sexuality, identity and boundary-crossing, analyses of poetic allusions and visual references, among others. This is, in no small part, due to her association with the fox myth with all its connotations of metamorphosis and trickery. By contrast, the other protagonist of the play, monk Gennō, lacks the literary pedigree, and his background, while noble, is all too commonly human. In the play, he is seen as the representative of the Order; he exorcises the spirit of the Killing Stone, he is the force for good, and bringer of (en)light(en)ment. I propose an alternative interpretation of Gennō, in which convention itself is used to subvert the very convention it purports to follow. I suggest that this is done by complicating the reading of the typified language used to describe him, and interrogating the expected positioning vis-à-vis his counterpart Tamamo, particularly in terms of gender, center/margin binary, and religious authority.

The play opens with Gennō and his somewhat unusual *michiyuki*. The *michiyuki* (道行), the travel sequence, has the function of setting the spatial confines of a play, which in *Noh* is particularly important, given its convention of being performed on a bare stage with minimal props and paucity of visual clues. The protagonist would narrate his/her travel, often specifying the season, time of day, and particularly places he or she has seen during the travel. The descriptors used in a *michiyuki*, however, are replete with allusions that provide not just the spatial, but ideological and psychological framing for the play and its protagonists. Gennō's *michiyuki* atypically foregoes the details of the travel itself, save for the point of departure and arrival, and focuses on this second, more abstract level. In other words, he does not focus on sites or sights, but his experiences of them:

¹⁵ See Bathgate, 2003; Goff, 1997; Faure, 1996 among others.

Let me traverse this floating world, my heart invited by clouds and water, my heart drawn forth by water and clouds.

I am Gennō, the one on the Path. Intent on achieving enlightenment, I have not strayed from the teachings of my lineage. Finally rid of affliction and delusion, I preach to people far and wide. I spent some time in Ōshū, but decided to go to the capital for the winter ascetic retreat.

My unstable self like water and clouds, my unstable self like water and clouds, wandering bewildered in the floating world of suffering. Having not reached the full depth of my mind I passed the Shirakawa barrier and arrived in Nasu-no-hara that glistens like the frost, I arrived in Nasu-no-hara in Shimotsuke province.¹⁶

While Gennō, by virtue of the generic convention, is in the reader’s/viewer’s mind contrasted with Tamamo and, as discussed earlier, supposed to represent Order to her Chaos, his monologue draws some obvious and significant parallels with his counterpart. His self-introduction and the references he makes mark him, too, as a creature of movement and transformation. He likens himself with clouds and water (雲水), and evokes imagery of movement, such as drifting (迷い行く), floating (浮く), wandering (旅に出る), all of which are references to the Buddhist concept of impermanence and an emblematic way of referring to traveling monks, but they also evoke the themes of boundary crossing; Gennō has passed the boundary at Shirakawa river, and his travelling trajectory takes him from the Eastern provinces, which in this historical and cultural context represent the Margin, to the capital, i.e. the Center.

The image of Gennō and movement is further bolstered by the reputation of the historical Gennō, who as an adept of the Sōtō Zen lineage, was heavily involved in traveling for proselytizing, gathering solicitations for building temples, as well as practicing mountain asceticism. The latter two, while not explicitly noted in the play, are, nevertheless, copiously documented in the historical and temple records (Ishikawa, 1984; Ueno, 2013). Apart from movement, Gennō particularly insists on his status as a drifting, unstable (定めなき) self (身), lost in this world, evoking imagery of malleability and transformation: water and clouds, clouds and frost, river and frost, all are words used in the *michiyuki* to

¹⁶ My translation. (Sanari 1930, p. 1635).

refer to Gennō's person and the space he occupies (physically and spiritually), and all bring forth the imagery of water and air condensing and freezing and changing from one into the other.

In *Noh*, the distribution of central roles is typically between *shite*, the protagonist, and *waki*, the counterpart.¹⁷ These are in no way “stock characters,” but in a tradition marked by a strong emphasis on conventional treatment of content, structure, and language, they always come with a set of presuppositions. In *Sesshōseki*, Tamamo is the *shite* to Gennō's *waki*, which already defines their relationship in a particular way, and creates certain expectations for the audience. In a play in which a female spirit is confronted by a Buddhist monk this is all the more true, due to the underlying power and gender dynamics. In her own consideration of boundaries in *Noh*, Gerry Yokota focuses on gender polarities, and considering female protagonist/Buddhist monk polarity she ponders whether the conventional relationship in which the social and religious dominance rests with the man, can become more equal, or even reversed (Yokota, 2016, p. 78). While Yokota directs this query particularly to the third category *Noh*, where the *shite* is a ghost of a human woman, and not a demonic entity as in the fifth-category *Sesshōseki*, her question, I believe, is a profitable venue to explore here, as treatment of Lady Tamamo and Gennō's relationship and rapport destabilizes the traditional convention.

By the time Gennō and Tamamo meet, the initial definitions of their personhoods, and the audiences' perceptions of them as polar opposites have gradually shifted. Drawing on generic conventions of *Noh*, their positionalities are first presented as a malevolent spirit/deluded entity versus the monk on the Buddha path. Then, as we see Tamamo's movement and transformation paralleled by Gennō's, narrative of impermanence and instability, it emerges that the nature of the two figures overlaps. Finally, the

¹⁷ The *shite/waki* relationship in *Noh* is difficult to define, as it defies the usual relational structuring in most other types of drama and fiction, especially the ones belonging to the Western traditions (such as “protagonist/antagonist,” “hero/villain,” etc.). I use the terms “protagonist” for *shite*, and “counterpart” for *waki* as I believe they come close to reflecting the relationship of simultaneous conflict, dependence, identification, and anything and everything in between.

reversal of the roles between the two happens on several levels. This is demonstrable in how the two are aligned with Margin/Center. While numerous aspects of the vulpine Tamamo designate her as a creature of the Margin, the opposite is also true. Tamamo, while moving, always associates herself with the Center and those who symbolize and represent it. She is a beloved and influential consort to kings and princes, or even a deity they worship, as seen in discussion above. Gennō, on the other hand, is a traveler without fixed abode; he represents the margin while she is center(ed). In fact, both characters move back-and-forth between their central(izing) and marginal(izing) identities. In a more dramatic way, this reversal is seen in the first encounter between the two protagonists, which begins with a spatial prohibition: Gennō is not to approach the stone. This, of course, is justified as necessary for his own protection, but at the same time it is a revealing commentary on the power positioning between the two. In the most basic sense, it is an injunction against violating a boundary, as it foreshadows the danger of violating certain spatial confines, and hints at consequences arising from it. This injunction is implemented by (the ghost of) Tamamo, ostensible bringer of Chaos, and not Gennō, ostensible representative of the Order. Furthermore, according to the Killing Stone folk tradition, the noxious rock marks the separation between this world and the Other, so in an ironic twist, the ultimate boundary crosser has literally become a boundary.

Even the final scene of the play, where Gennō holds a Buddhist service for the spirit of the stone to pacify it, is not uncomplicated. In her final proclamation of retiring her “demon form”: 鬼神の姿は失せにけり (Sanari, 1930, p. 1846) (*kijin no sukata ha usenikeri* “the form of the demon is gone!”) the character used is 鬼神 (*kijin*), which is a combination of 鬼, meaning “demon” (also “angry spirit”), and 神, designating deity (also “pacified” or “deified spirit”). In fact, the term *kijin* itself, does not necessarily refer to a malevolent demon, but a “fierce deity,” and foxes in Japan have, historically, been understood in precisely that way. The fox has a long-standing association with rice fields and rice field deities (Smyers, 1998, p. 75–78), and as such is a force for the culture and not chaos. In that sense, it is a symbol of fertility

and not death and destruction. On the other hand, through her incarnation as Dakiniden, as discussed earlier, the fox is associated with graveyards and corpses. Thus, drawing on these opposite but complementary associations, we can read Tamamo as a *kijin*, who mediates life and death through interplaying these two symbolic orders. Therefore, rather than a Buddhist priest, Gennō, in this particular case acts as a traditional Japanese Shintō ritualist, and pacifies, not the alien Other disruptive deity, but the very indigent fierce goddess that is Tamamo. Discussing representations of alterity in the Tantric Buddhist discourse, David B. Gray notes that “[R]eligious identity [...] is not monolithic but relational, developing and changing through the encounters that continually occur between competing religious traditions” (Gray, 2005, p. 45). The boundary-crossing that Tamamo and Gennō achieve together, is such an overlapping of religious codes.

Conclusion: Noh Boundaries

In *Sesshōseki*, border-crossing is presented as a mode of action that destabilizes Order, while also providing a means to reestablish it. Utilizing movement and transformation as modes of boundary-crossing, the play problematizes a number of social, historical, and religious issues. These are personified in the characters of the protagonist and her counterpart, and worked out through their interaction. Lady Tamamo is constructed as a subversive figure who upsets and disrupts the boundaries that establish, support, and maintain Order. The established order is one of superiority of human over non-human, male over female, ignorant over enlightened, domestic (Japanese) over foreign (continental), Center over Margin. Tamamo repeatedly crosses all these boundaries and upsets the Order. Katherine Pratt Ewing suggests that we can look at our very categories as “borderlands,” sites of negotiations (Ewing, 1998, p. 263). Tamamo embodies several overlapping categories as she moves and transforms across boundaries on multiple levels both synchronically (ontologically) and diachronically (over time). The body of a shape-shifter like Tamamo represents a site for negotiating and resolving crises in understanding the long held, entrenched categories. On the one hand she moves through multiple identities, imperial reigns,

continents and realms, while at the same time collapsing time and space and those identities, effectively erasing the boundaries between them.

Gennō, the proponent of the dominant religious regimen, acts as her foil and deterrent. However, as shown in the analysis of his *michiyuki*, he is himself a moving and shifting entity. A Buddhist monk without fixed abode, drifting and floating, having not yet reached the depth of his mind, he embodies ruptured Order. It is this vulnerability that makes the relationship between the two characters particularly interesting and significant. While on the surface this relationship plays out according to convention, when all the underlying subtext is taken into account (narrative tradition, linguistic connotations, performative structure) what it exactly means to say that Order is disturbed and reestablished invites deeper inquiry.

Noh lends itself particularly well to this kind of analysis, due to its own boundary-crossing characteristics, being at once literature, performance, religious text, and ritual. It weaves narratives from multiple sources, often generically quite diverse, into a tapestry that makes a narrative in its own right but relies on its predecessors for full meaning and significance. As a performance it overlaps dramatic acting with elements of religious ritual, and in its own way, dance and music. Acting technique in *Noh* is a part of this conversation as well, and contributes to the possibility of narrative expression, as “Body in *Noh* [is] a flexible processual site,” where “phenomenal world [is] perceived as a living body” (Amano, 2011, p. 530). This is why Tamamo and, indeed, Gennō can be the sites of different kinds of “crossings.” They are characters in a narrative, performers on the stage, and participants in a ritual. The narrative (or rather narratives, as we have seen multiple narrative threads woven together) provides the dimension of probing the historical context and socio-political structure of aristocracy/samurai transition. The ritual context of *Noh* coopts Gennō’s status as a Buddhist figure and places him within the demon-pacifying ritual structure, complicating the relationship between overlapping religious traditions (Buddhist and non-Buddhist). Precisely due to its generic characteristics, *Noh* provides the stage, literal and metaphorical,

on which competing regimens, orders, and Orders can interplay with each other. The order is established dialectically as the new Order, while the process of ordering is a reconfiguration of the preceding one.

Boundary crossing in Noh occurs in a way that boundaries are being transcended, but the reality is being reconfigured, not as disturbance of order, but as a constant process of ordering and reordering, in other words – unbounding. However, this process is simultaneously a process of (re)bounding – establishing boundaries that will be unbounded. This allows for the audience to remain comfortable with their categories that are seemingly reified. This process is deeply subversive in that sense, as it completely unravels the plane of reality while keeping the strings seemingly together. Narratives of boundary-crossing create an epistemological frame where nothing is as it seems, and reality is fragmented and unstable. Unbounding would rather be creating an alternative order through boundary-crossing reconfigured as un-bounding.

References

- Amano, Y. (2011). “‘Flower’ as Performing Body in Nō Theatre,” *Asian Theatre Journal*, 28, pp. 529–548.
- Bathgate, M. (2003). *The Fox’s Craft in Japanese Religion and Culture: Shapeshifters, Transformations, and Duplicities*. New York: Routledge.
- Brazell, K. (1999). *Traditional Japanese Theater*, Revised ed. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Butler, L. A. (1996). “The Way of Yin and Yang. A Tradition Revived, Sold, Adopted,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, 51(2), pp. 189–217.
- Ewing, K. P. (1998). “Crossing Borders and Transgressing Boundaries: Metaphors for Negotiating Multiple Identities,” *Ethos*, 26(2), pp. 262–267.
- Faure, B. (2015). *Gods of Medieval Japan: Protectors and Predators*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Goff, J. (1997). “Foxes in Japanese Culture: Beautiful or Beastly?” *Japan Quarterly*, 44(2), pp. 66–77.

- Gray, D. B. (2005). “Eating the Heart of the Brahmin: Representations of Alterity and the Formation of Identity in Tantric Buddhist Discourse,” *History of Religions*, 45(1), pp. 45–69.
- Heine, S. (2000). *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text: Philosophy and Folklore in Fox Koan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Ishikawa, R. (1984). “Genno Shinsho to sanrinryo,” *Indogaku bukkyogaku kenkyu*, 32(2), pp. 597–602.
- (1982). “Chuse sotoshu no chiho tenkai to Genno Shinsho,” *Indogaku bukkyogaku kenkyu*, 31(1), pp. 227–231.
- Itō, M. (1983). *Yōkyokushū / Itō Masayoshi kōchū, Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei*. Tōkyō: Shinchōsha.
- Iwagi Y. (2005). “Tamamo no mae monogatari no kenkyu,” *Ryukoku daigaku daigakuin bungaku kenkyuka kiyo*, 27, pp. 405–408.
- Kaifeng, X. (2006). *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kimbrough, K. & Haruo, S. (2018). *Monsters, Animals, and Other Worlds: A Collection of Short Medieval Japanese Tales*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Minobe, S. (1982). “The World View of ‘Genpei Jōsuiki,’” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 9(2–3), pp. 213–233.
- Nienhauser, W. Jr. (ed). (1994). *The Grand Scribe’s Records*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Sanari, K. (1930). *Yōkyoku taikan*, Vol 5. Tōkyō: Meiji Shoin.
- Sakaita, H. (1996). “Nicchu kitsune bunka no tansaku,” *Chukyo daigaku kyoyo ronso*, 36(4), pp. 1292–1330
- Smyers, K. (1998). *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Ueno, N. (2013). “Zoku fuso zenrin so hoden ni miru Genno Shinsho,” *Indogaku bukkyogaku kenkyu*, 61(2), pp. 560–563.
- (2010). “Genno Shinsho kaiso no dewa shohoji ni nokoru denki shiryō ni tsuite,” *Indogaku bukkyogaku kenkyu*, 58(2), pp. 722–725.

- Uther, H.J. (2006). "The Fox in World Literature: Reflections on a 'Fictional Animal'," *Asian Folklore Studies*, 65(2), pp. 133–160.
- Yokoi, K. (1999). "Sesshoseki densetsuko: shukyo jinruigaku no hoho to shiza kara," *Komazawa daigaku bukkyo gakubu ronshu*, 30, pp. 291–309.
- Yokota, G. (2016). "The Rhetoric of Noh: Border Crossings in Karukaya and Tadatsu no Saemon and Beyond," *Gengo bunka kyodo kenkyu purojekuto*, pp. 77–88.
- Yokoyama, S. & Matsumoto R. (1981). *Muromachi jidai monogatari taisei*, vol. 9. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten.

News Narratives across Borders: The Convergence of Interests and Patterns of Meaning in International Media Coverage of Disaster

Jamie Matthews

Bournemouth University

When covering significant global events, shared narratives may emerge across a globalised news media, circulating meaning and contributing to how publics make sense of issues and events (Cottle, 2014). In turn, these narratives are reflected in the spaces made possible by digital media platforms and through the formation of a global discursive community (Guo, Holton and Jeong, 2012). Disasters, those that meet the criteria of proximity for western media (Benthall, 1993) or are unusual in the scale of their impacts are exemplars of such global events, receiving worldwide media attention, with coverage that is open-ended, ritualised and often highly emotive (Cottle, 2006). By drawing on both media-system perspectives and the features attributed to the globalisation of journalism (Berglez, 2013), this chapter considers how shared narratives emerge through the representations of disaster in international news coverage.

While commonalities in coverage have previously been ascribed to hierarchies within a global media system, illustrated, for example, by the influence of a select group of satellite news channels (Cottle and Rai, 2006) and international news agencies on the selection, presentation and dissemination of news (Boyd-Barrett, 2008; Clausen, 2003; Wu, 2003), more recent research recognises

How to cite this book chapter:

Matthews, J. 2021. News Narratives across Borders: The Convergence of Interests and Patterns of Meaning in International Media Coverage of Disaster. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 207–225. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.j>. License: CC-BY 4.0

that mainstream news media are part of a complex and interconnected network of global communication (Heinrich, 2011). This enables a greater diversity of information and perspectives to circulate in the contemporary media environment, allowing alternative or counter-narratives to emerge and gain traction. Others suggest that similarities in news output are due to the norms, practices and values of journalism that are increasingly shared between different journalism cultures and contexts, for example approaches to newsgathering and the prominence now afforded to citizen material (Berglez, 2013; Nygren and Stigbrand, 2014).

To elaborate on these processes, this chapter will explore the narratives that emerged across global media coverage of the cascading disaster that Japan faced in March 2011. Through this case study and by drawing on approaches to networked journalism (Heinrich, 2011), it will argue that the narrativisation of this event, not only reflected the structural influences on news but echoed ways of understanding, in this example advancing a cultural narrative that was premised on the dominant discourses on Japan.

News and Narratives of Disaster

There is a large body of research and scholarship that has explored the narrative features of news and journalism (Elliot, 2000, p. 355). It is grounded in the view that news accounts are more than simply about conveying information but instead journalism interprets events and constructs social reality (Bird and Dardenne, 2009; Johnston-Cartee, 2005, p. 185). Many argue that narratives or frames rendered in news are a result of interactions between the different levels of discourse (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). This includes the context, political, economic and sociocultural, in which news is produced, and the professional practices, values and discipline of journalism, the emphasis placed for instance on objectivity (Schudson, 1978). Others highlight the features of journalistic discourse, news values, the genre and structure of news narratives, and how they determine what makes the news and how it is presented to audiences (Van Gorp, 2007).

The body of work on news as narrative distinguishes between master narratives, those common across coverage of different

issues, and narratives intrinsic to the topic or event being reported (de Vreese, 2005). Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) identified five overarching narratives that recur in news discourse, which they describe as economic, conflict, powerlessness, human-impact and morality frames. The conflict frame, to take one example, is a narrative present across a range of different topics that centres on discord and disagreement amongst different individuals, groups and organisations. This is evident in the way news media cover politics, where accounts will focus on the different positions adopted by individuals and political parties (See Aalberg, Stromback, de Vreese, 2011), to reporting on science and the environment, with reports emphasising the differences that exist in scientific opinion (See Tong, 2014). Other master narratives reflect universal story forms, those of tragedy (Kitch, 2003), heroism, and good versus evil. Issue-specific narratives, in contrast, are the themes enacted to bring together stories that are about the same topic or event (de Vreese, 2005), thereby functioning as central organising ideas or ‘interpretive packages’ (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989).

When narrating disaster news media coverage has been shown to follow familiar templates. Natural disasters are often presented as otherworldly, divine acts of God, reflecting dominant social and cultural understandings of disaster (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle, 2012, p. 4). Journalism will also seek to tell the stories that demonstrate the human impact of disaster, providing compelling accounts of survival, loss and resilience. These human-interest stories are a consequence of news values, which place an emphasis on personalised, emotive accounts that resonate with audiences (Zelizer and Allan, 2010, p. 55). Such stories often draw on the recognisable narrative frameworks of tragedy and heroism. Increasingly, these accounts are provided by those caught up in or witnesses to disaster, whose images, video or social media posts contribute to the narratives that unfold, offering an alternative perspective on disaster and their effects or contesting strategic narratives deployed by elites (Allan, 2013). Other scholarship has considered how disaster news reflects mythic themes and motifs, stories that are “familiar, readily understood and easily digested” (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 186), or perpetuate common disaster myths. One well-established myth is that

communities affected by disaster will panic and experience disorder, a belief that is refuted empirically by the evidence that shows altruistic or prosocial behaviours are more typical in post-disaster environments (Rodriguez, Trainor and Quarantelli, 2006). This was illustrated through the mediated representations of post-Katrina New Orleans, where news accounts advanced a narrative of lawlessness and anarchy that misrepresented the reality of the situation, reinforcing a political discourse that accentuated a need for social control in the management and response to this disaster (Tierney, Bevac and Kuligowski, 2006; Stock, 2007).

What is also significant about the narratives that emerge though news coverage of crises and disaster, is that they may act as representations of shared sentiments, for example through the expressions of grief and loss. In these periods of collective mourning such narratives will resonate with broader cultural symbols and can serve a ceremonial function by enabling societies to grieve and move on from disaster (Kitch, 2003, p15).

Processes of Narrative Homogenisation

Both the dynamics of the global flows of news and information, those that circulate around significant news events and issues, and common professional ideals and practices of journalism contribute to narrative coherence in the way disaster events are represented through media.

In traditional models the flow of information and content across borders has been attributed to hierarchies that exist in a global media system, one that has been “latently structured by the world’s politics, economy and cultures” (Wu, 2003, p. 9). Attempts to analyse these flows have identified a western hegemony in the production and distribution of media content (Tunstall, 2008). In the provision of news this hierarchy is evident in news agendas, the issues and stories given space in foreign news coverage, and the overrepresentation of western countries and their interests (Himmelboim, Chang, and McCreey, 2010). Recent work advocates a more nuanced understanding of the dominant flows of news and information. Thussu (2006) argues that digital technology, the emergence of regional news broadcasters, such as Al-Jazeera,

and greater internationalisation increase the flow and visibility of content, including news and entertainment media, emanating from other regional centres. These contraflows present alternative perspectives, represent diverse cultural outlooks and may be premised on different journalism models and values. While valuable, Thussu (2006) contends that their presence do not fundamentally alter the structural imbalances inherent within the global media system, in particular in the provision of information and news.

Watanabe (2013) attests that although audiences now have access to a greater diversity of news sources, aided by the growth of digital media and the flow of information through communicative spaces such as Twitter, western agendas and interests remain preminent. This leads to an overrepresentation of western countries and a greater focus on news from and about western countries in foreign news reporting (Himmelboim, Chang, and McCreedy, 2010), with stories from other regions and countries only making the news when certain thresholds are met (Gans, 1980). For disasters occurring in economically less developed countries, it is their scale, the extent that they may impact on dominant geopolitical interests or their relevance to western audiences that determine their visibility (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle, 2012). Consequently, the amount of coverage afforded to a disaster often corresponds with the number of western victims and its potential to create economic instability (Joye, 2009).

In the contemporary media environment, many recognise that the speed of transmission, interactivity and a greater diversity in sources are facilitating multidirectional flows of information (Castells, 2000; McNair, 2006). Heinrich (2011) proposes the concept of networked journalism, where news organisations are just one amongst many information nodes that comprise a complex web of global communication. Each node, whether it be the journalism produced by a news organisation, a blog, or individual tweet, can potentially connect to and influence each other. These networked perspectives acknowledge how alternative information sources have become prominent voices in global communication, afforded greater opportunities for access and reach by digital networks. Disasters, therefore, are represented through the flows of information that circulate around these events, with traditional

media one amongst many different information streams that contribute to how disasters become signified and understood (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle, 2012).

Despite these shifts towards more horizontal structures of global communication flows, questions of hierarchy and influence still remain. So, while the digital sphere provides access to different perspectives and can bring new information to bear, mainstream news organisations remain significant in setting agendas, defining the dialogical parameters and contributing to the framing of issues and events. As news organisations have sought to extend their reach by converging content across traditional and new media forms, with platforms such as Twitter and Instagram now used to source, report and distribute news, they have been able to enhance their agenda-setting and gatekeeping roles (Jenkins and Deuze, 2008).

Concentration in media ownership also serves to sustain dominant flows of news and information. Despite the emergence in recent years of regional players, such as China's Xinhua news agency, whose influence has increased in line with China's growing economic and political status (Tang and Iyengar, 2012), three news agencies, the Associated Press (AP), Reuters and Agence France Press (AFP), still maintain a substantial market share (Boyd-Barrett, 2008). Studies of online news, including news aggregators such as Google News that bring together stories from different sources distributed across the web, have been shown, for example, to be reliant on the content provided by these agencies (Watanabe, 2012). Others identify how the republication of articles from European and US newspapers, in particular from influential titles such as *Le Monde* (France), *El Pais* (Spain), the *Guardian* (UK) and the *New York Times* (US), serve to sustain a hierarchy in the flow of news (Tunstall, 2008).

Much scholarly attention has been paid to the established international news channels, including BBC World News and CNN, and satellite news networks broadcasting from other regional centres, most notably Al-Jazeera (Qatar), CCTV (China) and Russia Today, and their influence on global news flows. While some posit that the emergence of news organisations such as Al-Jazeera, have further eroded the western hierarchy in news (Si, 2014). Others

contend that only a select group of international news channels, the most significant being CNN International and BBC World News, can really be described as global in their reach, (Rai and Cottle, 2007, p. 63). Volkmer (2014, p. 160–161) argues that such international news channels are able to present a “a supranational news angle” by bringing together a breadth of information and perspectives. Even though the audience, which increasingly for this type of news are watching content on demand, may be small. They can be influential, “info elites” that are spread across different regions and countries. The reputation and quality of content provided by these international news channels allow them to operate as “supernodes” in the contemporary media system (Volkmer and Heinrich, 2008). While only one amongst many interlocutors contributing to a global public sphere (Volkmer, 2014, p162), their elevated position, as with other well-established news organisation, enables them to not only influence agendas but also through the representations that they construct to contribute to the narrativisation and interpretation of events. These narratives then circulate as dominant representations across national and linguistic borders.

It is also important to recognise how the convergence in global narratives to disaster can also, in part, be attributed to the discursive and professional practices of journalism. TV news agencies, such as Associate Press Television, Paterson (1998, p. 83) argues, produce content that appears to fulfil the criteria of objectivity and neutrality, which serve to present an “ideologically distinctive and homogenous view of the world,” facilitating the construction of a “global TV image.” In a similar vein, Volkmer (2014) identifies transnational dimensions of objectivity and authenticity. Others emphasise a commitment to common professional ideals as a feature of an emerging form of globalised journalism where core journalistic values are becoming shared across different journalism cultures (Berglez 2011). Comparative research on journalistic role conceptions shows, for example, that the value of information-disseminator, as a passive, objective recorder of information, is one that is now more commonly shared across journalism cultures, as opposed to a more active adversarial role (Weaver, 1998). Such common practices and

attitudes are a consequence of increasing interaction and cooperation between individual journalists, enabled by the opportunities afforded by global news organisations and the standardisation of journalistic routines facilitated by digital technologies, for example the use of social media for newsgathering (Reese, 2008). Others point toward the changing relationships between journalists and their audiences, where audiences now play a more active role in news production (Wardle and Williams, 2010) or recognise broader shifts in societal organisation toward networked forms of interaction.

Shared Narratives in International News Coverage of the 2011 Japan Disaster

To consider further how these processes may contribute to narrative homogenisation across linguistic and cultural borders, I will now turn to the characteristics of international media coverage of the cascading disaster that befell Japan in 2011.

On March 11, 2011 a 9.0 magnitude earthquake struck just off Japan's Pacific coast, generating a series of tsunami waves that devastated coastal communities in the north east of the country. Damage caused by the earthquake and tsunami to reactor cooling systems at the Fukushima Daichi nuclear power plant led to a third disaster, with the partial meltdown of three reactor cores at the site and the release of radioactive material.

Evidence from other analyses shows that familiar narrative frameworks to disaster were rendered in the initial media coverage of the tsunami and its impacts, with the common constructs of apocalypse, catastrophe and the power of *Mother Nature* deployed to describe the disaster scene (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle, 2012). On March 12, 2011 the most widely circulated British newspaper, *The Sun*, ran a front-page headline that simply stated *Apocalypse*. This figurative construct of the immediate post-disaster environment was also apparent in different media contexts. Jeune Afrique, a pan-African news magazine, described the disaster as *Japon: l'Apocalypse* (Japan: The Apocalypse) and in a photo essay published in *Le Pont International*, a French news magazine, as *Japon: les images de l'apocalypse* (Japan: images of

the apocalypse). It was also evident in online coverage in Germany, for example in *Der Spiegel* (Japan's Apokalypse, 13 March), and in a piece published in Italy's *la Repubblica* newspaper (*Apocalisse in Giappone*, 13 March).

Any similarities in narrative frames emerging during this initial phase of media coverage are indicative of the dominant discourses on disaster, which echo across different cultural contexts. These discourses are reflected in the established templates of disaster reporting, which are a consequence of journalists' attempts to communicate the scale and impacts of a disaster to their audiences. It is the commonality of this template and its use within different journalism cultures, albeit the examples offered here are principally from European media, rather than any systemic factors influencing selection and presentation, that explain the recurrence of this narrative in news accounts.

Powerful visual accounts also circulated quickly across global news coverage, with many of these images and videos captured by ordinary people who were able to document the tsunami and its aftermath. Much of this footage was first obtained by Japanese broadcasters but was quickly picked up and used by other news organisations, evident from the Japanese imprint in the original newscasts. Amateur footage of the tsunami inundating the small port city of Kesenuma, for example, was first broadcast by the All Nippon News Network (ANN) and the Japan Broadcasting Cooperation (NHK), but was then subsequently integrated into packages produced by the BBC, Russia Today, France 24 and CBS, amongst others. Global news agencies are also increasingly able to influence the flow of citizen and eyewitness material by sourcing, verifying and distributing this content to other news providers (Murrell, 2017). The space afforded to such images in international news coverage contributed to this narrative of catastrophe by providing a visual record of the magnitude and power of the tsunami. Technology, the use of smartphones and the practice of sourcing and incorporating eyewitness material into journalistic accounts of disaster in particular, which by this time had generally been routinised into news organisations' reporting and production processes, may also explain the convergence of news narratives around these themes.

The volume of content captured and shared by ordinary citizens in Japan following the earthquake and tsunami was unprecedented. Although much of this material was first disseminated through social networks, as videos uploaded to YouTube or images shared on Twitter and Mixi, mainstream news organisations enhanced its visibility by integrating it into their reporting on the disaster, through live news blogs for example¹ (Thurman and Rogers, 2014). Journalism, therefore, maintained a role as gatekeeper (Jenkins and Deuze, 2008), enabling this content to become central to the repertoire of images that formed as narratives to this disaster. Prominent examples include images and video of people fleeing the approaching tsunami in the town of Minamisanriku in Miyagi and footage shot from higher ground by a local tour guide of the waves inundating the town of Rikuzentakata, Iwate. In reporting and communicating disaster, this citizen content is valuable since it gives voice to disaster victims (Cooper, 2011). Here, in the context of this disaster, it narrativized the impact of the tsunami upon disaster-affected communities.

There is also evidence to show that an economic master narrative emerged as one of the principal organising frameworks in coverage of the disaster, with its impacts expressed in terms of economics, both for Japan and for the global economy (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle, 2012). One feature of this narrative was an interlacing of financial news with updates about the disaster. As a consequence, even reports that were structured around the disaster were often written from an economic perspective. There is a significant volume of news articles and packages published online that illustrate these narrative features, not only in content from the major international news outlets but from a range of different regional and national news providers.² The complex flows of news and information that circulate around disaster and the hierarchies that exist within a global media system explain the prominence

¹ Live blogs are used by many news organizations to bring together original reporting, alongside aggregated news, comment and citizen content on a breaking or significant news story (Elliot, 2016).

² For example, see: Japan Quake: Economic Impact Felt Across Asia, *BBC*, 18 March 2011; Japan scrambles to shore up economy, *Al-Jazeera*, 15 March 2011; Considerable economic impact from Japan quake, *ABC*, 13 March 2011.

of this economic narrative. Due to Japan's global economic position there were fears that the disaster, and a prolonged release of radiation at Fukushima, would have negative impact on a global economy still recovering from the 2008 financial crisis. The interests of elite nations, therefore, converged around an economic imperative, which was reflected in the way the disaster was communicated, debated and represented through international media coverage (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle, 2012, p55).

What is also significant, however, in the representations of this disaster was how ways of understanding, those premised on dominant discourses on and images of Japan, emerged as a shared narrative to the disaster. Discourses on Japan have a long history of emphasising cultural otherness and its difference from the West. This master narrative is sustained and reproduced through the contemporary mediascapes and the transborder flows and consumption of popular culture, news and information (Appadurai, 1995). Research identifies how mediated representations of Japan, across film, television and news reporting, have tended to produce and reinforce its cultural difference (See Dalot-Bul, 2008). This narrative was revealed through the representations of "Japan's" response to the disaster. Commentators writing at the time noted that international news coverage emphasised the role of culture in explaining how people in Japan were coping in the aftermath of the tsunami and the worsening situation at Fukushima (Huang, 2011; Rees, 2011). Subsequent analyses have also highlighted the frequency that references appeared in international media coverage to the stoicism, calmness and perseverance of the Japanese in the face of disaster (Iannarino, Veil and Cotton, 2014; Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle, 2012) and the use of a cultural framework to present human-interest stories to news audiences (Matthews, 2019).

There are various examples across different media that illustrate this narrative, from news and comment carried in influential international print titles, including *The New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, and packages produced by international broadcasters such as CNN International.³ These pieces often drew

³ For example, see: The Japanese could teach us a thing or two, *The New York Times*, 20 March 2011; We all know the slogan keep calm and carry

on stereotypical cultural traits, such as exploring a link between collectivist values and how people in Japan were responding to the disaster or integrated familiar images of Japan into its reporting on the disaster and its impacts. One example of this was the story of Tsuyako Ito, introduced in a piece first published in the *Guardian* newspaper on 18 March 2011 that described the post-disaster environment in Kamaishi city, Iwate. This article reflected on the longer-term difficulties she would face as a teacher of traditional Japanese dance and describing her as being known locally as the last geisha of Kamaishi (Watts, 2011). Her story, framed as a cultural narrative through the foregrounding in news accounts of her occupation and interests in the traditional Japanese arts, was later picked up and reported in a range of different media outlets including the *New York Times* (4 April 2011), *China Daily* (25 April 2011), and in *El Universal* (3 April, 2011). A subsequent update on her situation also appeared in coverage of the first anniversary of the disaster in reports carried by *Al-Jazeera* (10 March 2012) and *Le Figaro* (16 March 2012). Many initial reports credited AFP or the *New York Times*, but significantly not the *Guardian*, as the original source for the story. This underlines the importance of these global news outlets, one an international news agency, the other amongst the most widely read online newspapers (Sweeney, 2014), in diffusing a cultural narrative to this disaster. Although we could argue that this story was selected and framed to resonate in one context by perpetuating a familiar image of Japan amongst western audiences, it was recycled across others and contributed to the emergence of this shared narrative to this disaster.

A second example is provided by the space afforded in the global media to the concept of *jishuku*, the exercise of self-restraint during a period of mourning that was practiced in Japan in the weeks after the disaster (Kingston, 2013). It was reported widely⁴ and became part of the conversation about the post-disaster

on, but would we? *the Guardian*, 19 March, 2011; Amid disaster, Japan's societal mores remain strong, *CNN*, April 11, 2011.

⁴ For example, in a package produced by the BBC (8 April 2011), which was broadcast by BBC World News, and in articles published in lead-

mood in Japan. Its meaning, however, is nuanced. *Jishuku* may also be described as broader consideration for others (Schilling, 2015). While it can be attributed to a period of collective mourning, equally it may represent a personalised response to grief (McVeigh, 2014: 115). Such interpretations were not reflected in the way *jishuku* was presented through the international media coverage, instead it underwrote a cultural narrative by demonstrating the strength of collectivist values within Japanese society (Matthews, 2019)

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to elucidate the processes that contribute to shared patterns of meaning and understanding that circulate in international media coverage of disaster. Despite the growth of digital media, a greater diversity of voices in the international public sphere and new forms of mediation, international news organisations remain significant, not only in determining attention and selection, but in establishing the dominant narratives used to explain and interpret issues and events. By elaborating on the features of international media coverage of the 2011 Japan disaster, the discussion above has sought to examine how international news organisations, as important interlocutors within the network multinational flows of information, and the practices inherent to journalism, may contribute to the emergence of shared narratives across journalism contexts. While the hierarchies that exist in the global media system may explain the rendering of an economic narrative in this example, other narratives are a product of the journalistic values and practices that are increasingly shared across journalism cultures. Culture, therefore, became a framework through which to explain and understand ‘Japan’s’ response to the disaster, providing a narrative that would enable distant events to resonate with audiences (Gurevitch, Levy and Roeh, 1991).

ing newspapers including The New York Times (28 March 2011) and le Figaro (31 March 2011).

References

- Aalberg, T., Strömbäck, J. and de Vreese, C. H. (2012). "The Framing of Politics as Strategy and Game: A Review of Concepts, Operationalizations and Key Findings," *Journalism*, 13(2), pp. 162–178.
- Allan, S. (2013). *Citizen Witnessing: Revisioning Journalism in Times of Crisis*. Cambridge: Malden, Mass.: Polity Press.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Benthall, J. (1993). *Disasters, Relief and the Media*: London: I.B. Tauris.
- Berglez, P. (2013). *Global Journalism: Theory and Practice*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bird, S. E. and Dardenne, R. W. (2009). "Rethinking News and Myth as Storytelling," in Wahl-Jorgensen, K. and Hanitzsch, T. (eds.) *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 205–215.
- Boyd-Barrett, O. (2008). "News Agency Majors: Ownership, Control and Influence Reevaluated," *Journal of Global Mass Communication*, 1(2), pp. 57–71.
- Castells, M. (2000). *The Rise of the Network Society – Volume I: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, 2nd ed. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Clausen, L. (2003). *Global News Production*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School.
- Cottle, S. (2006). "Mediatized Rituals: Beyond Manufacturing Consent," *Media, Culture & Society*, 28(3), pp. 411–432.
- (2014). "Rethinking Media and Disasters in a Global Age: What's Changed and Why It Matters," *Media, War & Conflict*, 7(1), pp. 3–22.
- Cottle, S. and Rai, M. (2006). "Between Display and Deliberation: Analyzing TV News as Communicative Architecture," *Media, Culture & Society*, 28(2), pp. 163–189.

- Cooper, G. (2011). "From Their own Correspondent? News Media and the Changes in Disaster Coverage: Lessons to be Learnt," *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*.
- Dalio-Bul M. (2008). "Eroticism, Grotesqueness and Non-Sense: Twenty-first Century Cultural Imagery of Japan in the Israeli Media and Popular Culture," *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 28(2): 173-191.
- de Vreese, C. H. (2005). "News Framing: Theory and Typology," *Information Design Journal & Document Design*, 13(1), pp. 51-62.
- Elliot, C. W. (2000). "Flows of News from the Middle Kingdom: An Analysis of International News Releases from Xinhua," in Malek, A. and Kavoori, A. P. (eds.) *The Global Dynamics of News: Studies in International News Coverage and News Agenda*. Stamford, Conn.: Ablex, pp. 343-388.
- Elliot, C. (2016). "Inside the Guardian: How the Live Blog has Changed the Face of News Reporting," *The Guardian*, 4 February (Online). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/membership/2016/feb/04/inside-the-guardian-how-live-blog-changed-news-reporting> (Accessed 24 February 2018).
- Gamson, W. A. and Modigliani, A. (1989). "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), pp. 1-37.
- Gans, H. J. (1980). *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Guo, L., Holton, A. and Jeong, S. H. (2012). "Transnational Comparative Framing: A Model for an Emerging Framing Approach," *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 6, pp. 1918-1941.
- Gurevitch, M., Levy, M. and Roeh, I. (1991). "The global newsroom: Convergences and Diversities in the Globalisation of Television News," in Dahlgren, P. and Sparks, C. (eds.) *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge, pp. 195-215.

- Heinrich, A. (2011). *Network Journalism: Journalistic Practice in Interactive Spheres*, Routledge, New York.
- Himmelboim, I., Chang, T.K. and McCreery, S. (2010). "International Network of Foreign News Coverage: Old Global Hierarchies in a New Online World," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 87(2), pp. 297–314.
- Iannarino, N. T., Veil, S. R. and Cotton, A. J. (2015). "Bringing Home the Crisis: How US Evening News Framed the 2011 Japan Nuclear Crisis," *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 23(3), pp. 169–181.
- Jenkins, H. and Deuze, M. (2008). "Editorial: Convergence Culture," *Convergence*, 14(1), pp. 5–12.
- Johnson-Cartee, K. S. (2005). *News Narratives and News Framing: Constructing Political Reality*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Joye, S. (2009). "The Hierarchy of Global Suffering," *The Journal of International Communication*, 15(2), pp. 45–61.
- Kingston, J. (2013). *Contemporary Japan: History Politics and Social Change Since the 1980s*. Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.
- Kitch, C. (2003). "Mourning in America': Ritual, Redemption, and Recovery in News Narrative after September 11," *Journalism Studies*, 4(2), pp. 213–224.
- Matthews, J. (2019). "Cultural Otherness and Disaster News: The Influence of Western Discourses on Japan in US and UK News Coverage of the 2011 Great East Japan Disaster," *International Communication Gazette*, 81(4), pp. 372–392.
- McNair, B. (2006). *Cultural Chaos: Journalism, News and Power in a Globalised World*. Routledge: London.
- McVeigh, B.J. (2014). *The Nature of the Japanese State*. London: Routledge.
- Murrell, C. (2017). "The Global Television News Agencies and Their Handling of User Generated Content Video from Syria," *Media, War & Conflict*, (Online). Available at: doi:1750635217704224 (Accessed: 1 November 2017).

- Neuman, W. R., Just, M. R. and Crigler, A. N. (1992). *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Pan, Z. and Kosicki, G. M. (1993). "Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse," *Political Communication*, 10(1), pp. 55-75.
- Pantti, M., Wahl-Jorgensen, K., and Cottle, S. (2012). *Disasters and the Media*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Paterson, C. (1998). Global Battlefields, in Boyd-Barrett, O. and Rantanen, T. (eds.) *The Globalization of News*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 79-103.
- Rai, M. and Cottle, S. (2007). "Global Mediations: On the Changing Ecology of Satellite Television News," *Global Media and Communication*, 3(1), pp. 51-78.
- Reese, S. D. (2008). "Theorizing a Globalized Journalism," in Löffelholz, M. and Weaver, D. H. (eds.) *Global Journalism Research: Theories, Methods, Findings, Future*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 240-252.
- Rodríguez, H., Trainor, J. and Quarantelli, E. L. (2006). "Rising to the Challenges of a Catastrophe: The Emergent and Prosocial Behavior following Hurricane Katrina," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 604(1), pp. 82-101.
- Schilling, M. (2015). "Is Japanese Cinema Sinking Into a Self-Censorship Swamp?" *The Japan Times*, 11 February (Online). Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2015/02/11/films/japanese-cinema-sinking-self-censorship-swamp> (Accessed 1 February 2018).
- Schudson, M. (1978). *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. New York: Basic Books.
- Si, Si. (2014). "Expansion of International Broadcasting: The Growing Global Reach of China Central Television," *Working paper: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*.
- Stock, P. V. (2007). "Katrina and Anarchy: A Content Analysis of a New Disaster Myth," *Sociological Spectrum*, 27(6), pp. 705-726.

- Sweeney, M. (2014). "The Guardian Overtakes New York Times in comScore Traffic Figures," *the Guardian*, 21 October (Online). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/oct/21/the-guardian-overtakes-new-york-times-in-comscore-traffic-figures> (Accessed 1 November 2017).
- Tang, W. and Iyengar, S. (2012). "Introduction: The Emerging Media System in China: Implications for Regime Change," in Tang, W. and Iyengar, S. *Political Communication in China. Convergence or Divergence Between the Media and Political System?* London: Routledge, pp. 1-6.
- Thurman, N. and Rodgers, J. (2014). "Citizen Journalism in Real Time: Live Blogging and Crisis Events," in E. Thorsen and S. Allan (eds.) *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, Volume 2*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 81-95.
- Thussu, D. K. (2006). *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow*. London: Routledge.
- Tierney, K., Bevc, C. and Kuligowski, E. (2006). "Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 604(1), pp. 57-81.
- Tong, J. (2014). "Environmental Risks in Newspaper Coverage: A Framing Analysis of Investigative Reports on Environmental Problems in 10 Chinese Newspapers," *Environmental Communication*, 8(3), pp. 345-367.
- Tunstall, J. (2008). *The Media Were American: U.S. Mass Media in Decline*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Van Gorp, B. (2007). "The Constructionist Approach to Framing: Bringing Culture Back In," *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), pp. 60-78.
- Volkmer, I. (2014). *Global Public Sphere: Public Communication in the Age of Reflective Interdependence*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Volkmer, I. and Heinrich, A. (2008). "CNN and Beyond: Journalism in a Globalized Network Sphere" in J. Chapman and M. Kinsey (eds.) *Broadcast Journalism: A Critical Introduction*. Routledge: London, pp. 49-57.

- Wardle, C., and Williams, A. (2010). "Beyond User-Generated Content: A Production Study Examining the Ways in Which UGC is Used at the BBC," *Media, Culture & Society*, 32(5), 781–799.
- Watanabe, K. (2013). "The Western Perspective in Yahoo! News and Google News," *International Communication Gazette*, 75(2), pp. 141–156.
- Watts, J. (2011) "Japan Earthquake: Stories from Across the Disaster Zone," *The Guardian*, 18 March (Online). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/18/japan-earthquake-stories-disaster-zone> (Accessed: 24 October 2017).
- Weaver, D. (1998). "Journalists Around the World: Commonalities and Differences," in Weaver, D. (ed.) *The Global Journalist: News People Around the World*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, pp. 455–480.
- Wu, H. D. (2003). "Homogeneity Around the World?" *International Communication Gazette*, 65(1), pp. 9–24.
- Zelizer, B. and Allan, S. (2010). *Keywords in News and Journalism Studies*. Maidenhead: McGraw Hill/Open University Press.

CULTURAL MEDIATION

Images of Italy: Cultural Representations in the Peritext of Translational National Anthologies in Sweden

Cecilia Schwartz

Stockholm University

*È così magica l'Italia, che non si è molto sicuri che esista davvero*¹
Gabriel García Márquez

This study aims to examine the peritext of translational national anthologies, i.e. collections of translated literary texts from one specific nation published in another. The peritext is sometimes understood as a hybrid space where source and target cultures meet (Elefante, 2012, p. 11), but it has also been argued that the repackaging of literary texts in new languages and settings tends to reinforce national stereotypes (Sapiro, 2008). Could this be the case for translational national anthologies? In an attempt to answer this question, the current paper analyzes the peritext of anthologies of Italian literature published in Sweden. A corpus of peritexts is examined in order to explore whether cultural images of Italy and Italians are on display in the anthologies. The corpus will thus be analyzed from an imagological perspective, since imagology is the study of literary representations of nations and nationalities, so-called *images*, that form an *imagined discourse*

¹ "Italy is so magic that one cannot be very sure that it really exists." García Márquez expressed this in an interview from 1987, now available http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/cultura/2014-04-18/sono-realista-puro-e-triste-cerca-magia-200431_PRN.shtml (accessed 13 May 2020).

How to cite this book chapter:

Schwartz, C. 2021. Images of Italy: Cultural Representations in the Peritext of Translational National Anthologies in Sweden. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 229–253. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.k>. License: CC-BY 4.0

(Leerssen 2007). More specifically, the corpus will be compared to the images of Italy and Italians that have been identified from centuries of European travel writing (Beller 2007). Do Swedish anthologies of Italian literature recycle these clichés and national stereotypes? The intersections between translation studies and imagology, on the one hand, and paratexts (focusing on the peritext, the epitext or both) on the other, have recently been highlighted,² but studies that interconnect all three areas – translation studies, imagology and paratexts – are less common.

The corpus, however, is less interesting taken on its own than when viewed in relationship with similar anthologies devoted to the literature of other places. The second part of the article will thus examine whether the results presented in the first part are exclusive to anthologies of Italian literature or if other national literatures undergo similar changes. For this purpose, the peritext of a sample of Swedish translational national anthologies focusing on Poland, Spain and France will serve as a framework for comparison. These nations have been chosen for two reasons. The first reason has to do with the fact that their main national languages (Polish, Spanish and French) occupy different positions in the world system of translations (Heilbron 1999): according to this model, French is a central language having a share of 10 percent of the translations worldwide, Spanish – just as Italian and Swedish – enjoy a semi-peripheral position with a share of 1 to 3 percent of the translations in the world, while Polish is today one of the many peripheral languages with less than 1 percent of the share of translations³. Moreover, choosing the Romance

² Even though the comparatist Daniel-Henri Pageaux already in the 1990's underscored the use of imagology in studies of cultural transfer (Pageaux 1994), the intersection between imagology and translation studies has only recently been more thoroughly examined in the volume *Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology* (Doorslaer et al. 2015), which collects several contributions on the subject. As for the intersection between translation studies and paratexts, see Urpo Kovala's seminal study "Translations, Paratextual Mediation, and Ideological Closure" (1996), which has been followed by a series of interesting works, for instance, Tahir Gürçaglar (2002), Alvstad (2012), Elefante (2012), Gil-Bardaji et al. (2012), Pellatt (2013), Batchelor (2018).

³ It should be noted however that Polish, until the fall of the Berlin Wall, was a semi-peripheral language (Sapiro, 2014, p. 85).

countries of France and Spain together with Italy could also reveal prevailing stereotypes of southern Europe. For each of these nations, a sample of five anthologies has been chosen as a means for comparison.

Anthologizing Italy: Forms and Functions of Swedish Collections

In one of his few articles concerning the *international* literary field, “Les conditions sociales de la circulation international des idées” (2002), Pierre Bourdieu argued that texts circulate without their national context, obtaining a new signification from the context of reception, which is partly visible in the new packaging. In developing this idea, Gisèle Sapiro claims that recontextualization can be used “to reinforce the more or less stereotypical representations of foreign cultures” (2008, p. 163). What does this recontextualization look like in the case of translational anthologies whose basic selection criterion is a specific nationality? And is it true that texts always lose their original context as they undergo dissemination throughout the world?

To answer these questions, I will analyze what Gerard Genette calls the *peritext* of 20 anthologies of Italian literature published in Sweden during the years 1947–2012 (see appendix). The corpus – consisting of titles, covers, blurbs, notes and prefaces – will be examined in order to categorize the form, function and images of Italy and Italians in these anthologies. As Kovala underscores, these are “very heterogeneous elements” (1996, p. 123), consisting in images, photos, illustrations, texts etc., which he conceives both as “problem” and “benefit”. From an imagological viewpoint, the advantages predominate, since images, photos and other iconic elements in the peritext interplay with the textual images appearing in blurbs and prefaces.

Form and Function of the Anthologies and Their Peritexts

The following analysis draws on Genette’s assumption that the peritext works as a threshold to the text itself and thus consists of a fruitful method for visualizing the explicit and implicit

functions of translation anthologies, including the intentions of the anthologist.

Drawing on Helga Essmann's checklist, which has been elaborated to characterize the formal structure of anthologies (1998, p. 155), the collections included in my corpus could be described as follows: a) bilateral, involving just two nations, Italy and Sweden; b) mostly monolingual: 12 in Swedish, 1 in Italian, and 7 bilingual; c) the genre is mainly poetry (12) and short stories (6), or a mix between prose and poetry (2); d) overall, the peritext is extensive; e) the selection criteria is mainly literary (concerning epoch, genre, etc.), and the arrangement of texts is basically chronological, especially with respect to poetry; f) in most cases (14 of 20), the anthologist is the translator. In addition, the publication of a majority of the anthologies has relied on some kind of involvement – often in terms of financial support – by the Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm, which suggests a more or less visible presence of the source context in the publications.

The most common type of peritext in my corpus is what Kovala distinguishes as “informative”, meaning that it is “devoted to describing the work itself and contextualizing it”, often having “long prefaces as well as blurbs and note sections” (Kovala, 1996, p. 127). Interestingly, the informative peritext was almost nonexistent in Kovala's own corpus (Anglo-American translations into Finnish in the years 1890–1930), in which it “was virtually limited to a couple of classics”.⁴ The informative peritext tries to bring the text closer to the reader (Kovala, 1996, p. 130), and not the other way around, presuming that the reader needs or desires information in order to understand the texts, which implies a vision of a readership with an almost scholarly or educational interest in Italian literature. In the following, I argue that the peritextual elements of the anthologies seem to serve mainly educational,

⁴ Based on observations of his corpus, Kovala identifies four different types of “paratexts”: the modest paratext, which has only the necessary elements (such as the title, the name of the author etc.); the commercial paratext, the purpose of which is “to advertise other books by the same publisher”; the informative paratext which is “devoted to describing the work and itself and contextualizing it”; the illustrative paratext which has strikingly many illustrations, even within the text itself (Kovala, 1996, p. 127).

preservation and innovation purposes, rather than being motivated by, say, pleasure, accessibility or profit.⁵

Titles and Covers

The informative element preponderates the titles. In all cases but two, the titles contain a part that Genette calls *rhematic*, that is, descriptive formal information (1997, p. 86–88). Most commonly, the titles in my corpus are purely rhematic, often indicating the genre, the timespan and the geolinguistic origin of the texts:

Italienska berättare från Boccaccio till Moravia
‘Italian storytellers from Boccaccio to Moravia’⁶

Modern italiensk lyrik
‘Modern Italian poetry’

Italiensk lyrik från nio sekler
‘Italian poetry from nine centuries’

As Genette points out, the use of rhematic titles is a traditional custom that is much less commonly adhered to nowadays (Genette, 1997, p. 86). In my corpus, however, rhematic titles are recurrent, at least as a part of the title. There are several cases in which the titles are double, that is, they are both rhematic and thematic, the latter referring to a title that in some way indicates the subject matter of the text (Genette, 1997, p. 78). In the following examples, the thematic part precedes the rhematic in the first two examples, and vice versa in the third:

Jorden och döden. Italiensk lyrik i översättning av Estrid Tenggren
‘Earth and Death. Italian poetry in translation by Estrid Tenggren’

Kropp mot kropp. Elva samtida italienska poeter
‘Body to body. Eleven contemporary Italian poets’

⁵ Seruya *et al.* (2013) list several possible functions and purposes for anthologies and collections: pleasure, education, preservation, innovation, protection, structuring, accessibility, dissemination, subjective and profit (2013, p. 5).

⁶ All translations from Swedish and Italian are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

Italien berättar: en förebådande dröm
 ‘Italy tells: a foreboding dream’

Later, in the imagological analysis, I will return to these thematic titles. For now, we can just note that the classical use of purely rhematic titles, on the one hand, and the double title – which is “routine for titles of scholarly works” (Genette, 1997, p. 85) – on the other, express, together with the existential connotative value of these titles (earth, death, body, foreboding dream), a sense of serious, not to say highbrow, literature. Moreover, the publishers’ names, which in most cases are those of prestigious niche publishers such as Cavefors, Cartaditalia, and Tranan, contribute to the consecration of the publications.

The front covers included in the corpus can most easily be divided into three categories: 1) covers without illustrations or photos; 2) covers with illustrations; 3) covers with photos. Whichever the three types of cover the book has, they all convey the same sublime and undisguised solemnity.

What about the back covers, which often include blurbs used explicitly for promotional strategies? Are there any blurbs in the sophisticated surroundings of Italian translational anthologies? Well, the answer depends on what is meant by blurb. Many of the publications in my corpus have some kind of text on the back cover or on the flaps, but these texts sometimes simply consist of the names of the included authors or other very laconic information. However, frequent topics in the blurbs that contain more information are: a) the position of Italian literature in Sweden, and b) hints that the book contains a piece of Italy, describing it, for instance, as a “bouquet of short stories” that provides an “irresistible scent of Italy”. This last topic stresses the Italianness of the volume and sometimes even makes an appeal to the potential tourist in the reader: “Enchanting, Italy meets the reader in this selection of Italian poetry, in love poems, nature poems and strong moods from cities like Florence and Venice” (ILN). According to Nicky van Es and Johan Heilbron, cultural exchange is relying on the following factors: geographical proximity, related languages, extensive trade transactions, professional contacts, tourism and migration across borders (in Brems *et al.* 2015, p. 15). Of these factors, tourism is the only one having an impact on the relation

between Sweden and Italy and it could be argued that this is what is being reflected in the peritext.

Prefaces

In the prefaces, selection criteria are refined, and the purposes of the anthology are sometimes presented. Most often, there is the explicit intention to include writers who are “completely unknown in Sweden” or who have “never before been translated into Swedish”, which indicates that one of the purposes is innovation, but another is to correct a situation by filling a gap. Altogether, the prefaces in the corpus comment upon several common issues: the Italian literary tradition, the richness of Italian literature, the position of Italian literature in Sweden and the highbrowness of Italian literature.

The prefaces often remind the reader of the length of the Italian literary tradition and of a time when Italy was the center of world literature: when presenting the anthology *Italienska berättare* (IB) from 1952, Anders Österling recognizes St. Francis of Assisi and Dante as “spiritual teachers and bearers of tradition” (IB, p. 9) for the contemporary writers included in the volume, and he also refers to the early grandeur of Italian literature. In the anthology of Italian Renaissance short stories, Boccaccio is mentioned no fewer than five times, even though none of his texts is included in the volume. Similarly, in my own preface to the volume *Italien berättar: en förebådande dröm* (‘Italy tells: a foreboding dream’), I mention the “ancient roots” of the short story in Italy, referring to the anonymous collection from the thirteenth century, *Il Novellino*, as well as Boccaccio’s *Decameron*.⁷ All these references to the respectable *age* of Italy’s literature should be understood in the light of what Casanova has described as the international bourse of literary capital, in which age, volume, prestige

⁷ The decision to include a volume to which I have contributed is not unproblematic. However, since the volume is one of the most important anthologies of Italian prose in recent time, I decided to include it and concentrate on the other elements of the peritext – the cover, title, blurbs and presentations of the authors – without commenting on my own preface. The quote above is the only exception from this rule.

and language are regarded as literary values (Casanova 2004, pp. 14–17). Accordingly, another topic that is closely related to the long literary tradition regards the richness (or volume) of Italian literature, which is often expressed with respect to the selection of the texts: the anthology seeks to offer a “broad spectrum” or a “map” of Italian texts, although in some cases the emphasis is on the impossibility of covering everything. Furthermore, the preface writers very often express the desire to offer a “diverse spectrum of society”, “different sides of Italian life” and “today’s Italian reality”, implicating an extra-literary, educational purpose: through the texts, the reader can learn something about Italy. This becomes more explicit in the recent anthologies published in the new millennium, while older prefaces instead stress the variety of Italian *literature* included in the volumes. Only in one case, namely the most recent issue, does the preface underscore that the explicit purpose of the anthology is to “promote Italian literature abroad” (TIF, [s.p.]). Rarely do the prefaces highlight such aspects as the universality of the texts, a lack observed in Kovala’s study of Finnish paratexts as well (Kovala, 1996, p. 137). In this respect, however, three publications deviate from the rest in that they put very little emphasis on the Italianness of the included authors, focusing instead on their aesthetic aspects. Two of the anthologies were translated by Ingamaj Beck and published by Symposion in the 1990s, and one was published by Tranan in 2008.

The weak position of Italian literature in Sweden is a recurring theme in the prefaces, and it is often addressed as a crucial reason for the origin of the anthology. This is actually another issue connecting the very first anthology in the corpus with the most recent ones: “the few famous [writers] are often represented by figures of second or third level in our scale of literary values” laments G. B. Arista (CA, p. 8), while 60 years later his successor asks rhetorically: “What does the cultivated Swedish reader of today know about the contemporary Italian novel?” (TF, p. 5)

Criticism is also directed against the Italian literary system whose poetry, according to Anders Österling, suffers from “pedantry and compulsion toward rules”, while the prose remains “provincial and regional” (IB, p. 12). Giacomo Oreglia, on the other hand, accuses Italian literature of being too hegemonic,

the fruit of an “upper-class culture” (IN, p. 8) that has mainly focused on the formal side of literary expression in order to bow to Benedetto Croce’s ideal. Even other prefaces, especially those from the 1960s, underscore the necessity of creating a distance with older literary traditions and rigorous conventions. In one of the recent postfaces, the anthology is presented as necessary in order to correct the unequal Italian system: for instance, the struggle for “balance in terms of age, gender and geographic origin” aims to “counteract the imbalance in respect to these categories that pervade the literary world in general and the Italian in particular” (FD, p. 283).

Preface Writers

The prefaces are, for natural reasons, allographic, i.e. composed by someone other than the author (cf. Genette, 1997, pp. 263–275). More surprisingly, the preface is rarely written by the translator. Only on four occasions, the preface – if there was one – was authored by the translator, and in two of these cases the name of the translator is Anders Österling, who was one of the most influential and consecrated individuals in the Swedish literary field at the time.⁸ However, the tendency is in line with the general norm in Sweden:

Prefaces are most often written by someone other than the translator. The writers of prefaces usually have a large literary capital (literary critics, literary scholars or authors), and the prefaces usually deal with the books and/or the writers, and not with the translations. (Norberg, 2012, p. 105)

In accordance to Norberg’s observation, the preface writer in the corpus investigated here is often a person within the academic world, which downplays the translators and indicates a clear desire for what Bourdieu calls “institutional consecration”. For instance, one of the most prolific translators and anthologizers of

⁸ In the twentieth century, the poet Anders Österling (1884–1981) was one of the foremost translators, mediators and critics of Italian literature in Sweden. He was also a member of the Swedish Academy and its permanent secretary in the years 1941–1964.

Italian poetry in the 1960s, Estrid Tenggren, never presented her three collections herself: two of them lack in prefaces, while the third was written by Paolo Ravacchioli, an Italian lecturer at the University of Lund. Additionally, in 12 of the anthologies, the prefaces were authored by Italian academics, who were active within universities or other cultural institutions in Italy or Sweden. Once again, the preponderance of Italian preface writers highlights the presence of the source context in the Swedish anthologies. As we have seen in my corpus, the Italian context is actually explicitly present in the prefaces and in the preface writers' perspectives. Moreover, the presence of the source context is sometimes visible even in other parts of the editions: for instance, 6 of the 20 anthologies were published directly by the Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm, and 2 more publications had as their anthologist Giacomo Oreglia, who was closely connected to the same institute. These editions are often bilingual, not only with respect to the literary texts, but also to the peritext (prefaces, presentation texts and even promotional material are bilingual). The Italian influence is persistent over time: it is significant that the very first anthology in my corpus, from 1947, is monolingual, not in Swedish, but in Italian, and promoted by one of the initiative takers of the Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm, G. B. Arista. The issues of the culture magazine *Cartaditalia*, both of which were published in 2009, were also promoted by the Cultural Institute, and the publications were bilingual. The strong Italian influence exerted upon these anthologies somewhat contradicts Bourdieu's assumption that literature is exported without its context.

Images of Italy and Italians

The Italian involvement in the new context, in addition to the tendency to promote Italian literature as highbrow, should all in all constitute poor soil for the growth of national stereotypes and clichés about Italy and Italians, since "the celebration of nationally and ethnically branded 'differences' (...) have been niche-marketed as commercialized 'identities'" (Apter, 2013, p. 2).

In this respect, imagology offers a fruitful perspective, in that it examines literary representations of nations and nationalities, so-called *images* that form an *imagined discourse*. The latter has been defined as: "a specific set of characterizations and attributes

outside the area of testable report sentences or statements of fact” (Leerssen, 2007, p. 27). For instance, the statement “France is a republic” is a testable fact, and therefore it is not imagined, while statements such as “Paris is the capital of French elegance” and “The French are freedom-loving individualists” are imagined:

Generally, imagined discourse [a] singles out a nation from the rest of humanity as being somehow different or ‘typical’, and [b] articulates or suggests a moral, collective-psychological motivation for given social or national features. Imagined discourse is specifically concerned with the characterological explanation of cultural difference. (Leerssen, 2007, p. 28)

Could stereotypes and simple clichés exist even in a corpus of serious anthologies where preservation, education and innovation are key factors? In order to answer this question, the peritextual corpus has been compared to the images of Italy and Italians that the imagologist Manfred Beller has identified from centuries of European travel writing⁹ (Beller, 2007, pp. 194–200):

1. Ancient Rome. The admiration for the glory of ancient Rome that reflects adversely on contemporary Italy.
2. Religion. A cluster of negative stereotypes derives from a protestant critique of Catholicism together with literary representations of poverty and banditry. The Gothic novel set in Italy represented the country as “clerical, half-occult, perfidious and dangerous” (2007, p. 195).
3. Fine arts. On the positive side, there is Italians’ love of the fine arts, music, theater and, more recently, cinema.
4. Landscape. The image of Italy is largely constructed through the image of its landscapes and city silhouettes, including visual tropes.
5. Region. The image of Italy “remains strongly differentiated by region”, especially with respect to the socioeconomic differences between the northern and southern parts of the country.

⁹ Obviously, these images are constructions and artifacts reflecting a north European view on Italy. The images would probably have looked quite differently if they would have been produced from other perspectives.

In addition, an image connected to the beauty of Italian landscape and fine arts is the contrast between aesthetic beauty and the inhabitants' immorality – Italy has actually been described as “a paradise occupied by devils”. Altogether, these images seem to rely on an ambivalent concept of Italy and Italians. As Beller states, “nineteenth-century travel descriptions continue to list, side by side, positive and negative qualities” (Beller, 2007, p. 197). To what extent do these images appear in the peritext of anthologies of Italian literature? The most apparent image visible in the peritext is the Italian landscape.

Despite their sober designs, the front covers of the anthologies feature some stereotypical visual tropes: palm trees, ancient temples and famous urban silhouettes, as well as cats on roof tiles and laundry hanging from lines between picturesque houses. The sea, the cliffs and, in particular, the red, hot sun are visible even in the more abstract illustrations; these elements are frequent in the covers from the 1960s, a period in which the tourism industry in Italy exploded. In addition, the range of colors is often warm, and different combinations of the colors of the Italian flag are frequent. As for the titles, the national and/or linguistic connection is often present via the adjective *Italian*. In three cases where it is missing, the titles instead refer to the landscape or the sea: *Roman trio*, *Trio in a pastoral landscape*, *The pearl oyster*.¹⁰ Moreover, in the prefaces, the topography is used as a metaphor for Italian literature, both generally, as in the following formulation: “from the vast expanses of the terra incognita that is contemporary Italian reality” (TF, p. 7) and more specifically, as when one anthologist summarizes his overall impression of the Italian art of storytelling by reproducing a verbal image of the Spanish Steps in Rome (IB, pp. 12–13). Another preface assures the reader of obtaining a view that tourists never get: “We will bring [the readers] to [...] a Campania and Sicily that do not know the sea” (TF, p. 7). Furthermore, Italy's uniqueness does not lie only in the beauty of the landscape. A recurring theme in the prefaces and blurbs is the complexity of the country and its literature, which makes them difficult to capture. Therefore, as stated in one of the recent

¹⁰ These are my translations of the following titles: *Romersk trio*, *Trio i ett pastoralt landskap* and *Pärlemusslan*.

anthologies, the book can be used as “a kind of map to explore the vast and manifold land masses that is the contemporary Italian novel” (TIF, [s.p.]). According to Cecilia Alvstad, who has analyzed the peritext of Swedish anthologies of non-European literature, “[t]he focus on geography is a discursive strategy employed by publishers, marketing and critics. A complementary strategy is to focus on universal values and common ground” (2012, p. 87). In the case of Italian anthologies, this complementary strategy is absent, which paradoxically might be explained by the fact that Italy is felt to be so well known to the Swedish reader that the peritext seeks to underscore the differences and local qualities of Italian literature.

The depiction of Italy as a multifaceted and complex nation is projected onto its literature, which is highlighted for its many contrasts. The images based on contrasts are very frequent in all the elements of the corpus, as they appear, for instance, in some of the thematic titles, such as *A foreboding dream*, a title that connotes threats and promises, a contrast that is further emphasized in the postface:

Italy is a contradictory country – it flaunts its beauty, art and ancient cultural traditions despite its being thoroughly corrupt, poor and heavily commercialized (FD, pp. 284).

Similar suggestive images that should be distinguished from reported facts occur in blurbs and prefaces like the following ones:

We get to know the bad conditions and the abuses of society described through compassion or cold lucidity. We experience excruciating aridity and biting snow. (IN, blurb)

But even in the grayest weather the grenade flower flares as bright red as blood (IB, p. 12)

The feeling for life is hot, but dark; man’s inner problems are not eased by the blue sky (EB, p. 12)

(...) from the dark songs of the uprising to the light tunes of reconciliation (TP, p. 5)

After having stressed the fact that it would be risky to try to “establish some kind of national traits”, Anders Österling, in one

of his prefaces, states that “Italy’s voice has shifted greatly; for more than a thousand years it has sounded powerfully expressive and rich in contrast” (IB, p. 9).

Another prominent and contrasting image particularly revealed in the presentations of the authors in the analyzed corpus regards the differences between the northern and the southern part of the country. In these texts, it is frequently reported where the authors were born, especially when they originated in Southern Italy. For instance, in the preface to the anthology of Renaissance short stories, Masuccio Salernitano is described as an “incredibly combative”, “impetuous and passionate storyteller” with “reckless and aggressive expressions, and one senses in him the impulsive and biased temper of the Southern Italian” (IRN, p. 9). The description may well be compared to that of Matteo Bandello, who explicitly “represents the North” and is characterized as “extremely broad-minded” with a “far-reaching tolerance” (IRN, p. 10). In one of the anthologies from 2009, which makes a point of involving writers of different classes, genders and geographical origins, only 2 of the 14 authors were born in Southern Italy. These two writers are tied closely to their origin: Vanessa Ambrosecchio has “given Sicily a voice”, while Valeria Parrella’s represents Naples, which is described as antithetic: “a chaotic city, full of violence, drug trafficking and crime but also of exclusive art-galleries and dramatic love stories” (FD, p. 289). Obviously, Italy’s “internal orientalism” (Schneider 1998), *i.e.* the discursive practices that present Southern Italy as a problem and Italians from the south as different from those of the north, has been imported into the receiving culture.

To conclude, the corpus, even though it is composed only of peritextual material, holds many generic assumptions about Italy, Italians and Italian literature. One common strategy in the earlier anthologies is to connect literature and stereotypes of Italian national character:

“The short, loaded form suits the Italian temper extremely well”
(IB, p. 12)

“The desire to narrate is deeply characteristic of the Italian people”
(IB, p. 10)

“[D’Annunzio] included and represented such an array of typical Italian virtues and vices” (MIL, p. 13)

“The Italians had not, I would dare say, the courage to be futurists” (MIL, p. 17)

This does not continue after the 1960s, and the two poetry collections published in the 1990s are introduced by prefaces that make no connection at all to Italy or Italians.

To summarize, an imagological analysis of the peritexts in my corpus has shown that Swedish anthologies of Italian literature, despite their elegant designs and the influence of intercultural actors with academic titles, recycle clichés and national stereotypes to a remarkably great extent. They contribute to the long-lived idea that Italy is full of contradictions or, as one of the anthologists puts it, “a multi-faceted country where anything could happen” (FD, p. 284).

Images of Poland, Spain and France in Translational Anthologies

Is the tendency to underscore the diversity and variety of a nation’s literature based on contrasting images exclusive to Italian anthologies? Could it not be a common trope, typical of the anthology genre, which has to do with the very nature of collections, i.e. the aim to present an overview of another nation’s literature? In order to answer these questions, the following paragraph analyzes the peritext in a sample of Swedish translational anthologies from three other nations: Spain, France and Poland.

Anthologies of Literature from Poland

The sample of translational anthologies of Polish literature ranges from years 1972 to 2005 and includes five volumes.¹¹ Already in the titles it can be observed that the thematic parts have

¹¹ The anthologies are: *Och skuggorna blir längre. En antologi från krigets Polen* [‘And the shadows become longer. An anthology from Poland during the war’] (1972); *Du måste vittna. Poesi och reportage från Polen* [‘You have to witness. Poetry and reportages from Poland’] (1981); *Från andra sidan. En antologi med texter av polska författare i Sverige* [‘From the other side. An anthology with texts by Polish writers in Sweden’] (1997);

somewhat dark connotations: *shadows, war, witness, the other side* and *umbilical cord in the ground*. Differently from the case of oxymoronic Italy, Poland and Polish literature do not seem to be associated with any positive, romantic or sensual aspects at all.¹² If mysticism, honor, idealism and messianism were elements of Polish auto- and hetero-images before and during Romanticism, it seems clear that the Swedish anthologies from the last decades rather reinforce another old and persistent trope of “victimized, suffering Poland” (Gerrits & Leerssen, 2007, p. 218).

This trope recurs more or less explicitly in the prefaces and/or back cover blurbs of all the titles of my corpus. *Och skuggorna blir längre. En antologi från krigets Polen* (1972) (‘And the shadows become longer. An anthology from Poland during the war’) is very explicit, stating that the purpose of the volume is to “show what fascism can do to a subdued people” (1972: 9). The dark and tragic aspects of Poland’s twentieth-century history are underscored in all the prefaces – the holocaust, Soviet occupation, communism, censorship, persecutions, oppression, exile. Only on one occasion is there a tendency to draw attention to diversity and contrasts. In the poetry collection *17 Polska poeter* (2003), Irena Grönberg describes the poets included in the volume as “classicists and everyday-reporters, religious brooders and humourists” (2003, p. 6), and the anthology itself is referred to as a poetic archipelago with manifold islands. It is noteworthy, however, that these varieties regard the poets and their poetic residence, and not the Poles nor Poland.

Even though the sufferings of the Poles, unfortunately, are historical facts rather than just imagined discourse, the strong focus on the nation’s suffering should *also* be conceived as the choice of a certain trope. This becomes more evident in comparison with the Italian corpus, in which the two decades of the fascist regime, the German occupation and the terrorism in the 1970s and ’80s are only rarely mentioned in the peritexts. I argue that the difference between the selected images and tropes in

17 polska poeter [‘17 Polish poets’] (2003); *Polen berättar: Navelsträngen i jorden* [‘Poland tells: the umbilical cord in the ground’] (2005).

¹² This is reflected in the selection of the colors for the covers as well: they are all soberly blue, beige, white or grey, sometimes with a small red detail, which could signal both communism and the red of the Polish flag.

the case of Poland and Italy, at least to some extent, has to do with Swedish *hetero-images* of the two nations: Italy as a colorful and oxymoronic dreamland; Poland as a gray and suffering country, victim of many oppressors. Obviously, the chosen tropes also imply an *auto-image* of Sweden as the homeland of moderation (in contrast to Italy) and freedom (in contrast to Poland).

Anthologies of Literature from Spain

The inventory of Swedish anthologies from Spain showed a surprisingly narrow timespan: of the six volumes found, five were published in the years 1959–1966.¹³ The explanation for this abandonment seems clear enough: beginning in the 1970s, Swedish translations from Spanish changed focus from Spain to Latin America, whose literature had been rather neglected in Sweden. In the period from 1959 to 1966, however, there were five anthologies focusing on authors from Spain, and all but one of these are marked by the political situation during the Franco regime. Three of these anthologies use the peritext – title, cover design and preface – to highlight the desperate political dimension of the publication: *Själén tjuiter* (‘the soul is howling’) from 1959 is a poetry anthology with a black and red cover; *Det svarta Spanien* (‘the black Spain’) is also red and black, while *Vredgade vittnen* (‘furious witnesses’) is adorned with a cover in black and white, representing, in an expressionist manner, the face of a crying or shouting person.

All publications but one have prefaces in which the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship are addressed in the prefaces. One of the collections, *Spanska berättare* (1963), is distinguished from the rest in that it does not even mention *civil war*, *fascist regime*, *ensorship* or *oppression*. The anthologist, university lecturer Mateo Pastor-López, instead focuses on the tradition of the Spanish short story, which, according to him, contributed

¹³ The examined anthologies are: *Själén tjuiter* [‘The soul is howling’] (1959), *Spanska berättare* [‘Spanish storytellers’] (1963), *Moderna spanska noveller* [‘Modern Spanish short stories’] (1964), *Det svarta Spanien* [‘Black Spain’] (1966), *Vredgade vittnen* [‘Furious witnesses’] (1966). The sixth volume, *Generation 27!* (1996), which has not been taken into consideration, was an anthology of poetry from Spain, focusing on authors from the early 20th century, the so-called “generation of ’27”.

largely to subsequent and more elaborate works of short stories such as Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Interestingly, this is the only volume that draws on national clichés about Spain and Spaniards: firstly, the red-yellow-black front cover is adorned with an illustration of a woman with a mantilla and a hand fan, presenting a proud look to a young, elegantly dressed man pictured from behind, and secondly, the preface disseminates typically north European clichés about southern temperament, for instance, when Pastor-López states that the short story receives its form from the “authors’ temperament and feeling”, and, therefore, “the objective, emotionless and impersonally coloured short story is less recurrent in Spain” (1963, p. 8).

The same focus on great contrasts of personalities, as observed in the Italian corpus, is not as visible in the anthologies focusing on Spain. On one occasion, however, the preface writer says, about Lorca: “the conflict between worship of life and sense of death, that seem so typically Spanish” (1966, p. 9). Another difference that can be observed comparing the Italian corpus to the Spanish is that the former is less anchored in political and historical events than the corpus of texts from Spain.

Anthologies of Literature from France

The centrality of France as a cultural and literary nation in Sweden is confirmed when considering the number of anthologies focusing on the country, especially in comparison with Spain. While many translational anthologies from Spanish originate from Latin-American countries, France has maintained its hegemony as a source text nation over other Francophone nations. The most common theme in the prefaces of the six anthologies in the corpus¹⁴ is definitely the *richness* of French literature in comparison to Swedish literature. This issue is often explicitly pronounced: “the over rich field of French poetry” (1951, p. 5), “French literature is so tremendously much older and richer than ours that

¹⁴ *En bukett fransk lyrik* [‘a bouquet of French poetry’](1951), *Berömda franska berättare* [‘Famous French storytellers’](1957), *Boulevard och fågelsträck* [‘Boulevards and flight of birds’](1984), *Franska landskap från Ronsard till Rimbaud* [‘French landscapes from Ronsard to Rimbaud’] (2003), *Frankrike berättar: Där vi står nu* [‘France tells: Where we stand now’] (2014).

an orientation is hardly allowed to be made” (1957, p. 7), “the richness and diversity that the French poetry possesses” (2003, p. 12), “the great river of the last decade’s poetry in France” (1984, p. 6), “[the anthology] do not claim to cover the flora of French-language writers today” (2014, p. 10).

Even though the most common picture of France in the examined volumes is that of an extremely wealthy literary nation, there are two prefaces that also underscore this powerful nation’s negative sides. In the anthology entitled *Boulevarder och fågelsträck* (‘boulevards and flight of birds’), from 1984, the preface focuses on the dominance of Paris and French writers’ scheming for the critics of the capital: “It is a world filled with envy and wheedling. And it is a very small world, that of the Parisian litterateurs, not at all larger than its Swedish counterpart” (1984, p. 9). Similarly, in the most recent collection, *Frankrike berättar: Där vi står nu* (‘France tells: Where we stand now’), from 2014, it is claimed that France’s former glory is precariously slanting.

The prefaces of French anthologies are the only ones among the chosen nations that thematize the contrasts in a way similar to that which was observed for their Italian counterparts. Prominent Swedish poet Gunnar Ekelöf is the one who draws the most from the contrasts of France and French people in his preface to the anthology *Berömda franska berättare* (‘Famous French storytellers’), dedicating a great part of the text to establish the French “national character” (1957, p. 9). In order to accomplish this task, he describes the nation as both Catholic and free-minded, and, paradoxically, both conservative and modern (1957, pp. 8–10). Ekelöf also states that “it is the country of opposites” (1957, p. 9). Furthermore, in the aforementioned volume from 1984, the title of which already indicates a contrast between the boulevards of Paris and the flight of birds in the countryside, it is stressed in the preface that the anthology aims to embrace “the tension between the big city and the countryside, the myths about both, the contrasts between them, the simultaneosity” (1984, p. 9). Finally, the anthology from 2014 is another example of how the shifting character of France is thematized:

A France, which with its history of colonial great power and revolutionary heritage, its faltering economy and political

stagnation, its countryside under depletion and its cities under expansion, continuously fluctuate and changes colour depending on where you look. And who is doing it. And from where (2014, pp. 9–10).

Concluding Remarks

This survey has shown that literature does not always travel *without* its source context, as Bourdieu once claimed. Except for France, the Swedish translational national anthologies in my corpus include publications that are explicitly and evidently influenced by mediators originating from the source text nation. However, this influence turns out to be much more frequent in the Italian case, due to the recurrent contributions from the Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm. This indicates the importance of the Italian state and its 83 cultural institutes spanning the globe in promoting and sustaining literary circulation – a phenomenon that definitely merits more scholarly attention than it has received in the past.

When it comes to the imagological analysis of Italian anthologies, the results suggest that elements surrounding the text – the peritext – tend to reinforce national stereotypes. Out of 20 anthologies, only one does not draw at all from already existing cultural representations of Italy and Italians. Actually, all the images listed by Beller emerge to a more or less great extent in my corpus. This indicates that even when the source context is present, national clichés continue to be recycled. The image that preponderates, however, is that Italy is a contradictory nation, fascinating because of its many contrasts. I consider this focus on contrasts – which, interestingly enough, has not subsided with time – as the perpetuation of the antithetic images of Italy listed by Beller. Actually, I suggest that the image of Italy as a nation of contrasts *is a trope in itself*, which recurs even when the author seems aware of the difficulty of categorizing literature in terms of nationality (cf. IB, p. 9).

The same oxymoronic trope was much less common in the anthologies focusing on Poland and Spain, which also concentrated more frequently on issues regarding politics. Instead of dwelling

on the suffering of Italian people in the last century, the analyzed peritexts chose other perspectives, which might have to do with the great presence of the source culture in the publications. On the other hand, less emphasis on the nation's politics unite Italian and French peritexts, focusing on the richness of these national literatures and sometimes even formulating critical opinions on their literary hegemony. To summarize, Italian literature is presented and treated more similarly to the central language area (French) than it is to the (semi-)peripheral languages Spanish and Polish. The images of Italy and Italians are, however, the most stereotypical, and their focus on contrasting elements perpetuate a tenacious vision of Italy as an anomaly.

References

- Alvstad, C. (2012). "The Strategic Moves of Paratexts: World Literature through Swedish Eyes." *Translation Studies* 5 (1), pp. 78–94.
- Apter, E. (2013). *Against World Literature. On the Politics of Untranslatability*. London, New York: Verso.
- Batchelor, K. (2018). *Translation and Paratexts*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Beller, M. & Leerssen, J. (eds.). (2007). *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters. A Critical Survey*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi.
- Beller, M. (2007). "Italians", in Beller, M. & Leerssen, J. (eds.) *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters. A Critical Survey*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, pp. 194–200.
- Bourdieu, P. (2002). "Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol 145, décembre 2002, pp. 3–8.
- Brems, E., Réthelyi, O., van Kalmthout T. (eds.) (2017). *Doing Double Dutch. The International Circulation of Literature from the Low Countries* (pp. 67–91). Leuven: Leuven University Press.
- Casanova, P. (2004). *The World Republic of Letters*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

- van Doorslaer, L., Flynn, P. and Leerssen, J. (eds.) (2015). *Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Elefante, C. (2012). *Traduzione e paratesto*. Bologna: Bononia University Press.
- Essmann, H. (1998). "Weltliteratur Between Two Covers: Forms and Functions of German Translation Anthologies," in Mueller-Vollmer, K. and Irmischer, M. (eds.) *Translating Literatures, Translating Cultures. New Vistas and Approaches in Literary Studies*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, pp. 149–163.
- Genette, G. (1997). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gerrits, A. & Leerssen, J. (2007). Poles, in Beller, M. and Leerssen, J. (eds.) *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters. A Critical Survey*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi. pp. 216–219.
- Gil-Bardají, A., Orero, P. and Rovira-Esteva, S. (eds.). (2012). *Translation Peripheries: Paratextual Elements in Translation*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Heilbron, J. (1999). "Towards a Sociology of Translation. Book Translations as a Cultural World-System," *European Journal of Social Theory* 2/4, pp. 429–444.
- Jansen, H. (2015). "Bel Paese or Spaghetti Noir? The Image of Italy in Contemporary Italian fiction Translated into Danish," in van Doorslaer, L., Flynn, P. and Leerssen, J. (eds.) *Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology* (eds.). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 163–179.
- Kovala, U. (1996). "Translations, Paratextual Mediation, and Ideological Closure," *Target* 8:1, pp. 119–147.
- Leerssen, J. (2007). "Imagology: History and method," in *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters. A Critical Survey*. (Beller, M. & Leerssen, J., eds.). Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, pp. 17–32.
- Norberg, U. (2012). "Literary Translator's Comments on Their Translations in Prefaces and Afterwords: The Case of

- Contemporary Sweden,” in Gil-Bardají, A., Orero, P. and Rovira-Esteva, S. (eds.) *Translation Peripheries: Paratextual Elements in Translation*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 101–116.
- Pageaux, D-H. (1994). *La littérature générale et comparée*. Paris: Colin.
- Pellatt, V. (ed.) (2013). *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Sapiro, G. (2008). “Translation and the Field of Publishing. A Commentary on Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘A Conservative Revolution in Publishing’.” *Translation Studies* 1:2, pp. 154–166.
- (2014). “The Sociology of Translation. A New Research Domain,” in Bermann, S. and Porter, C. (eds.) *A Companion to Translation Studies*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 82–94.
- Schneider, J. (1998). *Italy’s Southern Question. Orientalism in One Country*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Seruya, T. et al. (2013). *Translation in Anthologies and Collections*. Benjamins Translation Library. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Tahir Gürçaglar, Ş. (2002). “What Texts don’t Tell. The Uses of Paratexts in Translation Research,” in Hermans, T. (ed.) *Crosscultural Transgressions. Research Models in Translation Studies II. Historical and Ideological Issues*. Manchester UK and Northampton MA: St Jerome Publishing, pp. 44–60.

Appendix: anthologies of Italian literature published in Sweden

See Appendix table on next page.

Year	Title (and the abbreviation used in the text)	Cover	Cover blurb/ flap text	Author(s) of preface and/or other texts	Publisher
1947	Cento anni. Pagine di prosa e poesia moderna (CA)	no illustration	No	Giovanni Battista Arista	Jan förlag
1952	Italienska berättare från Boccaccio till Moravia (IB)	illustration	Yes	Anders Österling	Bonniers
1954	En bukett italiensk lyrik (EB)	illustration	No	Anders Österling	Natur & Kultur
1961	Italienska noveller (IN)	illustration	Yes	Giacomo Oreglia	Gebers
1961	Italienska renässansnoveller (IRN)	illustration	Yes	Adamaría Terziani	Bergendahls
1961	Jorden och döden (JD)	illustration	Yes	No preface	Bo Cavefors Förlag
1962	Klassisk italiensk lyrik (KIL)	no illustration	Yes	Giacomo Oreglia	Italica
1964	Modern italiensk lyrik (MIL)	no illustration	Yes	Giancarlo Vigorelli	Italica
1964	Italiensk lyrik (IL1)	illustration	Yes	Paolo Ravacchioli	FiB:s Lyrikklubb
1965	Italiensk lyrik från nio sekler (ILN)	no illustration	Yes	Anders Österling	Bonniers
1968	Elementära tankar (ET)	no illustration	Yes	No preface	Bo Cavefors Förlag
1970	Italiensk lyrik (IL2)	no illustration	No	No preface	Bonniers
1974	Pärlemusslan (PM)	no illustration	Yes	Sture Axelsson	Zinderman
1995	Trio i ett pastoralt landskap (TP)	photo	Yes	Ingamaj Beck	Symposion
1998	Romersk trio (RT)	photo	Yes	Luigi Reina	Symposion

2008	Med ord och utan (MOU)	no illustration	No	Agneta Plejfel	Tranan
2009	Italien berättar: en föreåldande dröm (FD)	photo	Yes	Cecilia Schwartz, Ida Andersen	Tranan
2009	Tio författare, ett land. Italienska romaner av idag (TF)	photo	No	Paolo Grossi, Domenico Scarpa	Italienska Kulturinstitutet ¹
2009	Kropp mot kropp: elva samtida italienska poeter (KK)	illustration	No	Paolo Grossi, Martin Rueff	Italienska Kulturinstitutet
2012	Tolv italienska författare att upptäcka (TIF)	no illustration	Yes	Paolo Grossi	Italienska Kulturinstitutet/ Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori ²

¹ This anthology is actually an issue of the journal *Cartaditalia* published by the Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm. However, since the journal was very similar to anthologies in that it did not include anything else apart from the prefaces, author presentations and the literary texts, it was important not to exclude them from the corpus.

² This volume was published for two international book fairs, in Gothenburg and in Tokyo, in 2012. Even though it had all the elements of an anthology (preface, author presentations and translated texts) it was not published for the market. However, according to the information in the preface there should be an e-book version available on the webpage www.bookrepublic.it

Re-Imported Literature or Double Domestication: *Shizuko's Daughter* by Kyoko Mori

Hiroko Inose

Dalarna University

Introduction

When Kyoko Mori's novel *Shizuko's Daughter* (originally published in U.S. in 1993) was translated and published in Japan in 1995, the following copy was written on its cover: "A work of new, re-imported Japanese literature: Kyoko Mori writes a story of love in Kobe, a city full of beautiful flowers – it touches your soul¹." The original English version had won such awards as the ALA Best Book for Young Adults and New York Times Notable Book. The Japanese translation was also successful, so in 1999, it was reprinted as paperback. The translation was by Makiko Ikeda, given that Mori apparently had "refused" (Masubuchi, 1996, p. 94) to translate the novel into Japanese herself.

Whether the expression "New, re-imported Japanese literature" was appropriate or not, it definitely marked the beginning of a new phenomenon in the Japanese literary landscape, which would later be called *ekkyo bungaku* (literature that crosses the border). The genre includes works written in Japanese by non-Japanese authors, as well as works written by Japanese authors but in non-Japanese languages. The term *ekkyo bungaku* is not

¹ My translation from Japanese: 史上初、逆輸入の新しい日本文学 美しい花に彩られた神戸を背景にキョウコ・モリが綴る魂を揺さぶる愛の物語

How to cite this book chapter:

Inose, H. 2021. Re-Imported Literature or Double Domestication: *Shizuko's Daughter* by Kyoko Mori. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 255–274. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.1>. License: CC-BY 4.0

clearly defined, and it sometimes also includes non-Japanese authors writing about fiction that takes place in Japan (e.g. Ogawa, 2009, p. 115), thus indicating that the “border” to be crossed is not only language, but culture as well.

The author Kyoko Mori was born in Kobe (Japan) in 1957 and grew up there until the age of 20, when she moved to U.S. for her studies. She did not go back to Japan for 13 years, and by the time she published her first novel, *Shizuko's Daughter*, she had already become an American citizen, writing her works in English. However, the Japanese market seems to have received the novel as a part of Japanese literature (Masubuchi, 1996). As the abovementioned copy “New, re-imported Japanese literature” indicates, the publisher intended to sell it as “literature that came back” to Japan, something new and yet familiar at the same time. The novel had a different reception in Japanese literary academia however, where the author was positioned as an ethnic minority writer within U.S. literature. She is often criticized for recreating exoticism about Japan, writing according to the expectations held by American readers (Narasaki 2005; Watanabe 2009).

But if the novel simply reproduces stereotypical images of Japan and Japanese people held by American readers, as some researchers argue, should that not be perceived by Japanese readers as unnatural description of their own society and culture, – and why, then, was it so successful in Japan? Was there any role played by the translation for the text to be more easily acceptable by Japanese readers? For this text to first cross the cultural border to the U.S., and then to cross the language border back to Japan, what had to happen? These questions seem to be relevant if we see how the novel was received in U.S., where it was highly recommended to young readers as learning material about a different culture (Zitlow and Stover, 1998). So, on the one hand, the novel is expected to offer authentic information about Japanese culture and people. On the other hand, the information provided there has been criticized in Japanese academia for catering to western expectations. Finally, the Japanese version was not presented to the market as an example of how Japan was seen abroad, but as a story of love (between mother and daughter) in Kobe, as the copy stated. In other words, it was presented like any other story

that takes place in Japan written by a Japanese writer (though in fact she was already an American national), but originally written in English.

The present paper focuses on the novel *Shizuko's Daughter* as a case study of the text crossing borders at various times – culturally from Japan to U.S. and linguistically from English to Japanese – but the original English version being written by an author whose native language was (at least at one point) Japanese. After the introduction, a brief outline of the novel is given, pointing out its closeness to an autobiography, and therefore the possibility of the author's language choice being related to the issue of personal identity. Part three will discuss how this novel is positioned within the literary spheres of Japan and the U.S., thus creating different expectations to fulfil. Part four studies the translation of the text into Japanese. Using various examples, it will analyse the role of translation in fulfilling gaps that occur in the case of re-imported texts. The fifth part is the conclusion, which reconsiders the meaning of texts travelling back and forth between cultures and languages.

Shizuko's Daughter

Shizuko's Daughter is a work of fiction, though there are many elements that overlap with the life of the author. The protagonist, Yuki, is a 12-year-old girl who lives in Kobe, a city in the western part of Japan. At the beginning of the novel, Yuki's mother Shizuko commits suicide at home. Shizuko leaves a note to her daughter assuring that she loves her and kills herself in order not to be a burden for her. Shizuko had been deeply unhappy because her husband Hideki had been having an affair for many years and was almost never at home. Neither could she get a divorce, as it was customary in Japan in the 1970s to leave the children with their father, given that women often did not have a profession or financial independence. A divorce would have meant that she would lose Yuki.

Soon after Shizuko's death Hideki remarries his lover, and Yuki has to live with her father and new stepmother. Yuki's father and stepmother are depicted as caricatures of men and women in the Japanese traditional patriarchal system, with its internalised

sexism, and are living lies in order to keep face. Yuki cannot get over the death of Shizuko, who was so different from the stepmother in her character – Shizuko was sincere, artistic and wise. Yuki does not forgive the father who caused Shizuko's death, and refuses to forget the past, rejecting contact with her parents. This repulsion is mutual, especially between Yuki and her stepmother, who often gets hysterical. Yuki is alone in the house without love or care. The only refuge is Shizuko's family, Yuki's grandparents, aunt and uncles – but her father and stepmother forbid Yuki to see them except on rare special occasions. They do not want others to think Yuki is missing her late mother's family because of uncaring parents. Yuki, who shows excellent performance at school, decides to leave home as soon as she graduates from high school, by choosing to go to a university in Nagasaki, far away from Kobe. The story ends with Yuki finally being able to leave the past behind – moving into adulthood carrying the memory of Shizuko but not being dominated by it.

Though it is a novel, the similarities between the lives of Mori and Yuki are undeniable. Mori's mother died of suicide when Mori was 12 years old. In her autobiography, *The Dream of Water* (1995), Mori explains how her mother, Takako, must have even considered killing her two children (Mori and her younger brother) and herself in order to escape from her profound unhappiness. After Takako's death, Mori's father soon remarried his long-time lover, and Mori lived with him and the stepmother until she left Japan for the U.S. at the age of 20. This move was not only to study abroad for several years, but Usui (2002, p. 61) states, "Mori herself confesses that she possesses neither father nor country, nor a close family, since her home country is controlled by the patriarchy from which she is culturally exiled". It was a decision to leave the past and cut the unwanted roots. She did not go back to Japan for the next 13 years, and even that return, after so many years, was only a several-week visit connected to her work.

Various studies point out (e.g. Masubuchi 1996; Watanabe 2006) the autobiographical characteristic of *Shizuko's Daughter*. This characteristic might be an important element when we consider the author's choice of language.

Mori herself comments that she only considers herself an American, and not a Japanese writer, as she writes only in English

and does not identify with the Japanese literary tradition (Mori, 2000, p. 141). Her choice of language, though, might not only be based on the fact that she had studied literature and was trained to be a writer in English. She comments very negatively on the sexism and ambiguity (and therefore dishonesty) embedded in her once-native language, Japanese. She claims that the feminine Japanese language used in daily communication forces her to be “elaborately polite, indirect, submissive and unassertive”, and that “(T)here is no way I can sound intelligent, clearheaded, or decisive.” She describes how she never talks to a male Japanese colleague in Japanese, as: “(T)he language I use should not automatically define me as second best” (Mori, 1997, p. 12).

This strong accusation against the Japanese language could be one of the reasons for Mori to choose another language to express herself. For bilingual authors, the choice of language is deeply related to their identity, especially when writing autobiographies (Pavlenko 2001; Inose 2016), and it might apply to Mori as well. Mori is known to have refused to translate the novel into Japanese herself (Masubuchi, 1996, p. 94; Watanabe, 2006, p. 47). This might simply be due to the fact that she was no longer used to writing in Japanese, and as Narasaki (2005, p. 76) suggests, the accuracy and the depth of her knowledge of the Japanese language was questionable. However, it also seems possible that the author found that she could not self-translate her identity as expressed in one language into another, as this would require her to express the other part of herself that she had decided to leave behind when she left Japan. If the part of her identity constructed in the Japanese language does not have a connection with another part of her identity constructed later with the acquisition of the new language and new culture, as she explains in one of her works (Mori, 1997, p. 4), is it possible to replicate the thoughts and experiences expressed in one language again in another? Maybe it was only possible by a third translator, for whom it was not “my story”.

“Hearts of Non-Western People” or “Stereotypes”?

As was discussed in Part two, Mori writes as an American writer, and her works are studied as a part of literature produced by

bilingual authors (Pavlenko 2001), immigrant literature (Watanabe 2006, 2009; Kobayashi 2013) and Japanese-American literature (Zitlow and Stover 1998; Narasaki 2005), both in US and Japan. And yet, as was mentioned in the introduction, in Japan her work was presented by the publisher (and would have been received by some readers) as a part of Japanese literature. In this section, we will see various images and expectations surrounding *Shizuko's Daughter*, which at times seem to be contradicting each other.

It would be helpful to look at some paratexts, such as cover, title, table of contents or glossary, as they “implicitly convey information about the publisher’s intention and contribute to form the image of Other” (Rovira-Esteva, 2016, p. 190). The original English hardcover (First Ballantine Books Edition: New York) shows an image that gives away some messages. It is a photograph of an Asian (supposedly Japanese) girl in blue *kimono*, sitting on a stone with a sad expression on her face. The photograph looks very old, due to her extremely simple hairstyle, her *kimono*, and her face without makeup. However, the story takes place mainly in 1970s Kobe, and daily wear for both men and women had long been completely westernised. The protagonist, Yuki, does not wear a *kimono* even once in the story. This anachronism could be a reflection of what is expected of Japan as told in the story.

The English version has a glossary of Japanese cultural terms used in the story, such as *futon* or *tempura*. However, it is surprising that it has only eight entries including some historical terms already translated into English (e.g. “land reform”). Considering that the entire story takes place in Japan, an extremely small number of Japanese cultural terms are used. There is also a short note on the setting, which provides brief explanations about Japanese geography (Kobe, Nagasaki, etc.) and the school year (from April to March). These sections are attempts to make another culture described in the novel as accessible as possible to readers in the U.S. The very small number of Japanese cultural terms used indicates that the author used English terms which were considered to be culturally equivalent. It can mean sacrificing the details, as will be seen in Part four, discussing the translation.

The use of culturally equivalent terms is similar to the idea of domestication (Venuti, 1995) in translation studies, which is

about translating the text to sound fluent and natural in the target language, by minimizing its foreignness. According to Venuti, it is a dominating Anglo-American translation culture (Venuti, 1995, p. 21). Whereas the glossary and the note on the setting are there in order to draw the readers closer to understanding another culture, the domestication approach tries to draw the other culture closer to the readers. These efforts do not seem to contradict certain expectations about having a near-authentic cultural encounter through reading the text. Zitlow and Stover (1998) argue in an online article that “Reading literature, which offers the closest approach to living through the actual experiences of life, is the way to come to know something about a country and its people whether they remain in that country or move to another,” in discussing the educational use of Japanese-American literature in the U.S. They recommend *Shizuko’s Daughter* as it “takes readers inside the hearts and minds of non-western people.” Though they state that Japanese American writers do not write their fiction “with a predefined purpose to teach others”, they assure us that through Mori’s novel “the reader learns about the Japanese rituals Yuki observes, particularly with her grandparents; about the Japanese attitude toward nature in beautiful scenes where Yuki’s grandparents tend their gardens” amongst other things. The novel is expected to provide cultural information on Japan, yet some of their examples would leave Japanese people puzzled: “in Japan one does not smile at or talk to total strangers; in conversation formality, not emotions, governs encounters with people; only women hug each other; and there is an established custom about initially declining food offered by others.”

It may not be surprising that such expectations exist. As Watanabe (2006, p. 49) points out, “It is certain that her works belong to U.S. literature, as they are written in English, though the settings are in Japan. On the other hand, they also could be called Japanese literature though written in English, as not only the settings, but all the personages are Japanese².” It is true that *Shizuko’s*

² My translation from Japanese: モリの小説の設定は、日本ではあるが、英語で書かれているのだから、アメリカ文学ということになる。しかし、一方では、英語で書かれているものの、設定だけではなく、

Daughter talks only about Japanese people in Japan, though in her later works, some non-Japanese characters and settings also start appearing. Watanabe states that Mori's works often elaborate on longings for the dead mother and rancor against the father and the stepmother, and they are almost like *Shishōsetsu* (I-novel), a genre in Japanese literature that talks about the author's personal life: "There is a contradiction. Mori rejects Japan saying that it is not her homeland but only a place she visits in her trips, but then in her works, she only writes about Japan. Despite being a Japanese person, she does not write nor speak in Japanese. However, the world about which she keeps on writing in English is limited only to Japan³" (p. 49).

It was suggested earlier that Mori seems to have used the domestication approach to describe Japanese culture in English. Though it is a term normally used for translation, the process of writing about Japanese culture in English as in the case of *Shizuko's Daughter* could be similar to the translation process. This idea of domestication can be developed further in order to discuss if the author took such an approach in selecting the cultural elements described in the novel. That is to say, describing Japan or Japanese culture in a way that fulfils the existing images or expectations within the target (U.S.) culture. Throughout the novel, readers find beautiful descriptions of nature (flowers and trees from different seasons), as well as various traditional Japanese rituals and customs, such as the inauguration of a new house, a funeral, and a wedding. We have already seen Zitlow and Stover (1998) mentioning these points as examples of cultural information. However, these very points are criticised acutely by some Japanese researchers. For example, Watanabe (2006, p. 54) writes "It is also possible to argue that the beautiful Japanese sceneries or old Japanese traditions Mori describes would create

登場人物もすべて日本人であることから、日本文学ともいえるものである。

³ My translation from Japanese: すなわち「故郷ではない」「旅先にすぎない」と言って日本を拒否するモリであるのに、作品の中では、日本のことだけを書いているという矛盾が生じている。日本人でありながら日本語を書いたり話したりしない一方で、モリが英語で書き続ける世界は日本のことに限定されている。

exoticism that would please westerners, including Americans, and by hinting at orientalism, she is playing up to them. We can say that Mori, who hates Japan, is using just one aspect of it when it is convenient for her⁴.” In a similar tone, Narasaki (2005, p. 67) argues that in today’s Japanese American literature, a tendency to use Japanese culture in order to cater to American readers is still present. In relation to the *Shizuko’s Daughter*, Narasaki mentions Owaki (2004, cited in Narasaki 2005, p. 76) warning about the possibility of “reproducing orientalism”, and he himself argues that since “Mori is a first generation Japanese American, she is in the position to be able to explain today’s Japan to American society. However, she keeps on writing almost stereotypical images of Japanese culture and people, which would be questioned by any Japanese person⁵ (p. 75).” What Zitlow and Stover (1998) called the “minds and hearts of non-western people” is called “almost stereotypical” by Narasaki. Narasaki’s comment can also be read as an expectation for Mori to explain the reality of today’s Japan to American society. However, describing a different/foreign culture without being influenced by (or yielding to) the generalizations and stereotypes that exist in the majority culture is not easy. It can be extremely difficult when it has to be done in the language of the majority culture, in which one has to establish oneself as a professional writer.

Finally, there is the question of how the novel was presented in the Japanese market by the publisher. The actual translation of the text is discussed in Part four, but here the discussion will focus on other elements or paratexts. The cover image of the paperback version (published from *Kadokawa Shoten*, Tokyo) is an illustration – a profile of a short haired Asian girl standing in a white shirt, her

⁴ My translation from Japanese: しかし、見方を変えれば、モリの描く美しい日本の風景や古くから日本にある慣習は、アメリカ人を含む西洋人を喜ばせるような異国情緒を作り上げ、オリエンタリズムの香りを漂わせて彼らにへつらっているということになる。日本を嫌っているモリが、日本の一面だけを都合よく利用しているにすぎないとも言える。

⁵ My translation from Japanese: 世代論から言えば、日系一世にあたるMoriは、現代の日本をアメリカ社会に伝えることのできる立場にいるにもかかわらず、日本人なら首を傾げたくするようなステレオタイプに近い日本文化や日本人像を書きこんでいる。

face meditative with eyes closed. She must be Yuki, who cuts her hair very short at one point in the story. The girl is loosely enclosed in vines, which show leaves and flowers of lily and chrysanthemum, maple leaves (all of them appear in the novel). With her eyes closed, the vines almost look like a representation of her internal world. There is no girl in an old-style *kimono* such as on the cover of original English version, and Japanese-ness is not emphasized in an obvious manner, though images of plants can be connected to the beauty of nature. In fact, this aspect of the book is strengthened in the Japanese version. For example, the copy used when the book was first translated in 1995 stated “Kobe, a city full of beautiful flowers.” Another example is to be found in the chapter titles of the Japanese version. The novel has 15 chapters and an epilogue, and in the original version, each chapter has a title summarising some episode, such as “Housebound,” “The Wake” and so on. In the Japanese translation, all 16 chapter titles are plant names, such as “*Sakura*,” “*Shiragiku*” (cherry blossom and white chrysanthemum respectively) etc., though the original English titles are also written underneath. Though all 16 plant names do appear in their respective chapters, in the original English version only 5 chapters are named after plants, and this change must have been made to create a certain image of the novel. Emphasizing a sensitivity towards the beauty of nature and various seasons actually does fit the stereotype held in Japan about traditional Japanese culture (e.g. Asquith and Kalland, 1996).

Another aspect emphasized in the Japanese market was the fact that it was “re-imported,” as appeared in the copy. Though it is something familiar, there is something foreign, a hint of “otherness” at the same time. The translation of the title would be a good example. The title of the Japanese version is *Shizuko* *Dōtā*, a transcription of the English original title written in *katakana* (a Japanese script used to write foreign words), without really translating it into Japanese. The name of the author was also written in *katakana*, rather than using original Chinese ideograms for her name.

Maybe the mixed expectation for the novel presented in the Japanese market can be summarised as something familiar yet foreign. Both aspects are emphasized. However, based on what we

have seen in this section, it might even be possible for Japanese readers to perceive “otherness” through reading the text on Japanese culture domesticated for the U.S. audience. This, in itself, would not be such an unusual phenomenon. For example, Ogawa (2009, p. 141) who translated *Memoir of a Geisha* by A. Golden into Japanese, claims that the attractiveness of the original novel was in its “exoticism about Japan,” and though he made numerous corrections of cultural and historical facts in his translation, it was to reproduce this attractive virtual reality (and therefore not to eliminate the exoticism) convincingly in Japanese language. Can we say the same for *Shiuko-kozu Dôtā*? In order to answer this question, we will see how the actual text was translated into Japanese.

The Role of Translation

Part four will discuss some points that became clear through the comparison of the ST (Source Text – original English version) with the TT (Target Text – Japanese translation), considering the relation of the translation with various expectations surrounding the novel that have been discussed in the previous section. Unlike the original text, which was expected to provide information about another culture, the Japanese version was presented to the market as something familiar yet foreign. What role has translation played to make this change possible?

Shizuko's Daughter was translated into Japanese by Makiko Ikeda, and the first thing to notice through the comparison of the ST and the TT is the small number of mistranslations, omissions or major changes. The cases of mistranslation and missing information are at a minimum, and unlike some cases of translating texts which entail clear exoticism about Japan into Japanese, there were no obvious major changes and manipulation of the original text (Inose, 2017).

This seemingly almost “perfect” translation could be the result of several factors. First of all, in translating a culturally re-imported text (in this case, translating a text written in English about Japan into Japanese), the translator might assume some roles which are not required in a normal translation. For example, the translator might fill the gaps that exist due to the different levels of background cultural knowledge of the ST and TT readers. Since the TT

readers are mostly Japanese, one can expect that they would have much more knowledge about the Japanese culture, customs, etc., described in the novel than the readers of the original English version. Then the translator needs to correct mistakes in historical or cultural facts if there are any in the original. It is also necessary to choose Chinese ideograms to write names of Japanese personages according to the Japanese custom (provided that they are correct Japanese names, which is not always the case). Some expression or conversation might sound unnatural if spoken by Japanese persons. In this case, the translator has to decide whether to respect the original or use some domestication technique. These translation problems could occur frequently if the ST author were not too familiar with Japanese culture or language. However, as this is not the case with Mori, these gaps do not occur often. All personages have typical Japanese names, so the translator would not have had any problem in choosing appropriate Chinese ideograms.

There are some conversation lines and expressions that sound rather unnatural when spoken by Japanese people – for example, Shizuko tells her daughter, Yuki, how much she loves her:

ST: “Yuki ” she said. “Be good. You know I love you.” (p. 4)

TT: “*Yuki. Iikoni ne. Kāsan ga Yuki wo aishiteru koto wakatteru deshō.*” (p. 9)

(“Yuki, be good. You know mum loves Yuki.”)

The translator uses the word *aishiteru*, which means “(to) love”, which is a loyal translation of the ST. However, the use of this term in a conversation between mother and daughter is extremely unusual. Indeed, it might be unusual to express one’s emotion towards the interlocutor so openly, but when it is done, the common word to use would be *daisuki* (to be very much fond of), which is less formal. However, as in the last telephone conversation between Shizuko and Yuki, the line is extremely important in the story, and probably could not be compromised for this reason, though the phrase in Japanese sounds rather “translated”. Another example is:

ST: “It would be unkind of you not to let me go.” (p. 106)

TT: “*soredemo ikasete kurenai to shitara, sensei wa fushinsetsu desu.*” (p. 132)

(“If you still don’t let me go, teacher, you are unkind.”)

The line is spoken by Yuki to the teacher of domestic science, in front of the whole class. Again, it sounds rather unnatural for a Japanese to comment on the person one is speaking to (especially a teacher) so openly, and using the word *fushinsetsu* (unkind). This is not only because it is impolite, but the term *fushinsetsu*, though a correct translation of the word “unkind”, would be much less used than the spoken word *ijiwaru* (mean) in a similar situation. These correctly translated, but rather unnatural Japanese lines might hint at “something foreign” to the readers, but these cases are quite rare.

Secondly, though it is not only for the re-imported text, translation of conversational language into Japanese requires the translator to choose an appropriate speech style for each speaker. Japanese has an extremely elaborate system of various registers, and vocabulary including pronouns, verbs and particles used in conversation can vary greatly according to factors such as gender, age, social class, educational level of the speaker, as well as social hierarchy or degree of formality between the speaker and the interlocutor. A particular speech style can be chosen to give a certain image to a personage (Kinsui, 2003), and in the case of translating a text into Japanese, it is an unavoidable addition of nuance, if not meaning. In *Shizuko-kozu Dôtâ*, three generations of women, namely Masa-Shizuko-Yuki, use completely different speech styles from each other. Masa speaks using almost gender-neutral speech, using sentences ending with the particle *da* (e.g. *onegaidal* please), very informal expressions (e.g. *atashiral/we, wasurechimatta/I have forgotten*) and also expressions close to what Kinsui calls *rôjingo* or aged people’s speech (e.g. *tsureteitte okure/please take me along*). It has no similarity whatsoever with the speech style of her daughter, Shizuko, who speaks in old fashioned and extremely feminine language. She uses sentence endings such as *kashira* (*Yuki wa doko ni ittano kashira/I wonder where Yuki has gone*), *wayo* (*ii wayo/no problem*) or the soft order form *rasshai na* (*matte rasshai na/wait there*). It is classical feminine language, which is used less and less nowadays (Yamanaka, 2008), but would have been common in the 1960s and 70s when Shizuko spoke those lines. It is exactly the kind of Japanese feminine language that, Mori claimed, forced women to sound “elaborately

polite, indirect, submissive and unassertive” (Mori, 1997, p. 12). Yuki’s stepmother also uses this speech style.

Probably the most striking addition of nuance by the translator Ikeda in this aspect is the choice of speech style for Yuki. Yuki, again, speaks the language in a completely different way than her mother. In the novel, she grows from 12 to 18 years old, though her speech style does not change with age. She can speak quite rough language (e.g. *Ippatsu omimai shite yatta yo!* I punched him), and generally her speech is closer to male language (e.g. *tōsan to kōsan no koto wo kangaete itanda!* I was thinking of mum and dad) or more precisely, very gender neutral (which at times makes it sound like written language). She sounds frank and abrupt, and it is an unusual speech style which clearly avoids the use of typical feminine language. It might be an appropriate choice as Yuki seems to refuse to grow up to fit into the typical role of woman presented by the society (represented by the father and the stepmother), which also seems to coincide with the attitude of Mori (Usui, 2002, p. 61).

Thirdly, as it is a culturally re-imported text, the translator uses strategies similar to back-translation in her treatment of the cultural terms. For these terms, the translation process is similar to translate “back” to Japanese, what was once translated into English. As discussed in the previous section, Mori uses the domestication approach to describe Japanese cultural references in English. For example, many terms are de-culturalized by using cultural equivalence (e.g. “goblin” to refer to the Japanese traditional ogre *oni*, or “robe” instead of using the Japanese word *kimono*) or generalization (e.g. “salted fish” as a translation of *shiozake*, salted and grilled salmon, or “chant” as a translation of *norito*, chanted prayer by a Shinto priest). These are both translation techniques to adapt the text to the target culture, though in some rare cases, Mori also keeps Japanese terms and adds explicatory words (e.g. “*kikuna*, edible spring mums”). The most important example of such de-culturalization in the novel is treatment of religious cultural terms. In Japan, Shintoism and Buddhism are both present in people’s daily lives, not necessarily as religious practice, but as customs. As *Shizuko’s Daughter* describes events such as weddings, funerals, and death anniversaries, there are many terms related to both Shintoism and Buddhism. For example, the

weddings take place within the Shinto tradition, whereas the funeral and ancestor worshipping are part of Buddhist practices. Mori, however, does not distinguish between these two religions – for example, the word “priest”, without any added explanation, is used for both *kannushi* (Shinto priest) and *sōryō* (Buddhist priest). They both “chant” (*norito* is a Shinto prayer by a *kannushi* wearing a white *kimono* and carrying a wand, for example at a wedding. In comparison, *okyō* is a Buddhist prayer by a *sōryō*, wearing a black *kesa/kimono* and hair completely shaven, for example at a funeral). By seeing “the priest” at her father’s wedding, Yuki remembers “another priest (p. 25)” at her mother’s funeral – but in general, *kannushi* and *sōryō* are regarded as two different things that are not closely associated to each other. The same applies to the use of the words “temple” (*jinja* is a Shinto shrine and *tera* is a Buddhist temple) and “altar” (*kamidana* is a Shinto altar that enshrines gods whereas *butsudan* is a Buddhist altar which enshrines the spirits of ancestors). Though Mori also uses the term “Buddhist altar” later in the novel (p. 128), in general she has de-culturalized and eliminated many differences between two religious traditions in Japan, which might make sense as a part of the domestication approach, but would be extremely unnatural if translated into Japanese. In other words, it would have been another “otherness” Japanese readers might have perceived in the text. However, Ikeda has translated these numerous de-culturalized and generalized terms into differentiated Japanese words. So the cultural nuances which had been eliminated in the ST have been recovered in the TT, in order to adapt the text to Japanese readers. School system (e.g. the ST talks of “eighth grade” etc., whereas in the Japanese system it would be the second year of junior high school) and measurement units are other examples that are translated “back” to the Japanese system in the TT. Thus, the possible feeling of otherness are eliminated, which could also be considered a practice of domestication.

The fourth point concerns tone changes in translation, which could also be a part of the adaptation of the TT to the target audience. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Ikeda’s translation has very few cases of errors or mistranslations. However, as we have seen, it does not mean that the ST and TT carry an equal amount of information (especially cultural information). Unlike

adding (or restoring) cultural information to the de-culturalized terms, tone changes are subtle and sometimes it is not clear if they are conscious decisions taken by the translator. Still, these changes might have worked to reduce would-be unnatural sounding expressions in Japanese. For example:

ST: They are the adults, I shouldn't have to teach them about respect. (p. 135)

TT: *Minna wa otona nandakara, keii ni tsuite minna ni osekkyō nanka suru beki ja nakatta.* (p. 168)

(They are the adults, I shouldn't have preached to them about respect)

This is Yuki reflecting after having an argument with relatives of her mother's side. The tone is softer in the TT and Yuki regrets her action, whereas in the ST, she sounds annoyed that she had to explain her situation to the adults, who should know and understand better. Another interesting example is:

ST: There was already a lot of talk about how our country should send soldiers to occupy China. (p. 119)

TT: *Sonokoroniwa mou nihon wa heitai wo okutte Chūgoku wo senryō surunda tte iu uwasa ga tobikatteta.* (p. 148)

(There were many rumors at the time that Japan would send soldiers to occupy China)

The tone change is subtle, but it is clearly there. The speaker here is Kimura, a male friend of Shizuko, telling Yuki about the time of the Second Sino-Japanese war. In the ST, the speaker takes a more active stance in relation to the event ("our" country "should" send soldiers), whereas in the TT, the same event sounds a bit more distant, not directly related to the speaker. Considering that Kimura was just a child at the time of the event, maybe he did feel like it was something distant – but the translation also would have the effect of softening the feeling of proactively initiating the war, when read by Japanese readers. It is argued that the mention of a great historical event that happened to the country of origin is one of the typical features of ethnic minority literature in the U.S. (Kobayashi, 2013, p. 76). *Shizuko's Daughter* also talks about Japan during the war and about the land reform (in which the parents of Shizuko lost their land) that took place under the U.S.

occupation, though these are not main themes in the novel. The tone change above might indicate that these topics are even less central in the Japanese translation.

Finally, it seems that the Japanese TT has a stronger effect on readers to identify with Yuki's viewpoint. This is partially due to a Japanese language tradition – when one talks to a younger person, he or she often refers to himself or herself using a term that reflects his/her relation with that younger person. So, for example, Aya's (Yuki's aunt) speech to Yuki is translated as follows.

ST: After this, you won't see me very often anymore. (p. 23)

TT: *Kekkonshiki ga sundara, obachan niwa amari awanai hou ga iiwa.* (p. 33)

(After the wedding, it is better not to see the auntie so often.)

This is applied to all the adults surrounding Yuki, such as her father, mother, or grandparents. Instead of using "I", they all talk to Yuki referring to themselves as *tōsan* (dad), *kāsan* (mum) etc. And this is not only in their speech lines, but also in the narrative parts, the names of personages such as Aya, Shizuko, Masa, Hideki etc. in the ST are often translated as *oba/obachan* (aunt/auntie), *haha* (mother), *sobo* (grandmother), *chichi* (father) and so on, and thus they are constantly redefined in relation to Yuki rather than acting as independent personages. Though in Japanese all this does not sound unnatural (rather, it sounds very natural), the viewpoint offered by the text would shift and everything is narrated more from Yuki's viewpoint in translation.

Conclusion

The present study has considered issues surrounding a re-imported text, or a text that crosses language and cultural borders several times, such as different expectations regarding the text and the role of translation. It became clear that on the two sides of the crossed border, the text was presented by the publisher, and received by the reader to fulfil somewhat different expectations. Foreign touch, or otherness, is emphasized in presenting both the original English and Japanese translations, though it means different things in the two versions. Readers were told that they could learn about another culture by reading the original version, and

the publisher provided measures, such as glossary, to make it easier. The text itself makes it easier for the target readers by adopting domestication approach in handling cultural references. However, this approach has been acutely criticised by some Japanese researchers as not only inauthentic, but almost a reproduction of the exoticism and stereotypes about Japan that exist in the western world.

The otherness searched in the Japanese version is more complicated, as it has to be something foreign within the familiar. This would have occurred, though it might not have been in the way intended by the publisher, if the translation maintained the numerous cultural omissions (domestication approach mentioned above) appearing in the ST. It would have shown how Japanese culture could be presented outside Japan – an unfamiliar view of the familiar. However, by recovering all the omitted cultural information and changing the tones of some expressions, the Japanese translation eliminated the unnaturalness that Japanese readers could have felt. Moreover, by adding extra nuances through the choice of an unusual but appropriate speech style for Yuki and re-orientating the viewpoint of the reader to identify more with her, it might be possible to say that the Japanese translation more strongly represents Yuki's personal story than the original. Thus the “something foreign” is limited to the positioning of the novel by the publisher as re-imported literature, and a few other elements such as the book title, but the actual text is translated to be read as the personal story of a Japanese girl in Japan, without anything “foreign within the familiar.” In a way, it could give readers the impression of reading something different without experiencing uncomfortable discrepancy in cultural understanding, which might have been one of the causes of its success in Japan. The text was domesticated each time it crossed the border, having been re-imported and thus causing it to go through the process not only once, but twice.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by Åke Wibergs Stiftelse Foundation (Sweden).

References

- Asquith, P.J. and Kalland, A. (1996). *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives*. Routledge: London and New York
- Inose, H. (2016). “Not Crossing the Boundary: The Untranslatable in Japanese-English Bilingual Literature,” in Nordin, I., Edfeldt, C., Hu, L., Jonsson, H., and Leblanc, A. (eds.) *Transcultural Identity Constructions in a Changing World*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, pp. 219–234.
- (2017). *Literature Translation as Re-Importation: When the Text Travels Twice Between Cultures* [PowerPoint presentation given at The 8th Asian Translation Tradition Conference, London].
- Kinsui, S. (2003). *Vācharu nihongo yakuwarigo no nazo [The mystery of virtual Japanese language]*. 10th edn. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten
- Kobayashi, E. (2013). “An Analysis of Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* and Autobiographical Novels by Asian Americans,” *Wayo Joshi Daigaku Kiyō*, 53, pp. 71–82
- Masubuchi, C. (1996). “*Shizuko’s Daughter* – Eigo de kataru kako [*Shizuko’s Daughter – the past written in English*],” *Gakushūin Daigaku Jinbunkagaku Ronshū*, 5, pp. 93–106
- Mori, K. (1993). *Shizuko’s Daughter*. New York: Ballantine Books
- (1999). *Shizukozu Dōtā*. Translation from English to Japanese by Ikeda, M., paperback edition. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten
- (1995). *The Dream of Water*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc.
- (1997). *Polite Lies*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc.
- (2000). Becoming Midwestern, in Danquah, M.N. (eds.) *Becoming American: Personal Essays by First Generation Immigrant Women*. New York: Hyperion, pp. 138–145
- Narasaki, H. (2008). “Japonism and Americanism in Japanese – American Literature: Beyond Race and Generation,” *Otsuma Journal of Comparative Culture*, 9, pp. 67–83
- Ogawa, T. (2009). *Honyaku no himitsu [The secret of translation]*. Tokyo: Kenkyūsha

- Owaki, M. (2004). "Tashaka saseru 'nihon no onna' – Kyoko Mori to David Mura no nihon no onna no hyōshō ['Japanese women' being made into 'the Other' – representations of Japanese women by Kyoko Mori and David Mura]," in Ebine, S. and Takemura, K. (eds.) *Kakumo tasai na onna tachi no kiseki [Such diversified trajectories of women]*. Tokyo: Nanundō, pp. 237–258
- Rovira-Esteva, Sara (2016). "The (Mis)Use of Paratexts to (Mis) Represent the Other: Chun Sue's Beijing Doll as a Case Study," *Onomázein*, núm. 34, diciembre, pp. 187–208
- Pavlenko, A. (2001). "In the World of the Tradition, I was Unimagined: Negotiation of Identities in Cross-Cultural Autobiographies," *The International Journal of Bilingualism* 5 (3), pp. 317–344
- Usui, M. (2002). "The Trauma Caused by Mother's Deaths in Virginia Woolf and Kyoko Mori," *Doshisha Literature*, 45, pp. 59–81
- Venuti, L. (1995) *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London and New York: Routledge
- Watanabe, K. (2006). "Kyoko Mori no sokoku nippon – shin imin no tachiba kara [Kyoko Mori's homeland, Japan – seen from the position of a new immigrant]," *Tokyo Seitoku Tanki Daigaku Kiyō*, 39, pp. 47–55
- (2009). "Kyoko Mori no saishinsaku ni mirareru henyō [The changes seen in the latest work by Kyoko Mori]," *Tokyo Seitoku Tanki Daigaku Kiyō*, 42, pp. 123–134
- Yamanaka, Y. (2008). "Gendai nihongo no seisa ni kansuru kenkyū [Research on gender difference in today's Japanese language]," *Studies in Language and Culture*, 17, pp. 87–100
- Zitlow, C. and Stover, L. (1998). "Japanese and Japanese American Youth in Literature," *The Alan Review*, 25 (3). [Online]. Available at: <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/spring98/zitlow.html> (Accessed: 10 September 2017).

Self-Translation in Transcultural Mode: Francesca Duranti on how to Put ‘a Scent of Basil’ into One’s Translations

Arianna Dagnino

University of British Columbia

The Theory of the Transcultural Applied to Self-Translation

Self-translation, that is “the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself” (Popovič, 1976), has always been present in the literary scene, although this practice has rarely been acknowledged and its study has been most often neglected. More recently, however, a new wave of self-translations into English has sparked a growing interest towards this literary phenomenon and the reasons that lead writers to translate their own work, while at the same time highlighting the role of English as the dominant global lingua franca. Obviously, English as a target language for self-translation is more common in cases where the author has migrated to an English-speaking country or has attended schools that offered programs in English. However, a high level of bilingualism due to growing migratory flows, exile, or transnational lifestyles triggered by post-colonial and post-war developments may encourage self-translation in either direction, as the latest self-translations from English into Italian by the Italian writer Francesca Marciano demonstrate.

Taking Duranti’s self-translation of *Left-Handed Dreams* from Italian into English as a case study, this chapter sets to reveal the hidden dynamics of self-translation seen both as a process – of linguistic mediation, cultural negotiation and/or creative rewriting

How to cite this book chapter:

Dagnino, A. 2021. Self-Translation in Transcultural Mode: Francesca Duranti on how to Put ‘a Scent of Basil’ into One’s Translations. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 275–305. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.m>. License: CC-BY 4.0

– and as a product – subject to publication trends, market-related restrictions/impositions, readers’ response, and/or critics’ reception. Framing self-translation as both a process and a product is a methodological choice that is particularly rewarding from the heuristic point of view (Grutman and Van Bolderen, 2014). By analyzing it as a process, we can uncover the reasons motivating self-translation, the context(s) within which self-translation occurs, and the processes of cultural identity mediation writers undergo as they move into the role of translators of their work (Taft, 1981). By studying it as a product, through comparative textual analysis between source text and target text we can identify intertextual transfer strategies and modalities of cultural reframing employed by authors when they act as self-translators. The comparative textual analysis may reveal correspondences, (dis) similarities, additions, and/or subtractions, and thus shed light on the translation strategies applied. It can also show in which way and to what extent self-translators challenge (or succumb to) the pressures of translating into another language or extend (culturally, linguistically, and stylistically) the parameters/possibilities of one or both of their assumed languages.

As regards the language combination itself and its relation to the socio-linguistic web of global power dynamics, a disclaimer is here needed. Due to space limitations, the present contribution does not delve into the much-needed discussion about existing asymmetric power relations between languages. Suffice it to say that in the world’s linguistic stock exchange described by de Swaan (2001) and Casanova (2009), and further explored by Grutman (2015), translations (and thus also self-translations) can be called either “horizontal” or “vertical” depending on the value given to the languages involved. They are horizontal when they happen between national languages that have the same linguistic capital; that is, when the languages involved are “equally” juxtaposed, autonomous, dominant, and belong to well-established national literary systems (at any rate according to “canonical” perceptions of such hierarchy as established in the current global *status quo* by the history of unequal colonialist relations).¹ They

¹ See Casanova (2009).

are vertical translations when they perform languages “de statut trop inégal pour que le transfert puisse ressembler à un échange (mot qui implique une forme de réciprocité)” (Grutman, 2015, p. 21).² Vertical translations may further be qualified as “supra-uctions,” if the text is translated with an ascending movement (uphill) from a minor language into a dominant and more central one – from the periphery to the center; and “infraductions,” if the text is translated in the opposite direction, with a descending movement (downhill), from a major and more widespread language into a minor and marginalized one – from the center to the periphery (Grutman, 2015).³

From a theoretical perspective, the present study adopts a transcultural approach. As Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) suggest, the study and practice of literary translation (thus including self-translation) *are* the study and practice of cultural interaction. Moreover, any literary self-translation also implies some form of cultural construction and creative manipulation or rendition, thus leading to what the writer Octavio Paz calls a process of “poetic transmutation.”⁴ It follows from this that the focus is no longer on the assumed faithfulness of the translation to the original text⁵ but on conceptually, culturally, and creatively expanding

² “whose status is too unequal to resemble a veritable exchange (a word that implies a form of reciprocity)” (my translation).

³ The same distinction applies to self-translation, which can be thought of as “*infra*autotraducción” (*infrase*lf-translation) or “*supra*autotraducción” (*suprase*lf-translation; Grutman 2011, p. 81): that is, vertical self-translations between languages that have asymmetrical relations and in which the direction of translation is either from the hegemonic into the minorized language (*infra*-) or viceversa (*supra*-). For a thorough discussion on self-translation according to the unequal power relations between languages and thus its differentiation into “vertical” or “horizontal,” “endogenous” or “exogenous,” “symmetrical” or “asymmetrical,” see Grutman (2013a, 2013b).

⁴ Octavio Paz cited in Alastair Reid (1990, p. 96).

⁵ I would rather refer to the original text as the “primary version,” drawing upon Dasilva’s (2011, p. 63) suggestion of considering it as “the primary text.” As Anselmi (2012, p. 26) remarks, “Literary approaches to self-translation [...] do not take into sufficient account certain distinctive features that self-translation shares with ordinary translation, namely the fact that it is a mode of writing based on a pre-existing text, which is

it. Hence, we witness in such cases the rapprochement not only between translation studies, cultural studies, creative writing, and (comparative) literature but also between translation practice and theory.⁶

The theory of the transcultural (Dagnino, 2015; Epstein, 2009; Welsch, 1999) is a system of thought and a research method whose premise is that cultures are open and mutually transforming organisms rather than monolithic, mutually exclusive entities. Transcultural theoretical frameworks have been deployed and engaged, especially in the Latin American region, since the late 1940s, after Fernando Ortiz coined the term “transculturation” to describe the process of mutual—even if asymmetrical—cultural influences and fusions between so-called “peripheral” and colonizing cultures. The concept of transculturation has been further developed, among others and within a postcolonial framework, by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) in her book *Imperial Eyes*. In the present study, I refer to the subsequent conceptualizations of “transculture” and “transculturality” developed by Epstein (2009) and Wolfgang Welsch (2009) respectively. These more recent conceptualizations of the transcultural are intended to overcome the binaries of dominant versus subordinate, colonizer versus colonized cultures inherent in the original and postcolonial interpretations of “transculturation” by focusing on the commonalities and the urge to connect that all human beings (and cultures) share, despite their intrinsic differences. As Welsch (1999, p. 201) states, “It is a matter of readjusting our inner compass: away from the concentration on the polarity of the own and the foreign to an attentiveness for what might be common and connective wherever we encounter things foreign.” In this light, the transcultural may be understood as an all-inclusive space of subjective consciousness and cultural possibilities that does not deny the formative importance of native/national cultures—and, to some extent, their accompanying worldviews—but at the same

to be recontextualized for a new receptor-audience speaking a different language.”

⁶ Torrop (2002) as well as Yan and Huang (2014) emphasize the role of translation meant as a medium for, and a product of, cultural exchange.

time allows an openness to the reception, integration, negotiation, and permeation of other cultures, languages, worldviews.⁷

Translation theory often capitalizes on juxtapositions, such as author vs. translator, original vs. translation, literal translation vs. interpretation, dominant language vs. minority language, translatability vs. untranslatability. The process of self-translation contributes to calling into question these oppositional framings. Indeed, self-translation seems to inherently work in-between these dichotomies (Hokenson and Munson, 2007) and to inhabit a transcultural space that lies beyond the divides of languages and cultures (Dagnino, 2015; Epstein, 2009). A transcultural sensitivity may thus support the view of self-translation as “a new kind of textual territory; a labyrinthine but interconnected space in which the hybridity of texts-in-translation reflects the hybrid, inter- and transcultural identities of those who produce them” (Venzo, 2016, p. 1).

When and Why Bilingual Writers Self-Translate

Self-translation normally supposes bilingualism or near-bilingualism in at least one other language. As already stated, growing migratory flows have created new generations of bilingual writers (Grosjean, 2010), especially in settler countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States, and in former colonial powers such as France, Spain, and the UK. In this study, I draw upon the definition proposed by Grosjean (1989, p. 4), for whom bilinguals are “those people who use two or more languages in their everyday lives.” I also accept Grosjean’s (1989) distinction between a “stable bilingual” or “idiomatic bilingual” (who has reached an almost native-like competence in both languages) and a person still in the process of acquiring or restructuring a language (we might define the latter

⁷ As Nordin et al. remark (2016, p. 11), “Compared with concepts such as interculturality, multiculturalism, or hybridity, which all may have some relevance for describing cultural encounters, but which often presuppose the notion of cultural essentialism, the concept of transculturality has the advantage of recognising change and diversity, rather than focusing on boundaries and differences.”

as a “transitional bilingual”).⁸ Within a literary discourse, when we speak of bilingual writers we specifically refer to “authors who compose texts in at least two different languages” (Hokenson and Munson 2007, p. 14). Neurolinguists make a further distinction between “early bilinguals” and “late bilinguals,” focusing on the age in which the individuals acquired bilingual competence; that is, they differentiate between those authors who were raised as bilinguals since their birth and those who, due to a series of circumstances happened – more or less forcefully, more or less willingly – to become bilingual either in their youth or later in life. “Early bilingualism” is defined as “coordinated” and “balanced,” since the two languages are acquired in parallel before adolescence; while “late bilingualism” is defined as “subordinated,” since L1 (Language 1) is dominant over L2 (Language 2). It has often been implied that only early bilinguals can acquire high proficiency in both languages, mainly due to the fact that there appears to be a critical age (around puberty) after which acquiring a native-like control of a second language seems much harder to obtain (see Fabbro, 1996, 2004; Paradis 2004, 2009). More recent studies, however, have shown that, depending on life circumstances, the dominance between L1 and L2 can oscillate, that a native-like proficiency in L2 can also be acquired later in life and that L2 can become the dominant language (see Birdsong, 2005, 2014; see also Salmon and Mariani, 2008). In this study, I do not differentiate the degree of bilingualism according to the stage of life in which it was acquired (the age of acquisition) but rather on the self-perceived or assumed degree of bilingual proficiency and competence in the two languages in which the self-translating author is creatively active.⁹ It is clear that the relatively new field of

⁸ For an exhaustive definition of bilingualism see Baker (2001) and Grosjean (2010, 1989). On bilingual or translanguaging writers see also Hokenson and Manson (2007) and Kellmann (2000, 2003).

⁹ Several terms such as *balanced bilinguals* (highly fluent in both languages), *dominant bilinguals* (dominant in one language), *passive* or *recessive bilinguals* (gradually losing competence in one of the two languages), and *semilinguals* (a questionable, pejorative term used to identify those individuals with limited level of proficiency in both first and second language) have been used to categorise bilinguals according to the self-perceived or assumed degree of proficiency they have in both languages.

bilingual writing and self-translation calls for specific approaches and valid, reliable testing models to obtain deeper insight into different levels and modalities of bilingualism. From a (neuro)linguist's point of view, in particular, further study is required on how to measure scientifically bilingual literary competence as well as on how to determine the level of bilingual proficiency necessary to accomplish a successful self-translation (but, again, "successful" according to what standards?).¹⁰ This is a particularly thorny issue since, as a Recuenco Peñalver remarks (2011, p. 200), "La relación de un escritor bilingüe con su(s) lengua(s) es más compleja de lo que pudiera parecer y a menudo se encuentra presente en el propio proceso de escritura, incluso antes de que la actividad traductora intervenga."¹¹

Irrespective of their actual qualities, self-translations are often considered superior to non-authorial translations. This is because "the writer-translator is no doubt felt to have been in a better position to recapture the intentions of the author of the original than any ordinary translator" (Fitch, 1985). Moreover, self-translators have the authority to allow themselves alterations in the translation that an allographic translator would not deem, in principle, ethically or professionally appropriate (see already Grutman, 1998; and Landa 2006). Having said that, the presumed privileged and authoritative status of the bilingual writer as self-translator (Grutman, 2009) is marked by one of the hardest linguistic challenges: the transposition not only of a text but also of a whole cultural worldview and metaphorical space into another. As an undisclosed self-translator of poetry from Gaelic (mother tongue)

All these categories have repeatedly been problematized, put to question and criticized by different scholars. Baetens Beardsmore (1982), for example, argues that balanced bilingualism, that is a full competence in both languages, is close to impossible to achieve, and is therefore very rare. For an overview of these terms, see Chin Ng and Wigglesworth (2007). For an extensive discussion on bilingualism, see Romaine's (1995) book *Bilingualism*, which also has a section on measuring "Degrees of bilingualism," and Baetens Beardsmore (1982).

¹⁰ See, in this regard, Michael H. Daller (2011).

¹¹ "The relation of bilingual writers with their language(s) in more complex than it could seem and is often present in their writing process, even before they start translating" (my translation).

to English (second language) stated in Corinna Krause's (2007, p. 105) study, "the difficulty of translating not just the meaning of the words but the range of referents inherent within the culture is for me insurmountable." Similarly, the bilingual (English/Italian) writer Tim Parks (1999, p. 138) remarks that, "the rare bilingual person, the person most thoroughly grounded in two distinct conventions," must be "struck by the utter difference of the same text in their two languages" as a result of being "keenly aware of the distinct value structures implied by the [two] languages." These strong and unequivocal statements lead to agree with Lance Hewson (1997, p. 49) that changing languages also means changing cultures and, most often than not, meaning: "the (newly) translated text only begins to signify when it is fed into and functions within the receiving culture."

Despite the daunting difficulties inherent in self-translation, the reasons that lead writers to undertake this endeavor are manifold (economic, psychological, sociological, aesthetic, or cultural), often overlapping, and – as we shall see – often linked to migrancy or transnational lifestyles. Dissatisfaction with existing translations or the idea of challenging monolingual paradigms may encourage self-translation as much as market-related considerations, the wish to expose one's work to a culturally diversified audience, or the drive to explore new creative pathways through processes of linguistic and cultural mediation. In the course of this study I have identified at least seven main reasons or "authorial intentions" that lead writers to self-translate.¹² By compiling evidence drawn from other scholars' research¹³ and from personal conversations with a selection of self-translators,¹⁴ it emerges that writers may decide to self-translate in order to:

¹² Oustinoff (2001, p. 278), in particular, stresses the importance of the author's intention ("*l'intention auctoriale*") during the process of self-translation and how this affects the final product.

¹³ On the reasons that lead writers to self-translate see, in particular, Anselmi (2012), Bassnett (2006), Gentes (2016), Grutman (2015), Lagarde (2015) Nannavechia (2016) and Recuenco Peñalver (2011).

¹⁴ In the last six months, I have had the opportunity to interview five bilingual authors (namely, Antonio D'Alfonso, Francesca Duranti, Sebastien Doubinsky, Francesca Marciano, and Carmen Rodriguez) on their self-translational practices.

- **Sell their book.** That is, find interested publishers in their country of adoption. This happens especially with aspiring writers and writers who are in the process of becoming bilingual (“developmental bilingual”); in this instance, they usually avail themselves of the help of one or more native speakers. I call them “**the Sellers**” and the product of their self-translation “**the sellable.**”
- **Widen their readership** (or **expose their work to a wider international market**). That is, acquire recognition – and, possibly, financial gain – in the dominant or global language. This happens especially with emerging writers or mid-career writers who are in the process of becoming bilingual (“developmental” to “transitional bilingual”), and who are keen to give their work “an afterlife” in their adopted language (Grutman, 2013, p. 71). We may call them “**the Wideners**” (or “**the Exposers**”) and the product of their self-translation “**the widened**” or “**the exposed.**”
- **Maintain a degree of “ownership,” “autonomy,” and “authoriality.”** This happens especially with mid-career writers or with writers who belong to linguistic/ethnic minorities who can be either transitional or stable bilinguals.¹⁵ While some authors are particularly interested in the politics of promoting a minority language against the dominance of a major language, others confess to self-translate to “rescue” their work “from mistranslation” or to “avoid inaccuracy” (Krause, 2007, p. 110). I call this category of self-translators “**the Owners**” (or “**the Authorialists**”) and the product of their self-translation “**the owned**” (or “**the authorialised**”).
- **Reflect their bilingual identity and bi-cultural intermediation.** This happens especially with mid-career or established writers who are at least transitional bilinguals and in the process of becoming stable bilinguals. As an undisclosed subject of Krause’s (2007, p. 110) study stated, “I like seeing the same idea expressed in the other language; getting a bilingual perspective on what I’m actually trying to say [...]. I [...] like

¹⁵ See Grutman (2016b).

the challenge of making it work in the second language.”¹⁶ I call them “**the Bireflectors**” (or “**the Intermediaries**”) and the product of their self-translation “**the bireflected**” (or “**the intermediated**”).

- **Majorize or decentralize a language.** A writer may decide either to give relevance to a minor language by self-translating his/her work into that language from a major one (“majorization”), or to decentralize and diminish the self-importance of two equally dominant languages by self-translating one into the other and/or vice versa (“decentralization”). Depending on the case, I call this kind of self-translators either the “Majorizers,” and the product of their self-translation “the majorized,” or the “Decentralizers,” and the product of their self-translation “the decentralized.”
- **Explore and exploit** self-translation as a creative device that enables them to rewrite, reshape, alter, or reword their originals. This happens especially with well-established writers and stable bilingual writers (in this regard, Samuel Beckett’s self-translations are most exemplary).¹⁷ I call this group of self-translators “**the Explorers**” (or “**the Exploiters**”) and the product of their self-translation “**the explored**” or “**the exploited.**” It is in this latter case that writers have the unique

¹⁶ Similarly, the writer Andrea Chapela (2015; last paragraph) discovered in self-translation a sort of distancing device with which to critically analyze her work: “Self-translation was a great experiment and I wish to continue with it and to continue building my relationship with English. I like having to think about the words I used, the sentences I created, and the reasons behind a story that sometimes are lost in the act of writing it. It was challenging and insightful to recreate the genesis of a story, how it came to be, what the answers to questions I’d never actually asked myself might be. I grew closer to the story and to my own instincts as a writer when I was forced to take a step back and to look at them from afar.”

¹⁷ Other examples come from bilingual writers in the Spanish-English combination such as Manuel Puig, Ariel Dorfman and Rosario Ferré. As Esplin (2012, p. 182) argues discussing their self-translational practices, “The task of self-translating enables these writers to tweak, readjust, or revise aspects of their texts and their literary personae. [...] Especially in the event of self-translation, authorship and textuality become evolving and collaborative endeavors.”

opportunity of carving for themselves a niche of “added creativity” by exploring (and exploiting) their privileged double status of authors and authorized agents (see Grutman, 2016b).¹⁸ Indeed, this “extra” space of agency, authority, and authenticity is an alluring one. More than one bilingual author, once he/she discovers this third space of creative intervention, willingly and repeatedly goes back to it, basking in its highly demanding, but also highly rewarding web of creative possibilities. Let us just think of the often-quoted Samuel Beckett, or the South African writer André Brink, who self-translated many of his works either from Afrikaans to English or vice versa. Brink once remarked: “[...] it depends very much on the mindset and on the way that you want to approach it [self-translation], whether it is going to be disrupting or creative, whether it is going to add something to you or take something away from you” (Brink cited in Recuenco Peñalver, 2015).

This rather generic categorization of self-translators according to their aspirations, aims, and degree of self-perceived or assumed bilingualism provides us with a useful interpretive frame regarding the reasons that lead writers to self-translate and to the kind of self-translation they produce (see Table 1 for a graphic illustration of the proposed categories). However, one should keep in mind that these categories are never fixed nor impervious: they tend instead to overlap, intersect, or conflate into each other. Moreover, once they embark in the process of self-translation, writers tend to jump from one categorizing box to the other over the course of time – and, sometimes, even within the same book – depending on their publishing status, cultural manifestations, identity issues, or exploratory/creative drives. The main idea behind the proposed categorization and its related Table is to contribute to the definition of a new taxonomy for the sub-field of self-translation within a comparative transcultural paradigm. Thus, the analysis focuses on the self-translators’ intentions – as well as socio-cultural dispositions and bilingual status – in order to determine how these elements affect the final output.

¹⁸ On the place of creativity in translation theory see Hewson (2006).

Table 1. Categorization of self-translators and the nature of their output according to the writers' intentions and degree of self-perceived bilingualism.

Reason for Translating	Group	Output (type of self-translation)	Level of self-perceived bilingualism
Sell the book/ get the book published	the sellers	the sellable	developmental bilingual
Widen the readership/ expose the work to an international market	the wideners or the exposers	the widened or the exposed	developmental to transitional bilingual
Maintain a degree of ownership and authoriality on one's work	the maintainers or the authorialists	the owned or the authorialized	transitional to stable bilingual
Reflect one's bilingual identity or bi-cultural intermediation	the bireflectors or the intermediaries	the bireflected or the intermediated	transitional to stable bilingual
Majorize a minor language	the majorizers	the majorized	transitional to stable bilingual
Decentralize a dominant language	the decentralizers	the decentralized	transitional to stable bilingual
Explore and exploit self-translation as a creative device	the explorers or the exploiters	the explored or the exploited	stable bilingual

Duranti and Self-Translation

In her private and creative life, the now 83-year old Italian writer Francesca Duranti has crossed many borders: culturally,

linguistically, geographically, and creatively. The only child of a wealthy family, she claims that her mother tongue is not the Italian spoken by both her parents but rather the German of the Swiss nannies she grew up with: “Il tedesco è la mia prima lingua ma non è una lingua amata; perché è proprio la lingua della separazione dai miei genitori” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017).¹⁹ During her childhood Duranti also learned English and French and was often exposed to different cultural and linguistic environments: “A casa mia avevo questa *nanny* [in English; i.e. bambinaia] che era svizzera-tedesca e parlava tedesco. I miei cugini invece avevano una Miss Jesh che parlava con loro in inglese; venivano spesso a giocare nel parco a Genova ed erano in tanti; ma, soprattutto, la mia svizzera parlava un po’ d’inglese, mentre quell’altra non parlava tedesco. Per cui la lingua comune [fra di noi] era l’inglese. Quindi, inconsapevolmente, ho iniziato a impararlo. E poi è andata sempre così, insomma – l’inglese prima o poi s’impara: è nell’aria, nel vento, nelle canzoni...”²⁰

Later on, as an adult, Duranti traveled extensively, worked as a translator (mainly from English and German into Italian) and for over 20 years spent at least half of the year in New York, often changing apartments and suburbs. This multilingual and transnational background led her to undergo what I call a “transpatriation process” (Dagnino, 2015). This process, triggered by moving physically and imaginatively outside one’s cultural homeland, allows individuals, including writers, to adopt new ways of self-identification and to develop a transcultural orientation in which “all cultures look decentered in relation to all other cultures, including one’s own” (Berry and Epstein, 1999, p. 312). As a result, Duranti was able to creatively explore her acquired transcultural disposition and re-enact it in the form of transcultural narratives

¹⁹ “German is my first language but I don’t love this language; just because it is the language that [I felt] kept me apart from my parents.”

²⁰ “At home I had this Swiss-German nanny who spoke German. My cousins, instead, had a certain Ms. Jesh, who would talk to them in English; there were a lot of them and they would often come to play at the park in Genoa. But, most of all, my Swiss nanny would speak a bit of English, while their nanny couldn’t speak German. Thus the common language [among us] was English. In this way, without even knowing it, I started to learn it. And it was always like this, after all – sooner or later you get to learn English: it’s in the air, in the wind, in the songs...”

(Dagnino, 2016a, 2016b) pervaded by autobiographical references (Spagnuolo, 2017; Wilson, 2009). Although her transcultural sensibility runs through her body of work, it is mostly manifest in her eighth novel *Sogni mancini* (1996). It is the story of an Italian woman – “clearly a figuration of Duranti,” according to Rita Wilson (2009, p. 191) – who is obsessed with the idea of finding a way to get rid of fixed identities and monolingual perspectives. Duranti self-translated the book into English and published it in 2000 with the title *Left-handed Dreams*.

I interviewed Francesca Duranti on her work of self-translation in June 2017 in her Tuscan villa at the outskirts of Lucca. In our interview, Duranti confirmed that she started self-translating because she wanted the book out in English and because her editor in the US, Cecile Engel, pushed her to do so: “The publisher wanted to spare on the translation? Did she have a deep cultural purpose in mind? I don’t know. I wanted the book published [in English], and she [Cecilia, the editor] was bossy” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017a).²¹ *Sogni mancini* was published in Italian in 1996, while the self-translation was published four years later, both in the US and in the UK, by two different publishers. Duranti’s UK publisher, Troubador Publishing, rightly acknowledged Duranti’s contribution as a self-translator. The frontispiece reports this note after the title: “Written and translated from the original Italian by Francesca Duranti.” (Duranti, 2000b).²² On the other hand, Duranti’s US publisher, Delphinium Books, didn’t seem keen to advertise *Left-Handed Dreams* as a self-translation; therefore, in the para-textual material, there is no mention of it. I asked Duranti about her publisher’s reticence to promote it as a self-translation, but she was not of much help in this regard: “At the time, I did not really care about being acknowledged as the translator of my work” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017a).

²¹ Duranti made this particular statement in a private e-mail correspondence prior to our vis-à-vis interview. We conducted our interview in Italian, while in our email exchange she replied to me in English, although I had initially written to her in Italian. The author has kindly agreed to its public use.

²² On visibility or invisibility of (self-)translations through the analysis of paratextual material see, in particular, Dasilva (2011).

Transparency is not always strenuously sought after by publishers nor by writers-translators.²³ The reasons are manifold. Recent research shows that it may be due to the perceived lesser prestige ascribed to a translated work in relation to the original work, or to the writers' wish to inscribe their name as authors (not as translators) within a more prestigious and powerful literary system (Arrula Ruiz, 2018; Grutman, 2013b). The writer Francesca Marciano has also highlighted the fact that translated books cannot compete for national literary awards and are seldom granted those government book funds so needed by publishers to cover publication costs (Dagnino and Marciano, 2017).

For her English self-translation, Duranti availed herself of the help of a dear friend, the Italian-American Arthur Coppotelli, whose task was to “de-italianize her English” (Di Ciolla McGowan 2000, p. v): “Ogni sera inviavo via fax la mia auto-traduzione ad Arthur all’altro capo di Manhattan, in modo che lui potesse controllarla. A volte mi chiamava per dirmi, ‘You just can’t say this in English!’ [in inglese]. Io rispondevo, ‘Ma è proprio quello che voglio dire!’ Poi litigavamo per un quarto d’ora e alla fine trovavamo un compromesso. In un certo senso, l’abbiamo fatta insieme [la traduzione]. Io la facevo e lui mi sgridava. E poi me l’aggiustava. *C’est la vie*. Io avevo in mente UN libro, UNA storia ed era quella che doveva venire fuori, in forma e sostanza. A volte era una faticaccia” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017).²⁴ In our interview, the author states that she did not enjoy at all the process of self-translation and that after this first attempt she was not keen on the experience nor interested in replicating it: “Self-translation happened once. That’s it” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017a).

²³ On “transparent” (that is explicit) and “opaque” self-translations, see in particular Dasilva (2011).

²⁴ “Every evening I would fax my translated work across Manhattan to Arthur so that he could check it. He sometimes would call me back saying, ‘You just can’t say this in English!’ I’d reply, ‘But this is exactly what I want to say!’ To a certain extent we did it [the translation] together. I did it and he scolded me. And then he would fix it. Then we would argue for fifteen minutes until we would reach a compromise. *C’est la vie*. I had in mind A book, A story, and this is what would have to come out, in form and substance. At times, it was a real slog.”

Here I would like to open a little parenthesis and point out that Duranti does not consider herself a bilingual writer in the Italian-English combination. “My English is far from being fluent and proficient” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017a). Instead, she prefers to consider herself a polylingual, whose main language of reference remains Italian: “Bilingue non sono in niente. Semmai sarei polilingue, perché parlo anche il tedesco e il francese. Me la cavo parecchio bene in tutte queste lingue ma nessuna posso dire che sia una mia seconda lingua importante” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017b).²⁵ This partially explains why Duranti did not enthusiastically experience self-translation as a recreation, rewriting or a creativity enhancer but rather as a burdensome chore that needed to be carried out. In her case, there was no conscious experimentation with the translation process, as she confirmed in our interview. Indeed, in a previous interview with Helena Tanqueiro (2014, no p. n.) she had already stated: “il testo italiano a un certo punto ha cominciato a correre, mentre quello inglese (lo conosco bene, ma non è la mia prima, e neppure seconda, lingua) arrancava al seguito.”²⁶ This is an important and revealing element of Duranti’s approach to self-translation, which explains the lack of frequent and substantive differences between the two texts that could hint at a “regenerative” translation practice. In other words, it is hard to identify in Duranti’s self-translation any of those “revisional” changes usually required to re-contextualize the target text and that, according to Jung (2002, p. 49), represent “the actual decision of the author [...] to rewrite his [sic] text, rather than translate the original.”

To be precise, the main real difference between the two texts consists of the inclusion, at the end of the book (and only in the US edition), of a series of recipes that refer to the chapter titles (each chapter title corresponds to an Italian dish). Again, when

²⁵ I’m not bilingual in anything [meaning: in any language combination]. If anything, I might be polylingual, because I also speak German and French. I get along well with all these languages but I cannot say that any of this is an important second language.”

²⁶ “The Italian text started flowing rapidly, while the English one (I know English well but it’s not my first, nor second language) trudged heavily behind.”

I asked Duranti about the inclusion of the recipes, she explained that the idea came from her editor at Delphinium: “Le ricette? È stato un capriccio della mia editrice, Cecile, che si è impuntata come un mulo. Forse, da un punto di vista commerciale, ha avuto ragione ma io avrei mille volte preferito non avercele. Tra l’altro le ho inventate a casaccio” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017b).²⁷ Only in few instances there emerge little discrepancies (a few minor omissions and additions, the alteration of a few words) between the two texts. This leads to the inference that, more or less consciously, Duranti used the process of self-translation to translate not only her text but also her cultural self into another linguistic and cultural milieu, contesting the idea of a single, self-contained identity and embracing instead the notion of a dialectic, plurilingual, and pluricultural self. In so doing, as Spagnuolo (2017, p. 76) argues, “she [Duranti] manages to create a space where her original diversity does not disappear, but intersects with new meanings and values.”

I will provide here a few examples that show how, according to the parameters set by Oustinoff (2001), Duranti’s self-translation appears to oscillate between an “orthodox” (or equivalent) translation and a “decentred” one, that is one that incorporates elements or echoes of the source language.²⁸

²⁷ “The recipes? It was a whim of my editor; she insisted obstinately about it. Perhaps, from a commercial point of view, she was right, but I would have much preferred not to include them. By the way, I made them up quite randomly” (all translations of the interview material are my own).

²⁸ Starting from the viewpoint that translating means producing a new version of the work (“traduire c’est produire une nouvelle version de l’oeuvre”), Oustinoff (2001, p. 202), differentiates between three main types of self-translation: *proprement dite* and *naturalisante* (self-translation proper, that is conventional, orthodox, standard or equivalent; also, one in which all traces of self-translation and of the source language are erased), *décentrée* (decentred, in that it incorporates reminiscences of the source language) and “*récréatrice*” (a re-creation, a re-writing, in which the author feels free to modify and transform the target text as much as s/he wants). Oustinoff also considers how self-translation often steps outside the norms of ‘translation proper’ and how writers use several different translation strategies at various periods or even within the same work. He also differentiates between ‘circumstantial’ or ‘incidental’ bilingualism and its more ‘deliberate’ and ‘sustained’ variety. Subsequently and drawing on Oustinoff (2001), Recuenco Peñalver

At one point, in *Left-Handed Dreams* the main character, Martina Satriano – an Italian woman in her forties now living and teaching in New York – watches a TV show in which the presenter Julia Child runs into serious trouble trying to prepare a *tarte Tatin* which is “a gray, runny mess [...] a sorry heap.” However, Julia does not let herself be discouraged, puts up a stiff upper lip, and just says, ‘It sometimes happens’ (Duranti 2000a, p. 116).²⁹ And Martina thus comments the scene:

<p>“Capite, questo è il mondo anglosassone, il vostro mondo. O America, America. La signora Child era dignitosa nel suo insuccesso, ma certo era dispiaciuta” (p. 137).</p>	<p><i>A rather literal translation would sound like this:</i> “You see, this is the Anglo-Saxon world, your world. Oh America, America. Ms. Child looked dignified [even] in facing her own fiasco, but she was certainly displeased. <i>Instead, Duranti wrote:</i> “You see, this struck me, the envious Mediterranean, as model Anglo-Saxon behavior. Oh America, America! Julia Child—although certainly annoyed—didn’t allow herself to be upset by her flop” (p. 117).</p>
---	---

In the English text, Martina thus describes herself as “the envious Mediterranean”—envious of the solidity and optimistic attitude of the Americans. The reader, however, is induced to believe that Martina is open and ready to embrace this attitude – like the author, Martina is already in the process of incorporating another perspective into her cultural makeup. In the Italian version, instead, one feels that there is more distance between Martina and the American world. In the Italian text, there is no mention of the “envious Mediterranean”; instead, there is the recognition of a deep difference in cultural perception: the difference between the barbarism of the country she comes from (Italy) and the self-controlled civility of her adopted country (the US). Undoubtedly, in the Italian version, Martina shows a kind of “idealized” view

(2011) has provided a further, more thorough categorization of different types of self-translation.

²⁹ Unless otherwise specified, all the excerpts from Duranti’s (2000a) *Left-Handed Dreams* are drawn from the US version by Delphinium.

of American society, which is typical of someone who looks at it from an outsider's position, not with the self-critical eye of the insider. In this regard, the following sentence is revealing:

<p>“Ma qui di regola non si mente, neppure in Tv [...] Mente ogni tanto qualche politico, ma grazie al cielo ancora oggi, dopo Nixon, la cosa continua a fare scandalo. E io? Io ero ammira- ta e commossa dalla dirittura di quella anziana signora del New England” (pp. 137–138).</p>	<p><i>The word-for-word translation would be as follows:</i> “But here normally people don’t lie, not even on TV [...] Sometimes some politicians lie, but thank God even now, after Nixon, it still causes a big scandal. And what about me? I was in awe and moved by the forthrightness of this lady from New England.”</p> <p><i>And here is Durante’s self-translation:</i> “But in this country, normally, one isn’t supposed to lie. Some politicians sometimes lie, but—thank God—it still causes a big scandal, even after Nixon. At least that’s what we foreigners think, and Julia Child had just confirmed it [<i>this whole sentence is missing in the Italian version</i>]. And I? I was moved by the frankness of this old American lady” (pp. 117–118).</p>
--	--

Indeed, the English version offers a slightly more complex, slightly less naive view of assumed American straightforwardness. Further on, in the English version Durante (2000a) – or, Arthur-from-across-Manhattan – includes an extra sentence which again is meant to problematize the plain candor of the Italian text:

<p>“Quello, capite, era uno spettacolo che non avrei mai visto alla Tv del mio Paese. Credetemi, non esagero...” (p. 138).</p>	<p><i>The literal translation would read:</i> “That, you see, was something that I would never see on Tv in my country. Believe me, I don’t exaggerate...”</p> <p><i>Durante’s self-translation reads:</i> “That, you see, was the kind of situation I would never have seen on Italian TV. In a way it was the very reason I was living in America [<i>again, this sentence is missing in the source text</i>]. I don’t exaggerate...” (p. 118).</p>
---	--

It seems as though in the Italian version Martina still looked at the American society through the eyes of her Italian compatriots living in the peninsula; while in the English translation she had managed, like her author, to carve out for herself a more nuanced role: the role of someone who at the moment of embracing another culture acknowledges both its lights and its shadows, its positives and its negatives. In other words, it seems that, more or less consciously, Duranti took advantage of the self-translation process to project a new cultural identity of herself through a cultural repositioning of her authorial voice. At this stage, we might wonder if such cultural repositioning is due to a real growth in awareness or is instead induced, more or less consciously, by the need to be more attuned to a potential American readership that, in this case, might have found such a flattering depiction of its society too naïve. This would confirm the idea put forward by Arrula Ruiz (2017, p. 8) that, perhaps, “the role-taking of the author changes when rewriting a text to target another community of speakers, [...] aiming to attract a readership from a group or category that may be different from the initial one.”

Although her friend Cappottelli and her US and UK editors made sure that the book sounded like a real novel in English and not like a rather awkward translation by a non-native speaker,³⁰ Duranti was adamant in wanting to maintain a certain “ethnic flavor” in the translation: “I wanted to infuse my prose in English with “a scent of basil,” she reiterated in our interview.³¹ For example, she insisted on keeping the verb “de-southernize” (a neologism), literally translating it from “demeridionalizzare” (another neologism), in regard to the process of shredding Southern accents and dialects. She also chose, against her editors’ advice, to keep the Italian word *naturalzza* in the English text; this word, which we could translate with “naturalness,” is another way of relating to the concept of *sprezzatura*, that is, the acquired (thus

³⁰ In her introduction to the UK edition, Nicoletta Di Ciolla McGowan (2000, p. v) explains that the English version underwent “a number of revisions for over four years” before being published.

³¹ Duranti expressed this same concept, using the same expression (“a scent of basil”), in a previous mail correspondence with Di Ciolla McGowan (2000, p. xviii).

totally unnatural) ability to behave and to accomplish even the most difficult tasks effortlessly.

In order to mirror the English spoken by Martina, who is also the first-person narrator, Duranti used certain turns of phrase, “linguistic quirks [and] neologisms [...] that she created [...] on the model of the Italian lexicon” (Di Ciolla McGowan 2000, pp. v–vi). In so doing, Duranti more or less consciously even manages to destabilize, although ever so slightly, the centrality of English as the dominant global language. By introducing in her English prose a reminiscence of her native Italian, the author shows her resolve to resist – at least to a certain extent – the pressure to “domesticate” (Venuti, 1995, 2012) her text: that is, she declines to make it conform so closely to the values, norms, and linguistic conventions of the target culture that it may seem directly written in the target language itself.³² By introducing echoes of the Italian language into her English text, Duranti arguably shows her desire to disrupt the traditional dichotomy of source

<p>“Ed è certo che, se Dio vuole, questo sarà il mio ultimo sogno mancino, l’ultima volta che mi domanderò se mi trovo al di qua o al di là dello specchio, se la mano che accarezza il mio cane sia la destra o la sinistra [...] E avrò questo cane, questa vita e il resto, sia quello che sia, compreso Costantino, comprese le mie due Patrie. E ora che tutto è deciso posso finalmente aprire la porta, sento l’odore del basilico sulla finestra e sono a casa” (p. 229).</p>	<p>And one sure thing, God willing: this will be my last left-handed dream, the last time I’ll be wondering whether I am on this side or that side of the mirror, whether I’m petting my dog with my right or left hand [...] And I will have this dog, this life, and everything else, including Costantino and my two countries. And now that that’s decided, I turn the key, open the door, smell the basil on my window sill, and I’m home (p. 197).</p>
---	--

³² However, one should remind oneself that domestication techniques may be – and are – also applied to reduce the foreignness of the Other (as a bilingual author writing the source text in a foreign language) and potentially approach a new cultural version of the Self (as a self-translator working on a text for a new readership in the target language). On the role-taking and self-changing of the author during the process of self-translation see Arrula Ruiz (2017).

text vs. target text, as well as the hierarchy between languages. In this way, as Beaujour (1989, p. 112) would state, “both versions become avatars of a hypothetical total text.” In the self-translated text, the two languages are reconciled and become part of a unified meta-text, much as Martina reconciles her left-handed (the Other of her Self) with her right-handed self, finally finding unity in her transcultural home – her meta-identity.³³

Conclusions

By her own admission, Duranti started off self-translating her work with the aim of selling her book to an English-speaking readership. Thus, according to the categorization that I have here proposed, she initially assumed the role of a “Seller.” However, during the translation process, she gradually moved into the group of the “Bireflectors” (or “Intermediaries”). Although in a somewhat limited and mostly instinctive way, she used self-translation as a tool – together with her transcultural creative writing – to question her identity and redefine it by negotiating two linguistic traditions and their related worldviews. Unfortunately, Duranti did not follow this initial lead and stopped in her tracks. In other words, she limited herself to one single attempt at self-translation and did not further try to explore the stylistic and creative possibilities inherent in self-translation and bilingual writing. In other words, she never showed, nor acknowledged, any deliberate penchant for or any particular interest in the creative and stylistic experimentation typical of the “Explorers.”³⁴ Apart from few exceptions as reported in the course of this chapter, Duranti’s self-translation closely follows its source text with regard to the structure of chapters (including titles), paragraphs, sentences, and word choice. In

³³ In transcultural terms, a meta-identity allows to reconcile and accommodate each of the multiple articulations of being that may define and express an individual.

³⁴ Discussing the self-translational practices of bilingual writers in the Spanish-English combination such as Manuel Puig, Ariel Dorfman and Rosario Ferré, Esplin (2012, p. 182) argues that, “The task of self-translating enables these writers to tweak, readjust, or revise aspects of their texts and their literary personae. [...] Especially in the event of self-translation, authorship and textuality become evolving and collaborative endeavors.”

the target text there is no alteration of the scenes, descriptions, and dialogues presented in the source text. In Duranti's case, therefore, self-translation does not lead to the creation of another imaginary setup, with its different structure, word choice, set of poetic references, or symbolic system. One might argue that this is mainly due to the fact that Duranti did not dwell deeply and long enough in her adopted linguistic matrix to reach a stable bilingual status and thus enter a fully bilingual creative mindset. Research shows (Recuenco Peñalver, 2011) that there are self-translators who give up after their first attempt or even before completing their first self-translation endeavour. Despite their more or less accomplished bilingual status, they find the task too demanding, too time-consuming or even too confusing in terms of cultural negotiation and identity formation.³⁵ On the other hand, there also are writers who experiment with self-translation as the culmination of a creative process of bilingual acquisition. Once they reach idiomatic bilingual proficiency, these self-translators feel compelled to go the extra mile and create opportunities for personal revision and reinvention as they take ownership of the linguistic and cultural ambivalences that arise from authoring two similar yet always distinct narratives. For this reason, I think we need to distinguish between self-translation as the product of a process of linguistic and cultural mediation ("the intermediated" self-translation) and self-translation as the product of a process of creative transformation (the "explored" self-translation).

Despite not being a rewriting, a rendition or a re-generation of a previously written text, Duranti's self-translation is not a standard translation either. Rather, it may be considered a – somewhat rudimentary, perhaps – "intermediated" translation. In other words, Duranti did not limit herself to reproduce in one language what she had created in another. On the contrary, working within the limitations of not fully mastering English, she strove to produce a complementary literary text with its own cultural echo and effect in the target language. That is what she admitted doing when, operating as a cultural mediator and in full transcultural

³⁵ Arguably, other authors may also find that self-translation does not add any significant existential value to their experience as writers.

mode (Dagnino 2015, p. 158), she tried to infuse her English text with a “scent of basil.”

References

- Anselmi, S. (2012). *On Self-Translation: An Exploration in Self-Translators' Teloi and Strategies*. Milan: LED Edizioni Universitarie.
- Arrula Ruiz, G. (2017). “What We Talk About When We Talk About Identity in Self-Translation,” *Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione*, 7, pp. 1–21.
- (2018). *Theory and Practice of Self-Translation*. PhD. Lejona, Vizcaya, Spain: University of the Basque Country.
- Baetens Beardsmore, H. (1982). *Bilingualism: Basic Principles*. Clevedon, Avon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Baker, C. (2001). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 3rd ed. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Bassnett, S. and Bush, P. (2006). *The Translator as Writer*. London: Continuum.
- Bassnett, S. (2013). “L'autotraduzione come riscrittura,” in Ceccherelli, A., Imposti, E. G., and Perotto, M. (eds) *Autotraduzione e riscrittura*. Bologna: Bononia University Press, pp. 31–44.
- Bassnett, S. and Lefevere, A. (eds.) (1990). *Translation, History and Culture*. London: Pinter Publishers.
- Birdsong, D. (2014). “Dominance and Age in Bilingualism.” *Applied Linguistics*, pp. 1–20.
- Berry, Ellen E., and Mikhail N. Epstein (1999). “In Place of a Conclusion: Transcultural Dialogue,” in Berry E. E. and Mikhail N. E. (eds.) *Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication*. New York: St. Martin's, pp. 302–22.
- Klosty Beaujour, E. (1989). *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the “First” Emigration*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Birdsong, D. (2005). “Interpreting Age Effects in Second Language Acquisition,” in Kroll, J. F. and De Groot, A. M. B. (eds.) *Handbook of Bilingualism: Psycholinguistic Approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 109–27.

- Casanova, P. (2009). "Consecration and Accumulation of Literary Capital: Translation as Unequal Exchange," in Baker, M. (ed.) *Translation Studies. Critical Concepts in Linguistics*. Vol. II. London-New York: Routledge, pp. 85–107.
- Chapela, A. (2015). "Translating Myself: Adventures in Self-Translation at the Iowa Translation Workshop." *Exchanges*. The University of Iowa, 14 September. Available at: <https://exchanges.uiowa.edu/blog/translating-myself-adventures-in-self-translation-at-the-iowa-translation-workshop/> (Accessed: 31 August 2017).
- de Courtivron, I. (2003). *Lives in Translation: Bilingual Writers on Identity and Creativity*. New York: Palgrave/Macmillan Press.
- Dagnino, A. (2016a). "Transpatriation Processes and Early Twenty-First-Century Transcultural Novels in the Global Age," in Glenn, D. and Tulloch, G. (eds.) *Border Crossings*. Mile End, South Australia: Wakefield Press, pp. 204–217.
- (2016b). "Re-discovering Alessandro Spina's Diasporic Consciousness in a Transcultural Mode." *Special Issue: Transcultural Literary Studies: Politics, Theory, and Literary Analysis. Humanities*, 5(42), pp. 1–11.
- (2015). *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.
- Dagnino, A. and Duranti, F. (2017a). Email correspondence, 3 June.
- (2017b). Interview with Francesca Duranti, 2 July.
- Dagnino, A. and Marciano, F. (2017). Interview with Francesca Marciano, 14 September.
- Daller, Michael, H. (2011). "The Measurement of Bilingual Proficiency: Introduction." *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 15 (2), pp. 123–127.
- Dasilva, X. M. (2011). "La autotraducción transparente y la autotraducción opaca," in Dasilva, X. M. and Tanqueiro, H. (eds.) *Aproximaciones a la autotraducción*. Vigo, Spain: Editorial Academia del Hispanismo, pp. 45–68.
- De Swaan, A. (2001). *Words of the World: The Global Language System*. Cambridge: Polity.

- De Ferra, D. (2000). "Intervista con Francesca Duranti." *Bullettin for the Society for Italian Studies*, 33, pp. 17–26.
- Di Ciolla McGowan, N. (2000). "Introduction," in *Left-Handed Dreams*. Leicester, UK: Troubador Publishing, pp. v–xxi.
- Duranti, F. (2003). *L'ultimo viaggio della Canaria*. Venezia: Marsilio.
- (2000a). *Left-Handed Dreams*. New York: Delphinium Books.
- (2000b). *Left-Handed Dreams*. Leicester, UK: Troubador Publishing.
- (1999). *Effetti personali*. Milano: Rizzoli.
- (1996). *Sogni Mancini*. Milano: Rizzoli.
- Epstein, M. N. (2009). "Transculture: A Broad Way between Globalism and Multiculturalism." *American Journal of Economics & Sociology*, 68(1), pp. 327–51.
- Esplin, M. H. (2012). *Spanish, English, and In-Between: Self-translation in the U.S. and Latin America*. PhD. Michigan State University.
- Fabbro, F. (2004). *Neuropedagogia delle lingue. Come insegnare le lingue ai bambini*. Roma: Astrolabio.
- (1996). *Il cervello bilingue. Neurolinguistica e poliglossia*. Roma: Astrolabio.
- Ferraro, A. and Grutman, R. (2016). *L'Autotraduction littéraire. Perspectives théoriques*. Paris: Classiques Garnier.
- Fischer, B. (2016). "Transcultural Literary Studies: Politics, Theory, and Literary Analysis. Special Issue Introduction." *Humanities*, 5 (86), pp. 1–5.
- Fitch, B. T. (1985). "The Status of Self-translation." *Texte*, 4, pp. 111–25.
- Garazi A. R. (2017), "What we talk about when we talk about identity in self-translation." *Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione*, 7, pp. 1–22.
- Gentes, E. (2016). "... et ainsi j'ai décidé de me traduire. Les moments déclencheurs dans la vie littéraire des autotraducteurs," in Ferraro, A. and Grutman, R. (eds.) *L'Autotraduction littéraire: perspectives théoriques*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, pp. 85–101.

- Grosjean, F. (2010). *Bilingual: Life and Reality*. Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press.
- (1989) “Neurolinguists Beware! The Bilingual is not Two Monolinguals in One Person.” *Brain and Language*, 36(1), pp. 3–15.
- Grutman, R. (2016a). “L’autotraduction: de la galerie de portraits à la galaxie des langues,” in Ferraro, A and Grutman, R. (eds.) *L’Autotraduction littéraire. Perspectives théoriques*. Paris: Classiques Garnier.
- (2016b). “‘Non si tratta di una semplice auto-traduzione’: il ruolo della riscrittura nella postura d’autore di Amara Lakhous.” *Special Issue (Voci della traduzione/Voix de la traduction). mediAzioni*, 21, pp. 1–28.
- (2015). “Manuscripts, traduction et autotraduction,” in Montini, C. (ed.) *Traduire. Genèse du Choix*. Paris: Éditions des Archives Contemporaines, pp. 115–28.
- (2013a). “A Sociological Glance at Self-translation and Self-translators.” In Cordingley, A. (ed.) *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 63–80.
- (2013b). “Autotraduction, asymétrie, extraterritorialité,” in Lagarde, C. and Tanqueiro, H., *L’autotraduction aux frontières de la langue e de la culture* Limoges: Lambert-Lucas, pp. 37–42.
- (2011). “Diglosia y autotraducción ‘vertical’ (en y fuera de España),” in Dasilva, X.M. and Tanqueiro, H. (eds.) *Aproximaciones a la autotraducción*. Vigo: Academia del Hispanismo, pp. 69–91.
- (2009). “Autotranslation,” in Baker, M. (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge, pp. 257–260.
- (1998). “Auto-translation, Multilingualism” and “Translation,” in Baker, M. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. London-New York: Routledge, pp. 17–20; pp. 157–160.
- Grutman, R. and Van Bolderen, T. (2014). “Self-Translation,” in Bermann S. and Porter C. (eds.) *A Companion to Translation Studies*, pp. 323–332.
- Hannerz, U. (2001). “Thinking about Culture in a Global Ecumene.” *Culture in the Communication Age*. Ed. James Lull. London: Routledge, pp. 54–71.

- Hewson, L. (2006). "The Vexed Question of Creativity in Translation." *Palimpsestes*, Hors série, pp. 54–63. Available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/palimpsestes/1068> (Accessed: 25 October 2017).
- (1997). "Change in Translation and the Image of the Translator," in Simms, K. (ed.) *Translating Sensitive Texts: Linguistic Aspects*. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, pp. 47–56.
- Hokenson, J. W. and Munson, M. (2007). *The Bilingual Text. History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Huston, N. (2002). *Losing North. Musings on Land, Tongue, and Self*. Toronto: McArthur & Co.
- Johnston, D. (2007). "Mapping the Geographies of Translation," in Kelly, S. and Johnston, D. (eds.) *Betwixt and Between: Place and Cultural Translation*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 254–68.
- Jung, V. (2002). *English-German Self-Translation of Academic Texts and its Relevance for translation theory*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Kellman, S. G. (2003). *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on their Craft*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- (2000). *The Translingual Imagination*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Klosty Beaujour, E. (1989). *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the "First" Emigration*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Krause, C. (2007). "Eadar Dà Chànan: Self-Translation, the Bilingual Edition and Modern Scottish Gaelic Poetry." PhD. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh.
- Lagarde, C. (2015). "De l'individu au global: les enjeux psychosociolinguistiques de l'autotraduction littéraire." *Glottopol. Revue de sociolinguistique en ligne*, 25, pp. 31–46. Available at: http://glottopol.univ-rouen.fr/numero_25.html (Accessed: 21 July 2017).
- Landa, M. (2006). "La autotraducción como reescritura creative," in Hibbs, S. and Martinez, M. Toulouse (eds.) *Traduction, adaptation, réécriture dans le monde hispanique contemporain*. Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, pp. 52–60.

- Nannavecchia, T. (2016). "Translating Italian-Canadian Migrant Writing to Italian: A Discourse around the Return to the Motherland/Tongue." PhD. University of Ottawa.
- Ng B. C. and Wigglesworth, G. (2007). *Bilingualism: An Advanced Resource Book*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Nordin, I. G., Hansen J, and Zamorano Llena C. (2013). "Introduction: Conceptualizing Transculturality in Literature," in Nordin, I. G., Hansen J, and Zamorano Llena C (eds.) *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. ix–xxvii.
- Nordin, I. G., C. Edfeldt, L. Hu, H. Jonsson, A. Leblanc (2016). "Introduction: Transcultural Identity Constructions in a Changing World," in I. G. Nordin, C. Edfeldt, L. Hu, H. Jonsson, and A. Leblanc (eds.) *Transcultural Identity Constructions in a Changing World*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, pp. 11–22.
- Oustinoff, M. (2001). *Bilinguisme d'écriture et auto-traduction. Julien Green, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Paradis, M. (2009). *Declarative and procedural determinants of second languages*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- (2004). *A Neurolinguistic Theory of Bilingualism*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Parks, T. (1999). "Different Worlds," in Allén, S. (ed.) *Translation of Poetry and Poetic Prose. Proceedings of the Nobel Symposium 110*. Singapore, New Jersey, London, Hong Kong: World Scientific Publishing, pp. 135–150.
- Popovič, A. (1976). *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta.
- Pratt, M. L. (1992). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.
- Recuenco Peñalver, M. (2015). "Encounter with André Brink: Looking on ... Self-Translation." *Research in African Literatures*, 46(2), pp. 146–156.
- (2011). "Más allá de la traducción: La autotraducción." *Trans*, 15, pp. 193–208.

- Reid, A. (1990). *Whereabouts. Notes on Being a Foreigner*. Buffalo, N.Y.: White Pine Press.
- Romaine, S. (1995). *Bilingualism*. 2nd ed. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell.
- Saidero, D. (2011). "Self-Translation as Transcultural Re-Inscription of Identity in Dôre Michelut and Gianna Patriarca," in Ferraro, A. (ed.) *Oltreoceano 05. L'autotraduzione nelle letterature migranti*. Udine: Forum, pp. 33–41.
- Salmon, L. and Mariani, M. (2008). *Bilinguismo e traduzione. Dalla neurolinguistica alla didattica delle lingue*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Spagnuolo, E. (2017). "Giving Voice to the Hybrid Self. Self-translation as Strategy by Francesca Duranti/Martina Satriano." *Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione*, 7, pp. 67–84.
- Taft, R. (1981). "The Role and Personality of the Mediator," in Bochner, S. (ed.) *The Mediating Person: Bridges between Cultures*. Cambridge: Schenkman.
- Tanqueiro, H. (2014). "Sobre la experiencia de autotraducirse #1." *Translation Designers*, 18 November. Available at: <http://translationdesigners.tumblr.com> (Accessed: 23 January 2017).
- Torrop, P. (2002). "Translation as Translating as Culture." *Sign Systems Studies*, 30(2), pp. 593–605.
- Venuti, L. (ed.) (2012). *The Translation Studies Reader*. 3rd ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- (1995). *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Venzo, P. (2016). "(Self)Translation and the Poetry of the 'In-between.'" *Cordite Poetry Review*. 1(February), pp. 1–6. Available at: <http://cordite.org.au/scholarly/selftranslation-in-between/> (Accessed: 22 May 2017).
- Welsch, W. (2009). "On the Acquisition and Possession of Commonalities," in Schulze-Engler, F. and Helff, S. (eds.) *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 3–36.

- (1999). “Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today,” in Featherstone, M. and Lash, S. (eds.) *Spaces of Culture: City-Nation-World*. London: Sage, 1999. 194–213.
- Wilson, R. (2009). “The Writer’s Double: Translation, Writing, and Autobiography.” *Romance Studies*, 27(3), pp. 186–198.
- Yan, C. and Huang, J. J. (2014). “The Culture Turn in Translation Studies.” *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 4, pp. 487–494.

Established and Alternative Literary Criticism: A Study of Marguerite Duras's Works Reviewed in Sweden

Mattias Aronsson

Dalarna University

Introduction

This chapter examines two types of reviews issued in Sweden of Marguerite Duras's works translated into Swedish. A corpus of texts published in the Swedish press has been collected (here called "established criticism"), and this material is contrasted with reviews uploaded in the blogosphere by "prosumers" (in the study labelled "alternative criticism").¹ Hence, the two types of literary criticism are published in separate arenas, and we may assume that they target different audiences and serve different purposes. The reviews are also written by individuals occupying very different positions in the world of literature. The established critics publish their reviews in distinguished or at least well-known newspapers and magazines. These individuals have thus attained *dominating* positions in the field of cultural production. Most of the bloggers that are present in the corpus, on the other hand, must be considered as non-established in the cultural arena – since they do not have access to these renowned publications. Instead, they have positioned themselves in the *alternative* arena

¹ The first results have been published in a previous article (Aronsson, 2016), and the present study constitutes the second part of the research project.

How to cite this book chapter:

Aronsson, M. 2021. Established and Alternative Literary Criticism: A Study of Marguerite Duras's Works Reviewed in Sweden. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 307–335. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.n>. License: CC-BY 4.0

of the blogosphere, and they have embraced the “do-it-yourself” attitude of the Internet. Even if we regard the alternative online criticism as being a part of the public discourse today, we should remain aware that it has not attained, and will probably never attain, the same status as established criticism. To give an obvious example, a review published in a highbrow daily newspaper, such as *The Times* in Britain, *The New York Times* in the United States, or *Svenska Dagbladet* in Sweden, will always provide the literary author, and the reviewer, with more cultural capital than a text published on a personal blog. Therefore, I will, in this study, consider the established criticism as a *dominating discourse*, and the criticism published in the blogosphere as an *alternative discourse*.

The study investigates the discourses of these two types of literary criticism, with a special focus on the question: What are the main characteristics of the *dominating discourse* of the established criticism, and what are the main characteristics of the *alternative discourse* in the blogosphere? A corpus of Swedish reviews of Duras’s oeuvre has been chosen because many of her works have recently been published in Swedish translation. However, no reader-response study based on this material has ever been issued.

The alternative literary criticism published on the Internet represents a somewhat new phenomenon, inasmuch as it constitutes a parallel to the traditional reviews published in the “old” press – such as printed daily newspapers and literary magazines. It also presents the interpretations and opinions of “ordinary” readers, and by that I refer to people who do not occupy a position of power in the field of cultural production. This category of reader did not have the opportunity to participate actively in the literary debate prior to the democratization of information and communication technology – i.e., before personal computers with high-performing Internet connection, smartphones, iPads, etc. became an everyday household item for most people. In that respect, reviews written and published by bloggers on the Internet represent a relatively new facet of literary criticism.

The corpus for this research project has been collected using the search engine *Google*. Originally, 20 reviews labelled *established criticism* and published in the Swedish press were collected – as were 20 reviews published in the blogosphere and labelled *alternative criticism*. The material was collected in March 2016.

The established criticism appeared in daily national newspapers (*Svenska Dagbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Expressen*), in regional papers (*Göteborgs-Posten*, *Upsala Nya Tidning*, *Sydsvenskan*) or in periodicals (*Fokus*). Some texts were found in cultural magazines published exclusively on the Internet (*Dixikon*, *Litteraturmagazinet*, *Tidningen Kulturen*). The alternative criticism was collected from the blogosphere and, in two cases, from customers' reviews on a web-based bookseller's site (*Bokus*). Hence, the corpus comprised 40 texts altogether. For the discourse analysis presented in this part of the research project, a smaller number of representative reviews (6 from the Swedish press and 6 from the blogosphere) have been excerpted in order to illustrate the distinguishing features of established and alternative criticism, respectively.²

In the theoretical background below, some aspects of reader-response studies and the Internet will be presented. I will then briefly discuss some key concepts from the field of discourse analysis that are pertinent for this study.

Theoretical Background

Recent studies demonstrate the importance of opinions expressed by bloggers in the modern economy, where the "e-commerce" phenomenon has been soaring for quite some years.³ Hence,

² The reviews published in the Swedish press and representing the established criticism are written by Sem-Sandberg (2007), Törnvall (2007), Beckman (2012), Kåreland (2014), Van Reis (2014) and Högström (2015). The reviews published in the blogosphere and representing the alternative literary criticism are composed by Eli (2014), Flynnner (2014), Lager (2014), Linnea (2014), Nilsson (2015) and Wiström (2015).

³ See, for instance, Ardelet and Brial (2011, pp. 45–69) and Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson (2012, p. 386) who argue that "those who prosume on the Internet, especially Web 2.0, are very attractive to capitalists". Web 2.0 is a term that is sometimes used to describe the "new" version of the Internet, where content is commonly generated by the users themselves. Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson (*ibid.*, p. 385) explain: "Prosumption on the Internet has increasingly occurred through user-generated content on what has become known as Web 2.0 (in Web 1.0, such as AOL or Yahoo, content is generated by the producer, leaving little room for prosumption). Web 2.0 includes the social web with sites such as Flickr and You

publishing houses must today not only keep an eye on what the established critics in the old media have to say about their publications, but they must also be increasingly aware of the opinions expressed by literary commentators in the blogosphere.

The study is inspired by concepts such as *convergence culture* and *participatory culture*, popularized by media researcher Henry Jenkins, as well as other scholars. See, for instance, Jenkins (2006) and Jenkins, Ito and Boyd (2015). In a culture where old and new media tend to converge, the consumer of literature (as well as other products) has the opportunity to be an active participant in the construction of meaning and value – in this case by writing and uploading book reviews on a personal blog, for instance, or by publishing fanfiction stories in a web-based community.⁴ The notion of *prosumer* (a neologism created by merging “producer” with “consumer”) will be used with reference to this somewhat new actor in the world of commerce – and, indeed, in the world of literary reader-response research.

The Swedish researcher Ann Steiner (2012, p. 61), specialist in the sociology of literature, argues that the non-established critics specifically have become important agents in the modern literary market.⁵ They do not only consume cultural products, but they also contribute to the production of meaning and value by uploading their reviews on the Internet. They have, thus, become *prosumers*, i.e., agents who combine the role of the producer with that of the consumer. In doing so, they challenge the traditional cultural hierarchies, according to Steiner.

In a previous article presenting the first part of the research project focusing on the Swedish reception of Marguerite Duras’s oeuvre, I showed that the alternative criticism published on the

Tube, and much else where users not only consume but also produce content.”

⁴ Jenkins (2006, p. 331) defines *participatory culture* in the following way: “Culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content”.

⁵ Steiner (2012, pp. 51–63) uses the terms “*amatörer*” (amateurs) and “*amatörrecensenter*” (amateur reviewers) when describing critics who publish their texts in the blogosphere, whereas I have chosen to label them *alternative* or *non-established* literary critics.

Internet is largely dominated by women bloggers.⁶ They publish very succinct reviews that are significantly shorter than the texts that make up the established criticism.⁷ The specific books discussed by the bloggers also differ from the ones examined by the established critics. The alternative critics, or “prosumers”, review the Durassian classics (e.g., *The Lover* and *The Sea Wall*) more often than recently published titles. These bloggers write overtly subjective reviews, using a personal or even intimate tone – as indicated by the high frequency of pronouns in the first person (i.e., the Swedish equivalents to “I”, “me”, “myself”, “my”, and “mine”) referring to the reviewer herself (or himself).⁸ However, as noted in the previous study (Aronsson, 2016, pp. 15 and 20), an analysis of quantitative data of first-person pronouns may give certain indications, but it should also be supplemented with a qualitative approach. I will therefore, in this chapter, proceed with a more thorough analysis of the discourses employed in the established and alternative criticism that make up the corpus.

As Schiffrin, Tannen and Hamilton (2001, p. 1) point out, there exist numerous definitions of discourse and discourse analysis, emanating from disciplines as diverse as linguistics, anthropology, philosophy and psychology. Quite obviously, literary studies may also be added to the list.

One definition, focusing explicitly on *critical discourse analysis*, is formulated by Ruth Wodak and reads as follows:

Critical Discourse Analysis sees discourse – the use of language in speech and writing – as a form of “social practice”. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between

⁶ The results showed that 80% of the bloggers (16 individuals of 20) presented themselves with female names, 10% (2 of 20) with male names, and for the last 10% (2 individuals), the sex could not be established (Aronsson, 2016, p. 8).

⁷ When comparing the two types of texts, I found out that the median (=2nd quartile) is 1753 characters (with spaces) for the non-established reviews, compared to 4666 characters for the established criticism (Aronsson, 2016, p. 12).

⁸ The frequency of these pronouns was approximately nine times higher than in the established criticism: 295 pronouns per 100 000 characters in the blogosphere compared to 33 pronouns per 100 000 characters in the press (Aronsson, 2016, p. 14). This is, indeed, a significant difference.

a particular discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure that frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people (Wodak, 1997, p. 6).

As I find Wodak's definition informative and useful, I will apply it in this study together with Van Dijk's observations. Van Dijk (2001, p. 352) has pointed out that critical discourse analysis often tends to focus on power relations and the way in which social dominance and inequality are created and reproduced in language. It is therefore akin to disciplines such as gender studies, postcolonial studies and cultural studies. Van Dijk (*ibid.*, p. 355) also argues that “*access to or control over public discourse and communication is an important ‘symbolic’ resource*” that makes up the power base of a group or institution. “In many situations”, Van Dijk (*ibid.*, pp. 355–356) writes, “ordinary people are more or less passive targets of text or talk”, whereas members of powerful groups (the elite) “have more or less exclusive access to, and control over, one or more types of public discourse”.

Regarding literary criticism, this simple dichotomy of access and control versus non-access and non-control was undoubtedly true in pre-Internet days, when ordinary readers were *de facto* locked out of the literary debate. That, however, is not necessarily the case anymore, at least not if one includes reviews published in the blogosphere in the definition of “public discourse”.

Historically, women have always been a dominated group in patriarchal societies. Sheldon (1997, p. 228) notes that many linguists and literary scholars have denounced the silence regularly imposed on women in many situations. She states that “prescriptions of silence have historically restricted women and girls from expressing their authentic voice in speaking or writing”. A similar opinion is expressed by Reid (2011, p. 7), who argues that women who have ventured into the literary world have long been diminished, contested or quite simply ignored by male competitors already established in the field, who tend to show a “*misogynie tenace*” (*ibid.*, p. 9), a tenacious misogyny, vis-à-vis women writers and critics.

So, if women's literary writing and criticism have struggled to find a home and come in from the "wilderness" once identified by Showalter (1981), then the blogosphere may perhaps provide that safe haven today. After all, according to statistics regarding the situation in Sweden (Findahl, 2013, p. 35), girls and women make up the vast majority of the readers as well as of the writers of blogs. The women's dominance in literary criticism published on the Internet is also confirmed in my own corpus (Aronsson, 2016, pp. 7–9).

If the blogosphere is a social medium where different "voices from the margins" – particularly girls and women – have the opportunity to interact with one another without the "prescriptions of silence" identified by Sheldon, then this specific discourse will, indeed, serve as an interesting alternative to the dominating discourse of traditional literary reviews published in the press.

Results

First, some examples of established criticism published in the press will be presented and discussed, followed by some representative examples of the alternative criticism published in the blogosphere. Finally, the subject of interaction on the Internet will be discussed. The question of interaction is of interest because it introduces a new research field within literary reader-response studies. Traditionally, literary reviews were printed in the paper press, and there was normally no interaction between the reviewer and the readers of the newspaper or the journal, and nor did these readers have access to a convenient arena in which to interact with each other. The Internet, on the other hand, allows for an enormous potential with regards to an open exchange of ideas between the reviewer and the reading public, as well as between individual readers. Therefore, a brief analysis of the interaction in the blogosphere will be included in the study, as this phenomenon is somewhat new to the field of literary reception.

Reviews Published in the Press – An Established Literary Criticism

The established criticism of Marguerite Duras's work published in the Swedish press is, not surprisingly, often formulated in a

neutral and impersonal style. In these texts, the reviewer is if not invisible, at least rather inconspicuous.⁹ This is a quality often associated with traditional journalistic prose and presented as the stylistic ideal for this textual genre – especially for cultural journalism (see, for instance, Möijer, 1989, pp. 27–28 and Carlsson, 2010, p. 232). The following quotation, taken from my corpus, gives a representative example of this type of discourse:

There are few authors who can produce such a harsh and unforgiving tone as Marguerite Duras. When she depicts characters who are suffering for one reason or another, it becomes almost unbearable because she does not at any moment show any compassion. This is why they appear to be unusually lonely. In such a way, she stands out in terms of our notions of authors in general and female authors in particular. Marguerite Duras is still a shocking figure (Beckman, 2012).¹⁰

Notable is how the reviewer, Åsa Beckman, presents an authoritative judgment on Duras's work. In doing so, she provides a classic example of a dominating discourse. Without overtly mentioning that the above verdict expresses her own subjective opinion, the literary critic presents the information as factual and thus indisputable. When she argues that Duras stands out in terms of "our notions of authors in general and female authors in particular" [my translation], it is, obviously, her own idea of authors that is presented as universal. Moreover, the quoted passage consists of a series of declarative sentences. These statements are not incorrect *per se*, but each and every one of them can, of course, be discussed and problematized – since they are the result of an individual's subjective interpretation of a literary work.

⁹ As pointed out in the theoretical background, the frequency of first-person pronouns referring to the reviewer himself (or herself) is approximately nine times higher in the bloggers' reviews than in the established criticism.

¹⁰ My translation. The original review reads as follows: "Få författare kan skriva till en så hård och obevlig ton som Marguerite Duras. När hon skildrar personer som av någon anledning lider blir det nästan outhärdligt eftersom hon inte för ett ögonblick visar någon medkänsla. Därför framstår de som ovanligt ensamma. På det sättet bryter hon med vår föreställning om författare i allmänhet och om kvinnliga författare i synnerhet. Marguerite Duras är fortfarande en chockerande gestalt" (Beckman, 2012).

The context of the review is the following: the reviewer, Åsa Beckman, is a literary critic who writes for one of Sweden's most distinguished national newspapers (*Dagens Nyheter*), and the review was published in its section "Culture" – a fact that also contributes to the aura of trustworthiness and authority that surrounds the text. Her father, Erik Beckman, was a well-known writer and literary critic in his time – and her sister, Eva Beckman, was during the period 2010–2016 head of the cultural department (*kulturchef*) of Swedish national television. It is thus safe to say that the family name itself conveys an abundance of cultural capital. In fact, one could argue that this example illustrates the point made by Van Dijk above (2001, pp. 355–356), that being that the elite have "exclusive access to, and control over, one or more types of public discourse". In this case, it means that the *cultural elite* have access to and control over the dominating *cultural discourse*.

If the objectivity of the review above, upon closer scrutiny, appears to be largely made up of subjective opinions, the next quotation turns out to be even more so. The tone is still very much an authoritative one, illustrated by the fact that the argumentation is made up of declarative sentences, just as we saw in the first example:

It took time for Duras to find her style as an author and her unique way of writing. In the early days of her literary career, she was very insecure and doubted her own ability. But in *Moderato cantabile* (1958), she shows that she masters her means of expression in a tightly composed story. *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964) is even more accomplished. Here she portrays a woman on the verge of madness (Kåreland, 2014).¹¹

The context of the review is as follows: it is written by Lena Kåreland, professor emerita of comparative literature at Uppsala University in Sweden – a detail that, once again, highlights the

¹¹ My translation. The original text reads as follows: "Det tog tid innan Duras fann sin stil som författare och sitt speciella sätt att skriva. I början av sitt författarskap var hon mycket osäker och tvivlade på sin förmåga. Men i *Moderato cantabile* (1958) visar hon att hon behärskar sina uttrycksmedel i en stramt komponerad historia. Än mer fulländad är *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964) som skildrar en kvinna på gränsen till galenskap" (Kåreland, 2014).

importance of cultural capital in the arena of established criticism. It was published in the online literary magazine *Dixikon* in 2014.¹²

There is no proof presented in the review to support the statement that it took a long time for Marguerite Duras to find her own style and voice in writing – and that she, at the beginning of her literary career, was insecure and doubted her ability as a writer. This thesis is not necessarily incorrect, but the critical and commercial success of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (*The Sea Wall*) as early as 1950 somewhat contradicts the idea. And since no external source is provided as to the origin of the thesis, an initiated and critical-minded reader is bound to become just a little suspicious. The judgment that *Moderato cantabile* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* are more accomplished works than the previous publications is, of course, not an indisputable fact either – but merely a subjective opinion. Indeed, on the contrary, one could argue that Duras, in these particular works, changes her style in order to follow the then current trend of the *Nouveau Roman* – and in doing so, she exposes her insecurity and her lack of independence more than anything else.

Consequently, I see the two quotations above as examples of what Cassirer (2003, p. 158) calls *pseudo-objective* texts. He argues that a neutral and objective style may very well hide a line of argument that is subjective, biased, and even tendentious. As a matter of fact, upon closer scrutiny the argument in the established reviews of Marguerite Duras's work turns out to be subjective at the very least, despite appearing neutral and trustworthy on the surface – as a mere statement of cold facts.

The authoritative tone of this dominating discourse gives the impression that the reviewers are perfectly in control of the domain they are writing about, and that they have done their homework well. Therefore, it is interesting to note that the examples of established criticism included in my corpus are by no

¹² This periodical started in 2004 and can be seen as an example of the high-quality cultural journals that were born with the Internet. It avoids the costs of printing and distribution that often plague the paper press, but retains the high-brow scope and tone of traditional cultural magazines. Therefore, I include it in the established criticism and regard the review as an example of a dominating discourse.

means devoid of inaccuracies. There are, in fact, many errors in the reviews published in the Swedish press. Here, I will discuss some examples of the phenomenon:

But “The Sea Wall” has also given rise to one of the most fascinating corrections in the history of literature. In 1986 comes Duras’s blockbuster “The Lover”, which depicts her relation to the man from Cholen, which is what she calls him here (Beckman, 2012).¹³

The text becomes a requiem of repetitions (after an illness, Duras dictated her final books), but the purity and the singular clarity in this book’s prose – carefully reproduced by the translator Kennet Klemets – are still recognizable and serve as a way into the earlier literary production that began in 1947 (van Reis, 2014).¹⁴

The first reviewer (Åsa Beckman) has the year of publication of Duras’s most famous work wrong. In fact, *Älskaren* (*The Lover*) did not appear in 1986, as is suggested in the text. The novel was originally published in French in 1984, and the Swedish translation dates from 1985. The second critic (Mikael van Reis, editor-in-chief of the section on culture (*kulturchef*) of *Göteborgs-Posten*, the leading regional newspaper in western Sweden), claims that Duras began her career as a writer in 1947. The correct year is, in fact, 1943.¹⁵ In 1947, when the first Swedish translation appeared, Duras had already published two novels in France, one by the dominating publishing house *Gallimard*.

Another case worth mentioning concerns the central character of “M. Jo” in *The Sea Wall*. Several established critics depict him as a man of Chinese origin, just as the central male protagonist

¹³ My translation. In original: ”Men ’En fördämning mot Stilla havet’ har också gett upphov till en av litteraturhistoriens mest fascinerande korrigeringar. 1986 kommer Duras storsäljare ’Älskaren’ som beskriver hennes relation till mannen från Cholen, som hon här kallar honom” (Beckman, 2012).

¹⁴ My translation. In original: ”Texten blir till en dödsmissa av upprepningar (efter ett sjukfall dikterade Duras sina sista böcker), men renheten och den säregna klarheten i denna boks prosa – som översättaren Kennet Klemets varsamt återger – känns ändå igen och lämnar här en ingång till hela det tidigare författarskapet som tog sin början 1947” (van Reis, 2014).

¹⁵ That is, if one does not include the very propagandistic and pro-colonial work *L’Empire français*, which Duras co-wrote with Philippe Roques in 1940. This volume is, incidentally, the only book in existence published under the name of Marguerite Donnadiou (Marguerite Duras’s real name).

in *The Lover* and *The North China Lover* is a Chinese man. See reviews written by Steve Sem-Sandberg in *Svenska Dagbladet* (2007), Åsa Beckman in *Dagens Nyheter* (2012), and Jenny Högström in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* (2015). There is, however, no textual support in *The Sea Wall* backing this thesis, as has been pointed out repeatedly in academic research (see, for instance, Ahlstedt, 2003, p. 78; Pagès-Pindon, 2012, p. 74; Aronsson, 2013, p. 188; and Chalonge, 2014, pp. 32–33).

Of course, one may argue that it is somewhat petty to nitpick about erroneous details of minor significance, after all *errare humanum est*. But the interesting aspect here, I must stress, is that these inaccuracies are recurrent as well (or especially) in this authoritative and dominating discourse. For my next example, I will return to Lena Kåreland's review quoted above:

Marguerite grew up with two older brothers in a family without social esteem, a family where there was always a money shortage, a family where the father was missing – he died when Marguerite was four years old – and where the mother was mentally unstable (Kåreland, 2014).¹⁶

This excerpt is interesting because it puts the spotlight on a general tendency among commentators of Duras's work to confound fiction with reality, and, especially, to take the author's own assertions at face value. One can read in Duras's oeuvre, for instance in *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras* (Duras & Porte, 1977, p. 48), that her father died when she was four years old. This is not true, however, as her biographer, Jean Vallier (2010, pp. 16, 193 and 205), has shown. Marguerite was, in fact, aged seven and a half when her father, Henri Donnadiou, passed away in December 1921.¹⁷

The information concerning her mother's mental instability seems to be lifted directly from Duras's literary texts. She has, in fact, written extensively on the subject: in fictionalized form

¹⁶ My translation. The original text reads: "Marguerite växte upp med två äldre bröder i en familj utan socialt anseende, en familj där man alltid hade ont om pengar, en familj, där fadern saknades – han avled när Marguerite var fyra år – och där modern var psykiskt instabil" (Kåreland, 2014).

¹⁷ This information may also be found elsewhere in academic research – for instance in Bouthors-Paillart (2002, p. 5) and Pagès-Pindon (2012, p. 15).

in *The Sea Wall*, in dramatized form and adapted for the theater in *L'Eden-Cinéma*, and, finally, in an auto-fictional genre in *The Lover* and *The North China Lover*. In these works, the mother-character is described as a manic-depressive person. Jean Vallier, however, whose efforts in demystifying the claims of this notoriously unreliable writer are most welcome, does not present a single piece of evidence to suggest mental illness concerning the author's mother, Marie Donnadiou, in his extensive (1500 pages) biography. Indeed, on the contrary, he argues that Duras has made up a great number of stories about her experiences in Indochina and presented them as the truth (Vallier, 2010, p. 770). He presents testimonials from individuals in her entourage who call her a "grande mythomane" and a "mythomane extraordinaire" (*ibid.*, p. 783) and who affirm that, as far as they could tell from interacting with Marie Donnadiou in the 1950s, Duras's mother was *not* mentally disturbed (*ibid.*, p. 832).

The same Durassian tendency to "spin a yarn" explains the reviewer's statement concerning the family's poverty and lack of prestige. In fact, Duras depicts them repeatedly as white trash in her literary work, but this claim is also contradicted by Vallier (2010, pp. 354 and 357) in his well-documented biography.

I will now present one last example to illustrate this tendency of established critics to, rather naively, take Marguerite Duras's assertions at face value. The context is the following: the review was written by Clara Törnvall (a cultural journalist, presenter of cultural news on Swedish national television) and was published in the prestigious and highbrow news-magazine *Fokus* in 2007. Here, Törnvall presents Duras's version of one very central biographical detail without questioning it at all – a classic example of the phenomenon discussed in this section:

The mother decides not to return to France. She dreams naively of becoming rich and buys an allotment of land in Cambodia. But she is cheated; she does not know the first thing about farming and does not understand that in order to get a fertile piece of land, she has to bribe the civil servants working in the colonial administration (Törnvall, 2007).¹⁸

¹⁸ My translation. The original review reads: "Modern beslutar sig för att inte återvända till Frankrike. Hon när naiva drömmar om att bli rik och

It should be noted that the quotation above does not discuss Duras's literary oeuvre, but rather her *biography* – and that is precisely why the text turns out to be problematic. Duras has in all her Indochinese works, as well as in numerous interviews, claimed that her mother was cheated by the French colonial agents when buying a concession of land in Cambodia. In order to get a decent parcel, Duras argues, one had to bribe the civil servants working in the colonial bureaucracy. But Duras's mother was not aware of the rules of the game in this corrupt colonial society, so she ended up ruined, owner of a practically worthless piece of land that was regularly flooded by the waters of the Pacific Ocean. The theme is recurrent in Duras's works, and this experience is often presented as the very basis for her severe condemnation of France's colonial project.¹⁹ But the information given time and again by Duras in her (auto)fictional literary oeuvre and in various *para-texts* (published interviews, transcribed oral conversations, etc.) was falsified by her biographer, Jean Vallier, who took the trouble to consult official French and Cambodian documentation dating from the French colonial era. These documents show that Marie Donnadiou bought the concession from a Vietnamese individual by the name of Trang Long Phung (Vallier, 2010, pp. 317–319). So, if Duras's mother was indeed deceived by someone somewhere along the line with regard to this transaction, it was not by the French colonial administration. But this fact contradicts the more romanticized myth promoted by Duras herself, and it is never mentioned in the reviews of my corpus.

In conclusion, the established literary criticism examined in this study represents a *dominating discourse*. The reviews are written by rather well-known Swedish cultural journalists and published in prestigious publications. The texts consist of numerous declarative sentences expressed in an authoritative style. They can be classified as examples of a *pseudo-objective* discourse, because they often present subjective opinions disguised as cold facts.

köper en jordlott i Kambodja. Men hon blir lurad, är okunnig om jordbruk och förstår inte att hon måste muta kolonialförvaltningens tjänstemän för att de ska tilldela henne bördig mark” (Törnvall, 2007).

¹⁹ See, for instance, *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950, p. 25) and *L'Eden Cinéma* (1977, p. 21), where Duras uses the expression “*le grand vampirisme colonial*” to designate the perfidy of the colonial system.

Despite the authoritative tone used, the reviews are not devoid of error. The initiated reader may also find that the texts are characterized by a certain naivety, since they tend to confound fiction, myth and reality.

Reviews Published in the Blogosphere – An Alternative Literary Criticism

I will now present some representative examples of alternative literary criticism published on the Internet. The first example is a review of the Durassian essay *Att skriva* (English title: *Writing*):

Happy Saint Lucy's Day! Today I'm off to the Swedish church to see the procession of Saint Lucy. Very excited about that. But in the meantime I will show you what I've been reading lately:

First we have *Writing* by Marguerite Duras, which I got from Yrsa for my b'day. The book is partly about writing and creating, but it is also full of philosophical thoughts and anecdotes from her life. I don't understand everything in this book, but that's what I like. Because reading is also about being conveyed an emotion. It really is (Wiström, 2015).²⁰

In her definition of critical discourse analysis, Wodak (1997, p. 6) argues that a discourse is determined by the "situation, institution and social structure" that surround it; therefore, "discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned". We can see an example of this phenomenon, I believe, in the blogpost given above. The text is representative of the vast majority of alternative reviews in my corpus, insomuch as its distinguishing feature is a prose very much centered on the perspective of the individual reviewer – including five "jag" (I) and one "min" (my) referring to the blogger herself in the short excerpt. This detail, of

²⁰ My translation. The original blogpost reads as follows: "Glad Lucia! Idag ska jag till svenska kyrkan för att se luciatåget. Mycket peppad på detta. Men under tiden kan ni få se vad jag har läst på sistone: Först ut har vi *Att Skriva* av Marguerite Duras, som jag fick av Yrsa på min fölsis. Boken handlar delvis om skrivandet och skapandet, men den är också fylld av filosofiska tankar och anekdoter från hennes liv. Jag förstår inte allt i den här boken, men det är också det jag tycker om. För läsning är så mycket mer än att få konkreta svar. Läsning handlar också om att bli förmedlad en känsla. Ju" (Wiström, 2015).

course, distinguishes it quite clearly from the established criticism discussed above – which, as we have seen, is characterized by the neutral tone of traditional cultural journalism. It is a text that reveals glimpses of the reviewer’s personal life (“Happy Saint Lucy’s Day! Today I’m off to the Swedish church to see the procession of Saint Lucy. Very excited about that” [my translation]). We can also note that colloquial speech is used, the term “*fölsis*” being a slang abbreviation for “*födelsedag*” (birthday).

The second excerpt presented here is a review of *En fördämning mot Stilla Havet* (*The Sea Wall*) written by the pseudonym “Eli”:

Many people have probably, like me, put up a wall against the outside world at one time or many times. A couple of years ago I erected real ramparts around myself, I still do sometimes when other people seem too annoying and I don’t have the strength to deal with the pictures of reality.

[Descriptive text, résumé of the plot.]

I have only ever read *The Lover* by Duras, but there is no doubt that her fantastic language is present in this book as well, and I think I will love Duras’s other books too (Eli, 2014).²¹

Here we have another example of the bloggers’ often egocentric point of view. The review is based on the individual’s personal situation, overtly transmitting his or her own perception of the world. The reviewer speaks of his or her problematic relationship with other people.²² The frequency of first-person pronouns in this excerpt is as high as in the first example: 5 “*jag*” (I), and 1 “*mig själv*” (myself), all referring to the blogger himself (or herself). The review shows how important it is that the literary text be relevant to the reader’s own life. This aspect is also well-known in academic reader-response research. See, for instance, Sarland

²¹ My translation. The original text: ”Många är vi nog som någon gång, eller många, haft en fördämning mot omvärlden. För några år sedan byggde jag upp verkliga vallar omkring mig själv, ibland gör jag det fortfarande när andra människor känns alltför påträngande och jag inte riktigt orkar med bilderna av verkligheten. [...] Jag har tidigare bara läst *Älskaren* av Duras men det är ingen tvekan om att hennes fantastiska språk finns även i den här boken och jag tror jag kommer älska även Duras andra böcker” (Eli, 2014).

²² The sex of the individual is not clear in this case, because the chosen alias (Eli) may refer to a man as well as a woman.

(1991, pp. 79–90) who stresses the importance of “finding yourself in the text”, especially for young and inexperienced readers.

In this case, the literary work is said to reflect the reviewer’s own experiences. The blogger draws a parallel between the sea wall in the Durassian novel and the abstract and intangible walls erected by the reviewer to protect himself (herself) from the outside world.

Sometimes, a blogger may identify herself with Duras on a personal level, drawing parallels between their respective lives and their personalities – as can be seen in this review of *Att skriva* (*Writing*):

Writing is a book used in a creative-writing course that I am taking at the moment. I may have quoted Lagercrantz more often, but I recognize myself most in Duras. Not in the anguish and the despair, no: writing is, for me, a joy and intoxication. But I recognize myself in not knowing how not to write, that writing is a need. This quotation from page 13 illustrates a way in which Duras and I resemble one another:

Writing was the only thing that inhabited my life and made it magical. I wrote. The writing has never abandoned me.

Duras was probably not an easy person to live with. Nor am I. We both share the need to be alone, but I don’t need to be physically isolated. Peacefulness and people who understand my need to write, that’s the sort of loneliness amongst people I need. A distance between me and my fellow being (Nilsson, 2015).²³

In this quotation, the navel-gazing perspective is perhaps even more salient than in the previous examples, with 10 “*jag*” (I), 4

²³ My translation. The original blogpost reads as follows: “*Att skriva* är kurslitteratur i en kurs i kreativt skrivande som jag läser just nu. Jag må ha citerat Lagercrantz mest, men det är Duras jag känner igen mig mest i. Inte i vändan och förtvivan, nej: skrivandet för mig är en glädje och ett rus. Men jag känner igen mig i att jag inte vet hur man låter bli att skriva, att skrivandet är ett behov. Detta citat från sidan 13 illustrerar på ett sätt som jag och Duras är lika på: *Att skriva var det enda som befolkade mitt liv och gjorde det magiskt. Jag skrev. Skrivandet har aldrig övergett mig.* Duras var nog inte en lätt person att leva med. Jag är inte heller det. Behovet att vara ensamma har vi båda, men jag behöver inte vara fysiskt ensam. Ostördhet och människor som förstår att jag behöver skriva, den typen av ensamhet bland folk behöver jag. Ett avstånd mellan mig och min medmänniska” (Nilsson, 2015).

“*mig*” (me), and 1 “*min*” (my), all referring to the blogger herself in the above extract. The reviewer reveals that she has read *Writing* as a course assignment. She may have quoted another author (Lagercrantz) more often, she says, but she “recognize[s] [her]self most in Duras”, and she finds a quotation that illustrates the way in which she and Duras resemble each other. She draws another parallel between their personalities when arguing that “Duras was probably not an easy person to live with. Nor am I” [my translation]. Then she proceeds to explain in what way she believes they are alike.

One might think that this kind of extremely self-centered review would be of interest only to the individual blogger. However, quite the opposite is true. These *prosumers* have become commercially important agents due to their sometimes large number of *followers*, readers who rely on their literary judgment and who are, one gathers, big consumers of literature (*cf.* Steiner, 2012, p. 61). Therefore, the subjective opinions expressed in these reviews have a commercial value. The reviews are important to publishing houses and to booksellers because they serve as advertisements, regardless of whether the opinion expressed be positive or negative.²⁴ It is, in fact, most often positive. An individual who expresses his or her opinions on a personal blog is more likely to write about literature that he or she likes than about books that he or she finds uninteresting or boring. When the blogger quoted above gives Duras’s essay five stars out of five and concludes her review with the euphoric phrase “One thing’s for sure: I’ve got to get my own copy of *Writing!*” [my translation], it is obviously her personal and spontaneous opinion. And from her readers’ point of view, this kind of praise will always be more relevant and

²⁴ For the reader’s (and potential buyer’s) convenience, the reviews are sometimes linked to other reviews of the same literary work, and to on-line bookstores, where it can be purchased. See the following example regarding a review of *The Lover*: “Others who have written about the novel are [Bokstugan](#) and [TinaO](#). You’ll find it, for instance, at [Adlibris](#) and [Bokus](#)” [my translation]. (<http://www.bokblomma.com/11261/duras-marguerite/alskaren>). The words underlined in the quotation represent a *hyperlink*, which means that when the reader clicks on them, he or she is automatically redirected to these websites.

interesting than a “normal” advertisement, or even a review emanating from the sphere of established criticism.

A prosumer may also assume the role of a promotor of the literature discussed in direct interaction with the readers – as illustrated in this short dialogue, which follows the review of *The Sea Wall* discussed above:

[Reader: comment] It seems really interesting. I have considered reading something by Duras for a long time, but I have never got around to doing it.

[Blogger: reply] I'm sure you'd like her!²⁵

When the reader of the blog states that she has never read a work written by Duras, the blogger (Eli) replies “I'm sure you'd like her!”, which looks very much like an incitement to read (and maybe even to purchase) a work by the author.

Manifestly, the bloggers in my corpus have no problem revealing their sometimes limited knowledge, understanding and familiarity with the subject matter, i.e., Duras's literary work and the context surrounding it:

I don't understand everything in this book, but that's what I like (Wiström, 2015).²⁶

I have only ever read *The Lover* by Duras, but there is no doubt that her fantastic language is present in this book as well, and I think I will love Duras's other books too (Eli, 2014).²⁷

[I] have just finished Marguerite Duras's *Ten-Thirty on a Summer Night* from 1960, a short and exquisite novel. It's the first book by Duras that I have read, but I immediately felt the urge to read more (Flynnner, 2014).²⁸

²⁵ My translation. The original dialogue reads: “[Reader: comment] Den verkar helt klart intressant. Jag har länge tänkt att läsa något av Duras, men det har aldrig blivit av. [Blogger: reply] Jag tror absolut du skulle gilla henne!” <http://elilaserochskriver.se/fordamningar-som-brister/>

²⁶ Wiström, 2015, my translation.

²⁷ Eli, 2014, my translation.

²⁸ Flynnner, 2014, my translation. The original blogpost reads as follows: “Nyss läst ut Marguerite Duras *Halv elva en sommarkväll* från 1960, en kort och underbar roman. Det är den första Duras-boken jag läst, men jag får omedelbart lust att läsa fler.”

There are many classics written by women out there, and there are many that I haven't read. I got a tip concerning Marguerite Duras and chose her book *The Lover* (Lager, 2014).²⁹

The Lover is about a young woman who is raised in the French colony "Indochina" (nowadays Vietnam, Google has informed me) with her impoverished mother and her brothers (Linnea, 2014).³⁰

In the examples quoted here, we can see how the reviewers reveal how they had no – or very limited – previous experience of Duras's oeuvre before reading the novel that they have chosen to present on their blog. One blogger (Wiström) is not afraid to admit that there are aspects of the literary work that she does not fully comprehend, and another individual (Linnea) openly admits to having to use the search engine *Google* to find the meaning of the word Indochina. This very frank and somewhat intimate way of approaching the subject matter seems to be a strategy used by the bloggers to create a nice and relaxed atmosphere, and to build a personal relationship with the readers. Obviously, the bloggers want to avoid a highbrow attitude, and they make it very clear that they do not intend to speak to the audience from a patronizing perspective. On the contrary, the message transmitted is that these non-established critics have no pretensions of knowing more than the implied reader of the review.

This open-hearted and down-to-earth attitude of the reviewers is a characteristic feature of the criticism found in the blogosphere. I would like to link it to one of the assumptions of this study, namely that it is an *alternative discourse*. Apparently, there is no fear of appearing ignorant or ill-informed in this arena, maybe because these individuals have no positions of power to defend in the field of cultural production. The people who express themselves on personal blogs on the Internet do not normally belong to the cultural elite, and therefore they do not have access to the prestigious tribunes of the traditional press. If anything, they represent

²⁹ Lager, 2014, my translation. The original text: "Det finns många klassiker skrivna av kvinnor därute och det är många som jag inte har läst. Jag fick tips om Marguerite Duras och valde hennes bok *Älskaren*."

³⁰ Linnea, 2014, my translation. The original text: "*Älskaren* handlar om en ung kvinna som växer upp i den franska kolonin "Indokina" (nuvarande Vietnam, har jag googlat mig till) med sin fattiga mor och sina bröder."

voices speaking from the margins of the literary field. See, for instance, Van Dijk's (2001, pp. 355–356) discussion, quoted above, about how the elite tend to control the public discourse – and how ordinary people tend to be locked out of these arenas.

In the *dominating discourse* of the established criticism, on the other hand, there are no examples of this tendency to reveal various shortcomings. As we have seen above, this discourse is characterized by an authoritative tone and a great number of declarative sentences.

Interaction on the Internet

Generally speaking, the interaction is not very developed in my corpus, even though the Internet allows for a great deal of communication between people. In most cases, if there is any dialogue at all, the original blogpost is followed by a single question or a short comment by a reader, who then receives a reply from the blogger. Very few Internet reviews in my corpus transgress this basic structure of interaction. In fact, there is really only one clear exception to this rule: a review of the Durassian novel *The North China Lover* written by the literary author and publisher Bo Cavefors, and published as a “guest review” on the website *Dagens bok*. It is worth noticing that Cavefors distinguishes himself from the vast majority of Internet reviewers present in the corpus inasmuch as he has a long career in the field of cultural production. He has accumulated a great deal of symbolic capital and is, presumably, a rather well-known figure in the eyes of the reading public. Therefore, he must without any doubt be regarded as an established voice in the literary field.

This text (Cavefors, 2007) attracted no fewer than 21 comments in the weeks following its online publication in April of 2007. The reason for this is, presumably, the reviewer's somewhat provocative presentation and argumentation.³¹ In his reading of Duras's novel, he chooses to focus on two of the many themes present in the text, namely that of the main character's (a teenage girl's) sexual relationship with an adult man, and that of the incestuous bond between the young girl and her brother. Since

³¹ The title of the review is “Duras om barnets rätt till sexualitet” (“Duras on the child's right to sexuality” [my translation]).

Cavefors disregards other important aspects of the narrative (such as the unequal and power-based relations between colonizer and colonized, and the rather complex relationship between mother and daughter in the novel), the reader of the review can easily get a slightly biased impression of the story, especially of course if he or she has not read the novel beforehand. The reviewer expresses a very favorable opinion of the way in which Duras treats the sexual theme. "It is courageous and it is magnificent" [my translation], his conclusion reads.

Some commentators found the review provocative, and this resulted in an exchange of opinions and ideas that wildly exceeds anything else that can be found in the corpus, with regard to interaction. Here are two of the many hostile reactions:

Besides the fact that the review is poorly written, I am very disturbed by the non-arguing, blind ovation. Children and adult sexuality have nothing to do with each other. The child may well have taken the initiative; an adult should nonetheless never have sex with children. And how can it be considered as psychological profoundness and inner strength for a fifteen-year-old girl to have sex with her younger brother?? (Sanna)³²

c'mon, really, the review is disgusting and stupid. a not very enviable combination. would be nice if *dagens bok* could proofread its reviewers (Viktor).³³

Manifestly, these commentators find the review highly immoral. There is no indication that they have actually read the novel, so the moral outcry more likely concerns the review only. We can

³² My translation. The original comment reads as follows: "Förutom att detta är en dåligt skriven recension blir jag väldigt illa berörd av det oargumenterande, blinda hyllandet. Barn och vuxensexualitet har ingenting med varandra att göra. Må så vara om det var barnet själv som tog initiativet, men en vuxen ska ändå aldrig ha sex med barn. Och hur kan det ses som besvis [*sic*] på mentalt djup och inre styrka att en femtonårig flicka har sex med sin lillebror??" <http://dagensbok.com/2007/04/07/marguerite-duras-alskaren-fran-norra-kina>.

³³ My translation. In Swedish: "alltså verkligen, recensionen är otäck och enfaldig, en mycket litet avundsvärd kombination. vore bra om dagens bok korrläste sina recensenter". <http://dagensbok.com/2007/04/07/marguerite-duras-alskaren-fran-norra-kina>.

also note that the commentators make no distinction between reality and the fictional universe. They condemn the sexual relations represented in the literary text in the same way as they would, presumably, condemn similar relations conducted in the real world.

Other readers choose to stand up for the reviewer. Viktor's contribution, for instance, is met with opposition by another person (Daniel), who reads between the lines of the comment and interprets it as a call for censorship. One commentator (Daniel M, unclear if it is the same individual as "Daniel" above) says that he finds this review better than anything else published on the website *Dagens bok*:

Viktor; I also don't understand what you mean by proofreading, you seem to be referring to some kind of censorship (Daniel).³⁴

The review is truly excellent. It reaches a level that *dagensbok.com* seldom attains, or even dares strive for (Daniel M).³⁵

One observation can be made after examination of the corpus of this study: without the inclusion of a provocative element, as in the example discussed above, it is apparently rather difficult to create a genuine exchange of literary and aesthetic ideas on the Internet. Hence, the interactive possibilities of *Web 2.0* are often underutilized by the bloggers and their readers.³⁶

Conclusions

The alternative criticism published on the Internet is a rather new phenomenon, and one that has enriched the literary debate inasmuch as it allows ordinary readers – i.e., individuals who do not occupy positions of power in the field of cultural production – to discuss literary works and express their point of view publicly.

³⁴ My translation. In Swedish: "Viktor; Jag förstår inte heller vad du menar med korrläsning, du verkar vara ute efter någonslags censur". <http://dagensbok.com/2007/04/07/marguerite-duras-alskaren-fran-norra-kina>.

³⁵ My translation. In Swedish: "Recensionen är verkligen storartad. Den når verkligen nivåer som *dagensbok.com* sällan når, eller ens vågar sträva efter". <http://dagensbok.com/2007/04/07/marguerite-duras-alskaren-fran-norra-kina>.

³⁶ Comparable results may also be found in previous studies: see, for instance, Aronsson (2012, pp. 77–88) and Söderlund (2012, p. 197).

It may be noted that there is a majority of women reviewers in the alternative literary criticism examined here – but the same is true, in fact, of the established criticism published in the Swedish press.³⁷ Thus, judging from the corpus of this particular study, the “prescriptions of silence” imposed on women, and identified by Sheldon (1997, p. 228), seem to have disappeared from both arenas in the early twenty-first century (that is, in Sweden – the situation may be quite different in another cultural context). One should also remain careful when interpreting these results; Marguerite Duras is a female, and some would also say a *feminist*, writer. Therefore, her oeuvre is likely to appeal to women readers more than might the average novel on the market. It remains to be seen if women reviewers would outnumber critics of the masculine gender also in a reader-response study focusing on a hard-boiled and macho *male* literary work.

The questions formulated in the introduction of the study read as follows: What are the main characteristics of the *dominating discourse* of the established criticism, and what are the main characteristics of the *alternative discourse* in the blogosphere? We can now conclude that the alternative criticism is a form of literary commentary that, in many ways, differs from the established criticism. In fact, my corpus shows that the bloggers do not try to duplicate the established critics by imitating the reviews published in the traditional press. On the contrary, they often write openly subjective reviews – private opinions expressed in a, sometimes, intimate tone. The bloggers do not seem afraid to reveal their lack of knowledge or experience – and by playing the “amateur card”, they aim, presumably, to create a friendly and non-prestigious atmosphere in their respective literary blogs. On the other hand, the interaction in these blogs is rather underdeveloped – the only exception being a provocative review that has attracted many comments. This example (Bo Cavefors’s reading of *The North China Lover*) is the only one in the corpus that contrasts with the warm and good-natured ambience of mutual agreement reigning

³⁷ See Aronsson (2016, pp. 7–9). As a matter of fact, the same thing can be said about the academic research focusing on the works of Marguerite Duras that has been quoted in the study – it is also dominated by female scholars.

in this part of the blogosphere. This reviewer has an impressive CV that sets him apart from the other online critics present in the corpus. Quite clearly, his long career in the literary field makes him an established critic – a fact that distinguishes him from the other online reviewers who, if anything, represent alternative voices, or voices speaking “from the margins” of the literary field.

The results show that the two types of reviews examined here (established and alternative criticism) are characterized by very different discourses. Hence, the material analyzed in this study cannot be said to illustrate the *convergence culture* described by Jenkins (2006). The *dominating discourse* of the established critics is characterized by an authoritative style and many declarative sentences, even if the reviews of Marguerite Duras’s oeuvre are by no means devoid of errors – as has been shown above. I have labelled this discourse *pseudo-objective*, because the neutral journalistic prose employed in the reviews – where the writer remains “invisible” – often implies that subjective opinions are disguised as cold facts. In the material gathered for this study, the *alternative discourse* of the bloggers appears as the exact opposite. These individuals make a point of being openly subjective, frequently writing their reviews from a navel-gazing perspective. I have called these actors *prosumers*, because they combine the role of the consumer with that of the producer. The rise of these prosumers in the field of literary response illustrates the *participatory culture* highlighted by, for instance, Jenkins, Ito and Boyd (2015).

References

- Ahlstedt, E. (2003). *Le « Cycle du Barrage » dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Duras*. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis (Romanica Gothoburgensia 50).
- Ardelet, C. and Brial, B. (2011). “Influence des recommandations d’internautes: le rôle de la présence sociale et de l’expertise,” *Recherche et Applications en Marketing*, 26(3), pp. 45–69, [Online]. Available at: <http://ram.sagepub.com/content/26/3/45.full.pdf+html> (Accessed: 07 April 2016).
- Aronsson, M. (2012). “La réception sur Internet de *Kiffe kiffe demain* de Faïza Guène,” in Ahlstedt, E., Benson, K., Bladh, E., Söhrman,

I. and Åkerström, U. (eds.) *Actes du XVIIIe congrès des romanistes scandinaves / Actas del XVIII congreso de romanistas escandinavos*. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis (Romanica Gothoburgensia 69), pp. 63–80.

——— (2013). “Le Thème de l'étranger chez Marguerite Duras et Tayeb Salih. Quelques aperçus,” in Limam-Tnani, N. (ed.) *Marguerite Duras. Altérité et étrangeté ou la douleur de l'écriture et de la lecture*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, pp. 187–198.

——— (2016). “La réception de Marguerite Duras en Suède. La critique professionnelle et non-professionnelle,” *Moderna språk*, 110(2), pp. 1–24, [Online]. Available at: <http://ojs.ub.gu.se/ojs/index.php/modernasprak/article/view/3712/3079> (Accessed: 30 July 2017).

Beckman, Å. (2012). “Marguerite Duras: ‘En fördämning mot Stilla havet’,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 25 June [Online]. Available at: <http://www.dn.se/dnbok/bokrecensioner/marguerite-duras-en-fordamning-mot-stilla-havet/> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).

Bouthors-Paillart, C. (2002). *Duras la métisse. Métissage fantasmatique et linguistique dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Duras*. Genève: Droz.

Carlsson, S. (2010). *Skrivarbok. Om konsten att skriva prosa, poesi och journalistik*. Västerås: Faun.

Cassirer, P. (2003). *Stil, stilistik & stilanalys*. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur.

Cavefors, B. (2007). “Duras om barnets rätt till sexualitet,” *Dagens Bok*, 07 April [Online]. Available at: <http://dagensbok.com/2007/04/07/marguerite-duras-alskaren-fran-norra-kina/> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).

Chalonge, F. de (2014). “Dans l'Orient de Marguerite Duras, que sont les Orientaux devenus?,” in Chalonge, F. de, Mével, Y. & Ueda, A. (eds.) *Orient(s) de Marguerite Duras*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, pp. 29–42.

Duras, M. (1950). *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*. Paris: Gallimard.

——— (1977). *L'Éden Cinéma*. Paris: Gallimard.

- Duras, M. and Porte, M. (1977). *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- Eli (2014). "Fördämningar som brister," *Eli läser och skriver*, 25 May [Online]. Available at: <http://elilaserochskriver.se/fordamningar-som-brister/> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).
- Findahl, O. (2013). *Svenskarna och internet 2013*. Stockholm: Stiftelsen för internetinfrastruktur (.se internetstatistik) [Online]. Available at: <https://www.iis.se/docs/SOI2013.pdf> (Accessed: 12 August 2017).
- Flynnner, A. (2014). "Marguerite Duras – Halv elva en sommarkväll," *annikaflynnner.blogg*, 14 July [Online]. Available at: <http://annikaflynnner.blogg.se/2014/july/marguerite-duras-halv-elva-en-sommarkvall-2.html> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).
- Högström, J. (2015). "På andra sidan misären," *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 16 April [Online]. Available at: <http://www.sydsvenskan.se/kultur--nojen/bocker/bokrecensioner/pa-andra-sidan-misaren/> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, H., Ito, M. and Boyd, D. (2015). *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Kåreland, L. (2014). "Marguerite Duras," *Dixikon*, 23 July [Online]. Available at: <http://www.dixikon.se/marguerite-duras/> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).
- Lager, H. (2014). "Recension: Duras, Marguerite; Älskaren; 1984," *Feministbiblioteket*, 28 January [Online]. Available at: <http://feministbiblioteket.se/recension-duras-marguerite-alskaren-1984/> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).
- Linnea (2014). "Älskaren," *Bokblomma*, 24 January [Online]. Available at: <http://www.bokblomma.com/11261/duras-marguerite-alskaren> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).
- Möijer, K. (1989). *Svensk språkstil. Stil & stilanalys*. Solna: Ekelunds.
- Nilsson, C.R.M. (2015). "Att skriva av Marguerite Duras," *Lacrimamens*, 15 May [Online]. Available at: <http://lacrimamens.com/blog/att-skriva.html> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).

- Pagès-Pindon, J. (2012). *Marguerite Duras. L'écriture illimitée*. Paris: Ellipses.
- Reid, M. (2011). "Introduction," in Reid, M. (ed.) *Les femmes dans la critique et l'histoire littéraire*. Paris: Honoré Champion, pp. 7–9.
- Ritzer, G., Dean, P. and Jurgenson, N. (2012). "The Coming of Age of the Prosumer," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 56(4), pp. 379–398, [Online]. Available at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/10002764211429368> (Accessed: 12 August 2017).
- Sarland, C. (1991). *Young People Reading. Culture and Response*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D. and Hamilton H. (2001). "Introduction," in Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D. and Hamilton H. (eds.) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell, pp. 1–10.
- Sem-Sandberg, S. (2007). "Marguerite Duras urtexter ut ur skåpet," *Svenska Dagbladet*, 11 October [Online]. Available at: <http://www.svd.se/marguerite-duras-urtexter-ut-ur-skapet> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).
- Sheldon, A. (1997). "Talking Power: Girls, Gender Enculturation and Discourse," in Wodak, R. (ed.) *Gender and Discourse*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, pp. 225–244.
- Showalter, E. (1981). "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry*, 8(2), pp. 179–205, [Online]. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1343159.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A8dd4db453f540a2e11269508cd2e7234> (Accessed: 12 August 2017).
- Steiner, A. (2012). "Digital litteraturkritik," in Lenemark, C. (ed.) *Litteraturens nätverk: berättande på Internet*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, pp. 51–63.
- Söderlund, P. (2012). "Med livet som insats. Om bokprat på internet," in Carlsson, U. and Johannisson, J (eds.) *Läsarnas marknad, marknadens läsare. En forskningsantologi*. Stockholm: Fritze (Statens offentliga utredningar, SOU 2012:10), pp. 193–206.
- Törnvall, C. (2007). "Marguerite Duras – rebellen från Saigon," *Fokus*, 19 October [Online]. Available at: <http://www.fokus.se/2007/10/marguerite-duras-rebellen-fran-saigon/> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).

- Van Dijk, T. (2001). Critical Discourse Analysis, in Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D. and Hamilton H. (eds.) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell, pp. 352–371.
- Van Reis, M. (2014). “Marguerite Duras | Att skriva,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, 23 October [Online]. Available at: <http://www.gp.se/kulturnoje/recensioner/bocker/1.2525776-marguerite-duras-att-skriva> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).
- Wiström, F. (2015). “Marguerite Duras,” *Metromode*, 13 December [Online]. Available at: <http://flora.metromode.se/tag/marguerite-duras/> (Accessed: 03 March 2016).
- Wodak, R. (1997). “Introduction: Some Important Issues in the Research of Gender and Discourse,” in Wodak, R. (ed.) *Gender and Discourse*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, pp. 1–20.

TRAVEL AND MIGRATION

Liminality, Migration and Transgression in *El Metro* by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo

Carles Magrinyà

Dalarna University and Uppsala University

Introduction

The representations of *liminality* in different categories are relevant when they highlight a transitory state, that is, a transformation from one state to another, or when a long situation between two states stands out. The concept, close to others like *border* or *hybridity*, is implicitly present in *El Metro* (The Subway, 2007) by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo at different levels: in the representation of spaces, characters, and cultural space on the hand, and in the functions of the narrator on the other. The objective of this chapter is to contribute to the understanding of the functionality of the fictional border spaces and the ways to represent them. It examines how the protagonist and the narrator perceive and relate to these liminal spaces, and evaluates their function and significance.

El Metro by the Equatoguinean writer Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, published in 2007, is a *Bildungsroman* that addresses the issue of migration. It relates the biography and journey of a young Cameroonian forced to leave his village after a conflict with his father and his community, until arriving in Spain illegally in search of a better life. The vicissitudes of the protagonist, Lambert Obama, may be seen as that of the present-day African everyman. It is thus relevant to study this novel firstly in the context of globalism and migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to South

How to cite this book chapter:

Magrinyà, C. 2021. Liminality, Migration and Transgression in *El Metro* by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 339–356. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.o>. License: CC-BY 4.0

Europe; and secondly, as an example of the relatively unknown Afro-Hispanic novel from Equatorial Guinea, often ignored by academia.¹

The novel displays a clear tone of social criticism questioning the conflict between tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa – i.e., religious beliefs, social structures of groups, taboos, etc. – and modernity, i.e. changes and values brought first by colonialism, and later on by neocolonialism and globalism. The ultimate aim of the novel, as the author has explicitly reported (García, 2007), is to denounce current events in which migrants find themselves involved, and to criticize and report on the situation of the contemporary sub-Saharan African. As for the writer's role, like the traditional African storyteller, it becomes for Ndongo that of a spokesperson for the society where he lives and a representative of the community to which he belongs. Consequently, writers are always bearers of meaning and identity so that an author is not perceived as a distant individual. Literature is not solely an aesthetic expression but it serves the community, and its main objective is to denounce a situation, be it economic, political or religious. Ndongo himself has stated: “[i]n the Fang ethnic group², to which I belong, there is no art for art's sake, but it has to be useful, as well as beautiful. My books are a proposal for taking action to solve the problems that afflict this generation of Africans” (García, 2007)³. The role of contemporary African writers according to Ndongo is that of custodians of the collective memory. Oral literatures do not survive or end up distorted, but writing them is a step in preserving

¹ It is not common to study Equatoguinean literature in Spanish at Spanish-speaking universities, but it is becoming increasingly common in the USA. Ndongo's works are widely read in Gabon, Ivory Coast, or Madagascar. Chronologically, the literary production from Equatorial Guinea is later than *Négritude*, and its thematic orientation is different. The largest production of works of literature has been since the beginning of the 1990s until today.

² The Fang people are a Central-African ethnic group found in Equatorial Guinea, northern Gabon, and Southern Cameroon (Lyle, 2002, p. 72).

³ “En la etnia fang a la que pertenezco, no existe el arte por el arte, sino que tiene que ser útil, además de bello. Mis libros son una propuesta de acción para que se resuelvan los problemas que aquejan a esta generación de africanos”.

traditions and finding new ways of telling stories. This symbiosis already exists in the presence of the genres in the novel, blending aspects of the novel of European background – *Bildungsroman* – with those of the literature of African oral tradition, for example, in the representation of the narrator, as we shall see.

El Metro has an “epic” and initiatic structure (departure, initiation, return) in a journey that emphasizes the dangers and fears of the main character. In this sense, the spaces that involve some form of intermediate or border state for the characters, that is, some kind of threshold, are particularly interesting to study due to their dynamism. Examples of such spaces are pilgrimage sites, gardens, beaches, vehicles, boats, subways, and caves.

Following the conceptual and terminological contributions coined more than a century ago by the anthropologists Arnold Van Gennep and the later elaboration of Víctor Turner⁴, we define the spaces that have those traits in *El Metro* as *liminal*, proving that they are often associated with situations of tension and fear for the protagonist. Therefore, it is logical to state that they comprise scenarios full of tension, where vital options open or close for the characters.

Approaching Liminality

Even though liminality does not refer necessarily to space, the very notion itself derives etymologically (*limen* signifies “threshold” in Latin) from the realms of space and territory. In anthropology, the concept of *liminality* is used to analyze transformations of identities, interactions between identities and intermediate zones. Since its introduction, several studies have been published in which the concept is applied both to literature in general and to specific literary works.⁵

In his foundational work *The Rites of Passage* from 1909, Van Gennep established a solid structure with a series of transitions that affect the individual in his social development in relation to his

⁴ The main study regarding the concept of liminality is Turner, Victor W in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, from 1966.

⁵ Among them, Pérez Firmat (1986), Ashley (1990), Spariosu (1997), Viljoen, Hein & Chris van der Merwe (2006), Phillips (2015).

life cycle and family: for example, between youth and adulthood, between being single and being married, between not belonging and belonging to a group, between traveling and returning. Van Gennep distinguished three phases in a rite of passage: 1) *preliminal rites*, or separation 2) *liminal rites* (the interstitial phase), or margin; and 3) *postliminal rites*, or aggregation (Van Gennep, 2008). The first phase is a symbolic death, since the initiate is detached from his environment in which he must break with previous practices and routines. The next stage is ambiguous for the aspirant. While this transition takes place, the novice remains between one identity and another; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the stage of aggregation, the initiate has crossed the threshold of the rite, returns to society, and acquires a new way of being. He is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards. Turner emphasized the importance of this middle stage of liminality for its ambiguity, ambivalence and instability. According to Turner, liminality facilitates a space of a social anti-structure in opposition to the hierarchic structure of the regular life (1991, p. 105). Thus, liminality acquires its own autonomy, as with, for example, during courtship – the transitory state between being single and marriage. However, liminality is not exclusive to the second phase in a rite of passage. Since Turner, the concept has been used in other disciplines such as cultural and postcolonial studies (Bhabha, 1994), highlighting a realm of new possibilities where new cultural expressions can be tested. In postcolonial studies, the concept is used to circumscribe a being on the border, marginal, or on the threshold, dividing distinct spheres, identities or discourses.

In literary works, the term also concerns aspects of space, time, the state of the characters, etc., characterized by indeterminacy, ambiguity, hybridity, and potential for creating a new identity. A liminal boundary is “where something ends, but also where something new may begin. [...] This usually happens at places (doors or gates) where one is allowed to cross the boundary” (Spariosu, 1997, p. 10). The notion of space has produced new metaphors and names in contemporary literary studies: interstitial, limits, in-between, border zones. Although the interdisciplinary use of

these concepts is potentially fruitful, it is important to concretize and delimit the framework in order to avoid endless equivocal interpretations. We will refer mainly to Turner's work because even though the concept of liminality has its roots in anthropology, it is applicable in a literary discourse.

Ritual and Transgression

The first part of the novel focuses on the colonization of Cameroon by the French. As mentioned, the conflict between tradition and modernity is nuclear in this novel, and it is in this sense that the departure of the protagonist from his village is to be understood. His grandfather, Ebang Motuú, is the leader of the Yendok clan, a man symbolizing the colonial experience, as well as the resistance against the colonial administration. Lambert's father, Guy Ondo Ebang, on the contrary, becomes a Catholic priest, and represents the black man's adoption of the white man's ways. The culture clash is thus defined between traditional pagan and Catholic cosmogonies, although the question may be raised as to whether or not the latter is modern.

Lambert Obama Ondo, our protagonist, breaks off with the logic of his community and rejects his father's mimicry and aping of the imperial master – mimicry here becomes mockery and is at once resemblance and menace (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). When his mother dies, his father begins a relationship with another woman whose daughter is Lambert's lover. The daughter then becomes pregnant by Lambert. The leaders of the community do not accept Lambert's request of marriage, that is to say, a rite of passage and a temporal border crucial for his evolution in the community, judging their relationship as incestuous. In the light of this refusal, the protagonist decides to flee in search of a better future, in a moment of epiphany: "Lambert Obama dismantled his spirit to the myths of yesterday to travel extensively in search of new horizons. It was necessary to be reborn" (p. 173).⁶ This selection of words, of initiatory connotations (die – reborn), also refers to the

⁶ "Lambert Obama desmontó de su espíritu los mitos del ayer para peregrinar a la búsqueda de nuevos horizontes. Era preciso renacer para vivir".

transitory stage in which he enters: “Obama Ondo felt the *transition* [emphasis mine], which shook the essence of his existence and swept away all his convictions like the prologue to an era of instability (p. 173).⁷ In this particular case, we have to take into consideration the polysemy in the original Spanish version in the words in italic, pointing at the decisive moment in which the character makes the decision to abandon his cultural identity. It involves not only a transformation and transgression, but also the seed of the internal conflict that many African migrants experience, with the paradox that the moral limits of their community are what at the same time constitute their identity. This moment of rupture of the social structure is when the separation takes place that leads to entry into the liminal state. That is, the fact of not being able to consummate a marriage – a rite of passage – is what causes our protagonist to wander endlessly and become socially ambiguous – “between and betwixt” to use Turner’s words.

Turner describes this state as a “realm of pure possibility” (1970, p. 101), where people can abandon their social conditioning and constitute a new space. The individual develops a social critique, as well as a sense of non-belonging or of not occupying any symbolic space in the social structure: “and he knew that he had descended the last steps of the social ladder, he had ceased to be a free man worthy of respect” (p. 175)⁸. This revelation occurs in an episode in a space with liminal connotations: in the central market of the Yaoundé city, a transit point, and at an intermediate time, at dawn (between night and day). From this moment, the search for new cultural meaning will be in the dialectic between tradition and modernity. Lambert is therefore outside of the social structure when he moves to the capital of Cameroon, a dirty, insecure, and stressful place where its inhabitants focus only on their own interests and prioritize materialism. The action moves to urban spaces that work more like *locus horribilis* in contrast with the idyllic memory of the village, an unattainable yet idealized

⁷ “Obama Ondo percibía aquel *trance* [*tránsito*] que conmocionaba su esencia y barría todas sus convicciones como el prólogo de una era de inestabilidad”.

⁸ “y supo que había descendido los últimos peldaños de la escala social, había dejado de ser un hombre libre digno de respeto”.

locus amoenus. For instance, rite is subverted in the city and materialism is not antithetical to religious practices. It is not that the inhabitants of the city have turned their backs on the supernatural; on the contrary, they perform rituals and use spells and amulets for the satisfaction of their ambitions. Those responsible for materializing the desires of the avid are sorcerers who really have a power, “*evu*” (p. 186), that allows them to satisfy all their needs in exchange for human sacrifices. Politicians, governors, and senior executives turn to these sorcerers to achieve their goals. Lambert’s idea of the village is now more myth than reality, because the life of his community relies on outdated values: “What other horizons could an entire people condemned exclusively to survive glimpse? To preserve the fiction of dead traditions, incapable of lasting? [...] To embrace a suffocating and alienating modernity, which leaves no room for the building and development of one’s own personality?” (p. 200).⁹ The thought of the self-sufficient peasant is only an idealization in contrast with crude reality that pushes many young people to flee from the countryside to the city in search of well-being and happiness.

The conflict between tradition and modernity is also represented in the situation of women. It is interesting that the character of Danielle, a lover of Lambert, is an example of a hybrid subject. For her, the perfect man is a synthesis of African and European, a man who mixes equal doses of emotion and logic. She is a modern woman married to a rich man, who has become rich at the expense of the government. Danielle, however, represents the illusion that wealth provides freedom. The taboos of tradition are socially rooted, such as in the example of the impossibility of divorce. Something strongly symbolic is the use of products for skin whitening. She is another ambivalent subject, isolated physically and psychologically from her community, in the bubble of an ostentatious life.

⁹ “¿Qué otros horizontes podía vislumbrar todo un pueblo condenado exclusivamente a sobrevivir? ¿Conservar la ficción de unas tradiciones muertas, incapaces de perdurar [...]? ¿Abrazar una modernidad asfixiante y alienante, que no deja resquicio alguno para la construcción y el desarrollo de la propia personalidad?”

Liminal Spaces and Other Realms of Reality

There is, in fact, no clear and final destination in Lambert's journey, unlike the route of a pilgrimage. His wandering is characterized by spontaneous and unexpected events, and the structure of the story unfolds as the crossing of geographical borders and as changes in location occur. From Yaoundé in Cameroon, Lambert crosses the first national border by boat to Dakar, Senegal, where he gets enough money to embark on an illegal trip to Europe organized by networks of illegal-migrant smuggling mafias. Then he arrives in Casablanca in Morocco and El Aaiún in the Western Sahara, a territory disputed over by Morocco and Mauritania during the process of the decolonization of Spain.¹⁰ As such, another aspect of liminality takes place, considering that liminal spaces go from borders to disputed territories (Rogers, 1997, p. 528; Shcimanski and Wolfe, 2017, p. 156–157). It is in this liminal space that he embarks a small boat (“*patera*”) and arrives at Arrecife, a city on Lanzarote in the Canary Islands. The arrival on the beaches of the Canary Islands is significant and symbolic: it involves the arrival of the longed-for continent and, on the other hand, it also symbolizes the convergence of the two continents – a Spanish territory in Africa, a third space imagined as Ugarte suggests, between Africa and Europe (2010, p. 81).¹¹

As we can see, Lambert Obama crosses the sea twice, all in difficult conditions: firstly, on a ship transporting wood from Douala (Cameroon) to Dakar (Senegal); secondly, in the painful crossing inside the small boat, before arriving in Spain, showing the torments that migrants suffer prior to arrival at the point of destination. In these episodes, the ship is the space of the character in a psychological liminal state, between wakefulness and sleep.¹²

¹⁰ Western Sahara was occupied by Spain until the late 20th century, and the decolonization process was interrupted in 1976 when its managing power, Spain, left Western Sahara in the hands of Morocco and Mauritania.

¹¹ Spain is seen by Africans as a gateway nation, a stepping stone for migrants to move illegally from Africa to Europe. Many initiatives have been made by the Government of Spain since the end of the last century to control immigration, including agreements with Senegal and Morocco that restrict and normalize migration to Spain from Africa (Ugarte, 2010: 78).

¹² Ndongo had already written about these themes in his first short story, “El sueño” (The Dream, 1973). It relates the epic trip and experience

In the first sea trip, he sneaks onto the ship and must remain hidden, and what characterizes the episode is indeterminacy, total disorientation, and the loss of the sense of time. He does not know either where he is going or how long the trip will take, or whether he is awake or asleep. Claustrophobia, loneliness, and the sensation of a living hell while inside a dark cave lead to a chain of thoughts about the difficulties of this trip taking into account the conditions of his ancestors during the Atlantic Slave Trade.¹³ The second route recounts the hard trip with a small boat (“*patera*”) prepared for ten people loaded with thirty-six men and women, extremely cold nights, sub-human conditions of hygiene, deaths of several passengers. These moments of disorientation, loneliness, restlessness and ambiguity are those of liminal situations, according to the notion of *liminoid* persons of Turner.¹⁴ This type of person can experience the vision of entities such as guides or counselors; legendary beings of ambiguous and hybrid nature can be represented in the liminal experience with the co-presence of opposites (high / low, good / bad).

The function of the maritime *chronotope* of the ship proves significant, as it appears in the novels during a time of crisis for the main character. Aware of the dangers of the sea, in both trajectories the protagonist relies on his ancestors. It is worth paying attention to the first sea trip when he performs some kind of ritual that is syncretic in nature and that invokes at the same time a pagan divinity and the Christian God (he will perform another animist ritual to recover from a disease) in an example of trans-religious spirituality. The reader is referred to the domain of cultural hybridity of the protagonist:

In his light sleep, before falling into lethargy, the astonishing visions of his grandfather and his mother appeared again, surrounded by a myriad aura, and repeated incessantly, do not distress yourself, son, you have finally arrived safe and sound to the distant

of hardship of a young Senegalese traveling from Senegal to Dakar, the Canary Islands, Barcelona and France.

¹³ Koné studied the symbolism of the boat in *El Metro* (2015).

¹⁴ The concept *liminoid* is restrictively applied to the quality of liminar in contemporary Western world, while the liminal points out to states and rites in tribal societies (Deflem, 1991, p. 15).

port of destination. And he knew with certainty that during the unfortunate journey he had been protected at every moment by the spirits of his elders (p. 354).¹⁵

While he is in a light stage of sleep, the intermediate time between sleep and wakefulness, the teachings from his tradition in the form of aphorisms and proverbs come to his consciousness. The use of adjectives related to light, darkness, and dawn, along with metaphors about the shadows of the soul, point at a setting marked by liminality.

Turner notes that the absolute authority of the elders in the liminal state represent the values of a given society and that they provide the esoteric instructions in the *sacra* realm (1970, pp. 102–106). It is in the decisive moments, in situations of danger, that the spiritual world bursts into the material, naturally, without being perceived as something extraordinary. The process by which the ancestors and the forces of nature are in permanent contact with man has been called African animist realism (Nomo, 2004; Melo, 2009, pp. 116–118). Hauntings are also figurations of the temporal border between the living and the dead (Schimanski and Wolfe, 2017, p. 163), and a form of border beings that appear in the liminal state. If an eschatological space is in the afterlife, liminality will imply then a border zone, a place where the natural and the supernatural coexist¹⁶, represented here through the convergence of the chronotopes of the threshold and the boat. Indeed, Koné (2015) has pointed out the importance of the chronotope of the boat, but as we shall see, the irruption of the supernatural is an essential requisite for the resolution of the plot.

Once in Madrid – this time, a longed for city – the interior spaces take a central role together with themes like alienation

¹⁵ “En el duermevela, antes de caer en el letargo, se le aparecieron de nuevo las asombrosas visiones de su abuelo y de su madre, circundados por un aura mirífica, que le repetían incesantemente no te angusties, hijo, por fin has llegado sano y salvo al lejano puerto de destino. Y supo con toda certeza que a lo largo de aquel periplo infausto había estado protegido en cada instante por los espíritus de sus idos.”

¹⁶ The notion is similar to what Henry Corbin named *mundus imaginalis* (2006, pp. 24–26), a sacred and intermediate double-space where the terrestrial and celestial worlds collide.

and claustrophobia. The protagonist spends the last moments of his life in the underground tunnels of metro stations, selling trinkets. A group of skinheads inside a train carriage beat him to death. This series of interior spaces is nuclear because it is where the action of the novel begins and ends (chapter 1 connects with chapter 19), and in addition it is the title of the novel.

The abundance of explicit and symbolic references to light and darkness in the last city in the novel should be highlighted. The passages of the underground world evoke and actualize the classic motif of the *catabasis*¹⁷ and adventure into the underworld (*descensus ad inferos*). The journey into the world of the dead, in which the hero, through a cave, traveled to the Hereafter, had to undergo an initiatory test and returned, improved, to relate what he had seen (Piñero, 1995, p. 8). These are moments of deep psychological introspection into an unknown place. In this episode, the selection of words condenses a set of contrasts pivotal to the *inventio* of the text, between light and darkness in a binary opposition that has been gradually taking shape throughout the novel – for instance, between the natural darkness of the underground, the “underworld”, and the artificial light of the underground city, as Ugarte suggests (2010, p. 82). In addition, the opposition between the darkness and the light of the world outside can be seen in the following specific instances: Lambert meets Lucía (a feminine noun meaning ‘light’, from the Latin *lux*); it is said that her beauty would “dazzle” (*deslumbraría*, p. 452) him; he sells small trinkets near Lucero (Venus, “morning star”) metro station or near Puerta del Sol (Sun Gate), in a quote that foreshadows the end of the novel: “from Madrid to Heaven, he had heard from the elders of the place [Madrid]” (p. 19).¹⁸ There is even a quote that quickly connects intertextually with Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: “He came from the cursed land, Africa, the continent of eternal night, heart of darkness” (p. 21).¹⁹ These words are part of a long reflection on alienation in terms of what it means to be black in Europe, the collective past of slavery, and the difficulty but also

¹⁷ κατάβασις, from κατὰ “down” and βαίνω “go”.

¹⁸ “de Madrid al Cielo, había oído a los más viejos del lugar”.

¹⁹ “Procedía de la tierra maldita, África, el continente de la noche eterna, el corazón de las tinieblas”.

the possibility of realizing his own individuality, with plenty of dualities. This reference is not accidental; indeed, Conrad's work left its mark on Ndongu and was decisive for his career (Otabela and Onomo, 2008, p. 41).

In the description of the liminal state, Turner points out that the attributes of the liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are ambiguous, expressed by a variety of symbols associated with death, being in the womb, darkness and wilderness, among others (1991, p. 95). Moreover, in the description of the subterranean world of Madrid the protagonist identifies with a "grombif", a giant field rat of his country, in a simile that expresses his progressive dehumanization. He sees himself transformed into this strange being, a hybrid in Turner's terms, half human and half animal, that in the evening looks for its den under the tunnels of Madrid. This metaphoric mental space is thus for Lambert the border zone, the state in which the old and the new coexist. The underground world on the other hand is analogous to a cave, whose function is as threshold to the supernatural or Hereafter, as the final paragraph vividly demonstrates:

His last image, perceived by his conscious mind or perhaps with the eyes of the soul already in the world of the dead, was the luminous face of his mother ... who stretched out to him her glistening arms for taking him under her wing²⁰, while the firm and serene voice of his grandfather wrapped him in a prodigious tranquility, and told him "do not be afraid, son: at last you have reached the port of destination, and your death will not be anonymous" (p. 458).

Our protagonist left the community in the first phase and experienced the second phase under the direction of his ancestors, suffering from increasing fear and the different tests. At this point,

²⁰ "Su postrera imagen, captada por su mente consciente o quizá con los ojos del alma ya en el mundo de los idos, fue el del rostro luminoso de su madre ... que extendía hacia él sus brazos refulgentes para recibirle en su *seno* [emphasis mine], mientras le envolvía en una placidez prodigiosa la voz firme y serena de su abuelo ... y le decía no tengas miedo, hijo: al fin has llegado al puerto de destino, y tu muerte no será una muerte anónima".

'Seno' in Spanish can also mean 'family', 'maternal womb', 'mother's breast', 'protection', 'bosom'.

the liminal phase ends and he enters into the last phase. The last stage is not the end of a formal rite but the coming of death with the subsequent reunion with his grandfather and mother.

What happens in our protagonist's transit to the world of the dead is, however, similar to rites that include the symbolic return to the uterus (*regressus ad uterum*). In this sense, the historian of religion Mirce Eliade studied the symbolism of rituals of initiation that implied a return to the embryonic state that enables a higher mode of existence (Allen, 1998, p. 245). The *regressus ad uterum* takes place, in many cases, under the earth, because this is the element or *materia prima* with which man has been created. Concomitantly, the liminal state is associated with death, darkness, and the womb, as we have mentioned. The postliminary stage or aggregation in Lambert, the *regressus ad uterum* to her mother, is marked by a real and unsymbolic death, since the return to his home and community, both psychologically and sociologically, takes place at a metaphysical level.

Lambert is a "product" of colonial past and hybridity, that is, a process by which he challenges the authenticity of any essentialist identity. Migration, transformation, social liminality can lead to a new cultural synthesis and integration in the dimension of a new 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994: 5). As a migrant, being in an 'in-between' space opens up creativity and ideas as to what his new role must be: for instance, combating stereotypes, and finding a solution to the conflict between the modern world and the traditional world, racism and multiculturalism (311); or, instead of becoming one with the prosperity of the West, uniting with his countrymen to fight for freedom and liberty (p. 447; O'Connor, 2009, p. 3). This new third space of possibilities that Lambert has is abruptly demolished in the last chapter.

Narrative Transgressions

Given the number of mentions to light and darkness, the heterodiegetic narrator suggests that Lambert wandered in a dark and confused world – the impossibility of creating a third space out of the duality modernity/tradition, something like "he had walked through darkness and now sees the light". The constant presence of the symmetry *lux / tenebras* and the very last paragraph of the

novel in the last moments before death actualize and allude to the biblical *Post tenebras spero lucem* (Job, 17.12)²¹ (“After darkness, I hope for light”). The act of adopting another identity is a crossing towards another shore, leaving behind a frustrated hybridity. Thus, the search for light – knowledge, truth – is expressed in what will be the last words of our mysterious narrator.

As in the African oral tradition, the story is delivered by a plurality of voices under the control of an omniscient and hetero-diegetic narrator, in control of all the narrative material. The narrator represents the figure of the “Mvet”, “Mbom Mvet”²² or “griot”, a kind of troubadour from precolonial times who relates legends, stories of the tribes, and the heroic life of charismatic leaders, with the purpose of advising and exhorting his community (Hale, 2007: 24–40).

The use of normal indirect speech and above all free indirect style with the subsequent almost absolute absence of *verba dicendi* (they only appear in the visions of Lambert) is used on entire pages of rhetorical questions on issues such as colonization, the situation of neocolonial Africa, and paganism and superstitions. Otabela and Onomo (2008, p. 141) give an account of 374 cases of rhetorical questions (those that stand out are chapter 8, 38 cases; chapter 14, 45 cases; and chapter 18, 56 cases) and point out that these are also present in the para-text, concretely on the back cover (“What drives so many Africans to flee from their country and emigrate to the North? What is the price of this uprooting?”).²³ At times, the voice of the protagonist fuses with that of the narrator (Ugarte, 2010: 84). In some instances, the criticism about neocolonialism – here, corrupted African governments under the tutelage of the West – takes the form of a short essay. Thus, the use of free indirect style results in an ambiguity that gives greater emancipation to the narrator, transgressing the limits of the diegesis – or textual borders – and making it difficult to differentiate between

²¹ “*Noctem verterunt in diem et rursus post tenebras spero lucem*”. The motto was adopted later on by reformer John Calvin – *Post tenebras lux*.

²² “Mvet” is a noun that refers to a traditional guitar from the ethnic group Fang; “Mbom vet” designates the player of this instrument (Otabela & Onomo, 2008: 15).

²³ “¿Qué impulsa a tantos africanos a huir de su tierra y emigrar al norte? ¿cuál es el precio de este desarraigo?”

diegetic levels. The result is an effective blending, also liminal in a sense, of free indirect style and inner monologue. I believe that in relation to the narrative transgressions of this novel, it is relevant to recall Genette's main idea of *narrative metalepsis* (1980, pp. 234–235), that is, the crossing or transgression of diegetic levels, blurring the narrative levels as well as the line between reality and fiction. As a result of the transgressive merging of two levels, the intrusion of the extradiegetic narrator in *El Metro* on different planes creates a no-man's land narrative zone, ontologically speaking, that the reader and his effort and implication in the text can only decode.

It is then through the combination of the figure of “Mbom Mvet” with modern narrative techniques that Ndongo shapes ambiguity and the construction of a narrative space and discourse that enables him to focus on issues of migration. The very last words of the novel invite reflection: “*Columbia, Missouri (United States), October 2005*” (p. 458).²⁴ Who is signing this? Is the whole text a letter? In the para-text we find that the text is dedicated *or* addressed to a narratee: “To Pascual, an atypical immigrant”.²⁵ On the other hand, the real author, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, lived in 2005 in Columbia, invited there by the University of Missouri. This opens up the opportunity to penetrate into the intention of the real author. If we go back to Ndongo's idea about literature and the role of the writer as being useful to his community and not a mere artist, what we have is the last transgression of the novel – the irruption of the empiric author in the text, leaving us with the feeling of not knowing whether what has been narrated to the reader is a real history of a Black African postcolonial migrant or not.

Final Considerations

The foregoing analysis validates the proposition that liminality plays an important role in the poetics of our case study. It is evident the notions of limit and transgression are nuclear in the novel. The scope of application of liminality is particularly

²⁴ “*Columbia, Missouri (Estados Unidos), Octubre de 2005*”.

²⁵ “Para Pascual, un inmigrante atípico”.

remarkable upon a study of the rites and the psychological states of the protagonist. In all the cases that we have examined, the main function of the various liminal spaces such as boats, subways, and disputed territories is to emphasize the ‘in-between’ state of our protagonist, entrapped in a dichotomy between the values of tradition and modernity. On the plane of expression, liminality is often articulated in ambiguous atmospheres and sets of contrasts that evoke classical literary motifs. *El Metro*, written by the main author of Equatoguinean contemporary literature, serves to make us question our reality and find new ways to be creative in our thinking. The use of liminal narrative strategies reveals his epistemological point of view. Ndongo-Bidyogo shows us in his work that what helps us understand the seriousness of important social issues such as migration is, paradoxically, crossing borders into fictitious worlds.

References

- Allen, D. (1998). *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade*. NY: Gardland.
- Ashley, K. (ed.) (1990). *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism. Between Literature and Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London & NY: Routledge.
- Corbin, H. (2006). *Cuerpo espiritual y tierra celeste*. Madrid: Siruela.
- Deflem, M. (1991). “Ritual, Anti-Structure and Religion: a Discussion of Victor Turner’s Processual Symbolic Analysis,” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30, pp. 1–25.
- Eco, U (1992). *Los límites de la interpretación*. Barcelona: Lumen.
- García, A. (2007). “Mis novelas son una propuesta de acción. Donato Ndongo–escritor,” *Diario ABC*, 22 November [online]. Available at: http://www.abc.es/hemeroteca/historico-22-11-2007/abc/Canarias/mis-novelas-son-unapropuesta-de-accion-donato-ndongo-_escritor_1641397706708.html (Accessed: 20 September 2017).
- Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Hale, Thomas, A. (2007). *Griots and Griottes. Masters of Words and Music*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Koné, T. (2015). "The Ship as 'Cronotop' in *El Metro* of Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo," *Perífrasis. Revista de Literatura, Teoría y Crítica*, 6 (11), pp. 38–52.
- Lye, K. (2002). *Encyclopedia of African Nations & Civilizations*. London: The Diagram Group.
- Ndongo-Bidyogo, D. (2007). *El Metro*. Barcelona: Ediciones del Cobre.
- (2008). "El sueño," in Otabela, J. and Onomo, S. *Entre estética y compromiso. La obra de Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo*. Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, pp. 85–88.
- Nomo, M. (2004). "Rasgos comunes y particularidades en cinco novelas negroafricanas postcoloniales en lenguas europeas: *Rebeldía; Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra; The House Gun; Une vie de boy* y *O deseo de Kianda*," *Tonos. Revista electrónica de estudios filológicos*, 8. Available at: <http://www.um.es/tonosdigital/znum8/estudios/15-monique.htm> (Accessed: 20 September 2017)
- O'Connor, M. (2009). "A Kiss of Death: The Perils of Migration in Donato Ndongo's *El Metro*." Cádiz: University of Cadiz. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/4912479/A_Kiss_of_Death_The_Perils_of_Migration_in_Donato_Ndongo_s_El_Metro (Accessed: 20 September 2017).
- Otabela, J. and Onomo, A. (2008). *Entre estética y compromiso. La obra de Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo*. Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia.
- Phillips, T. (2015). *Liminal Fictions in Postmodern Culture: The Politics of Self-Development*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan
- Pérez Firmat, G. (1986). *Literature and Liminality. Festive Readings in the Hispanic Tradition*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Piñero Ramírez, P. (ed.). (1995). *Descensus ad inferos: La aventura de ultratumba de los héroes (de Homero a Goethe)*. Seville: University of Seville.
- Rogers, H. (ed.) (2013) "'Between and Betwixt' Worlds: Spatial and Temporal Liminality in Video Art-Music," in *The Oxford*

Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 525–542.

Shcimanski, J. and Wolfe, S.F. (2017). *Border Aesthetics. Concepts and Intersections*. New York: Berghahn Books. Series: Time and the World. Interdisciplinary Studies in Cultural Transformations.

Spariosu, M. (1997). *The Wreath of Wild Olive. Play, Liminality, and the Study of Literature*. NY: State University of New York Press.

Turner, V. (1970) “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage,” in *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 93–111.

Turner, V. (1991). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. 7th edn. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

Ugarte, M. (2010). *Africans in Europe. The Culture of Exile and Emigration from Equatorial Guinea to Spain*. Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press.

Van Gennep, A. (2008). *Los ritos de paso*. Madrid, Alianza Editorial.

Viljoen, H. and van der Merwe, C. (eds.). (2006). *Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature*. New York: Peter Lang.

“Bestimmt wird alles gut”: Journeys and Arrivals in Contemporary German Children’s Books

Anneli Fjordevik

Dalarna University

Introduction

In the picture book *Karlinchen. Ein Kind auf der Flucht* (Fuchshuber 2016), the young girl Karlinchen has to leave home on her own and find another place to live. She seeks protection at the home of the catfishes, in the trees where the waxwings live and at the home of the crows, but she is not welcome to stay with any of them. She comes to the conclusion that they do not like, help or understand her because she is a foreigner and not like them.

In the last few years, many people from war-torn countries have left home to seek safety in distant countries. Refugees have come to Europe to an extent that has not been seen since World War II. It is estimated that around 50% of the refugees are children under eighteen and many of them have ended up in Germany. The fact that many people leave their homes and become foreigners in new countries is also noticeable in literature. In recent years, an increasing number of books on this topic have been published, not least children’s books. It can be assumed that the children and their families have experienced a great deal of hardship on their adventurous and sometimes traumatic journeys from different countries and through Europe. It can also be assumed that many of them find their new “homes” unfamiliar and strange or even have difficulties finding a new home like Karlinchen. Despite this,

How to cite this book chapter:

Fjordevik, A. 2021. “Bestimmt wird alles gut”: Journeys and Arrivals in Contemporary German Children’s Books. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 357–373. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.p>. License: CC-BY 4.0

many children's books depict escape from war as a form of travel or adventure with a happy ending. Warnqvist (2016) has studied how escaping war has been thematised in Swedish children's books 2014–2016 and draws the following conclusion: "The authors of these works have generally chosen to portray the escape from war as a journey or adventure story with a happy end rather than focusing the flight as a trauma" (p. 63).¹ Dall'Armi (2017) draws a similar conclusion, when she calls the absence of flight causes in some German children's books for "a deplorable zero position" (p. 110).² The challenges of keeping the family together, settling and finding work in the new country, and feeling alienated (such as described above with Karlinchen) rarely figure upon first sight. Further, reflections on whether the families who escape made the right decision or not, expectations in terms of their new life and discussions of being "the other(s)" in the new country are often absent.

This chapter considers how escape from war and the arrival situation are depicted in eight picture books published 2016–2017 in German: *Bestimmt wird alles gut* (2016) by Kirsten Boie, *Karlinchen. Ein Kind auf der Flucht* (2016) by Annegert Fuchshuber, *Flucht* (2016) by Niki Glattauer, *Amani, sieh nicht zurück* (2016) by Katrin Holle, *Aminah gehört zu uns* (2017) by Petra Mönter, *Zugvögel* (2016) by Michael Roher, *Wasims Weste* (2017) by Anja Offermann and Christiane Tilly and *Nusret und die Kuh* (2016) by Anja Tuckermann. Most of the books describe the original environment of the children (their home, family, etc.) and the journey as refugees. My focus is on whether the fact that the families have to escape to a foreign country is problematised in any way: How do the children (and their families) in the books deal with the new language and with communication? Are there any difficulties concerning identity and "otherness"? What

¹ Original quotation: "Upphovspersonerna till dessa verk har över lag valt att skildra flykten från krig som en rese- eller äventyrsberättelse med lyckligt slut snarare än att fokusera flykten som trauma" (Warnqvist 2016, p. 63). Translation from Swedish into English: Anneli Fjordevik.

² Original quotation: "Eine Verortung von Fluchtursachen nehmen die Texte nicht vor, eine bedauerliche Nullposition [...]" (Dall'Armi 2017, p. 110). Translation from German into English: Anneli Fjordevik.

expectations/reflections (such as whether or not they made the right decision) on the new life – if any – are being related? How does the stress affect them and their families? And do the stories about leaving home and arriving in a foreign place have entirely happy endings?

Leaving Home

A journey offers the traveller an opportunity to interact with foreigners and to learn about the unknown. Children’s literature shows a “double connection”³ to the literary system on one hand and to the educational on the other hand; its main task is stated as “conveying knowledge and values”⁴. Thus, the “learning situation” or educational opportunity is a well-known pattern in children’s literature, not least when it comes to understanding different cultures. Kåreland emphasises the educational role of literature and the way in which fiction can facilitate the understanding of “the other” or “the foreign/the strange” (Kåreland 2013, p. 137).⁵ Accordingly, the narratives in children’s literature very often start at home: “children and childhood are strongly associated with the idea of home” (Östlund 2013, p. 1). Most of the children and their families in the analysed books have nice homes with cute houses, pianos, books, cell phones, friends, relatives, and so forth before the war begins; in all the books, a rather idyllic life is described before they have to leave their homes. Then the war comes and they are forced to leave, probably forever, which they – of course – do not want to do. When the father in *Bestimmt wird alles gut* (Boie 2016) tells the children that they are going to leave everything behind and travel away without their grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts, the young boy Hassan protests loudly: “Dann will ich nicht hin!” [“Then I don’t want to go there!”]⁶ In this book, the boat trip is very central. The ship the family boards looks very small and old, and it is very crowded. The boat trip

³ See the chapter “Doppelte Zugehörigkeit zum literarischen und pädagogischen System“ in O’Sullivan 2000, p. 112ff.

⁴ Original quotation: “Kenntnisse und Werte zu vermitteln” (Ewers 2000, p. 178).

⁵ See also Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity* (1997).

⁶ Translations from German into English by Anneli Fjordevik.

lasts eight days, and their only nourishment is water and rice (after five days, the adults do not even get rice). Finally they reach Italy without passports or any belongings and with very little money, from where they take the train to Germany (without tickets as they do not have enough money since their luggage has been stolen by the smugglers). Also in *Flucht* (Glattauer 2016), the journey is central. Of fourteen pages, twelve describe the family's journey across the ocean in a small boat. The story is told by the cat E.T., who watches the family from the "outside" and refers to them as "meine Menschen" [my people]. In this story, the refugees do not go to the North to seek safety, but to the South. The mother says that they should get away and the father asks where to:

Mutter hat gesagt: *In den Süden. Über das Meer.* [Mother said: *Southward. Over the sea.*] *Nach Afrika?*, hat der Vater gefragt. [To Africa?, the father asked.] *Hast du eine bessere Idee?*, hat die Mutter gefragt. [Do you have a better idea?, the mother asked.]

Young readers probably understand better that this could happen to anyone, a didactic aspect that is often listed as one of the characteristics of children's literature.⁷ We care for others unequally, depending on how easily we can imagine ourselves in their situations, Wilkie-Stibbs argues: "It is hard to empathize with people who seem Other, and it is hard to sympathize with those we cannot empathize with" (Wilkie-Stibbs 2008, p. 21).⁸

⁷ Children's picture books are read on two levels, independently from each other: Adults read the text (textual level) and children "read" the pictures (pictorial level). A number of researchers have listed specific characteristics of children's literature, e.g. Judith Hillman, p. 3 (typical childhood experiences from a child's perspective, children/childlike characters, simple and direct plots that focus on action, optimism/happy endings, combining reality and fantasy). Perry Nodelman also lists a number of characteristics (also including didactics); on the other hand he emphasizes the complex relationships between different definitions of children's literature and comes to the conclusion that children's literature claims to be void of adult content, but it is always there: "This means that texts of children's literature can be and often are as complex as texts for adults – but the complexity is of a very specific and quite different sort" (p. 341).

⁸ This "turning around" of the perspective in order to make the readers (the children) empathise with the refugee's situation is also obvious in the Swedish picture book *Flykten – en bok om att tvingas lämna allt* by Mía Hellquist Forss: It begins with a very "Swedish" setting: Appearance of the characters, nature, the apartment area and the grocery store look

In *Wasims Weste* (Offermann & Tilly 2017), the father takes the decision that the family has to leave, and they travel by bus and boat. Unfortunately the grandparents feel too old to accompany the family, but the grandmother gives eight-year-old Wasim a vest that plays an important role in reminding him of home: “Die Weste ist aus lauter Stoffresten, aus einer Hose, die Opa nicht mehr passt und aus Omas altem Kleid” [The vest is made of nothing but scraps of fabrics, of a pair of pants that don’t fit Grandpa anymore and of Grandma’s dress]. As in the other books, the family has to cross the sea, and Wasim and the adults on the boat feel very frightened. At the time the story is told, Wasim and his family are living in asylum in accommodation with other refugees, but soon they are to move into their own flat. In *Amani, sieh nicht zurück* (Holle 2016), a very life-like story is told from the perspective of the young girl Amani. The family lives in Syria and the reader learns about life when the war begins – about bombs falling as children make their way to school and about the decision – to leave or not – that has to be taken by the adults. The father wakes Amani in the night to tell her that they have to go away and so their journey begins. The only text where the main character is ready to leave is *Nusret und die Kuh* (Tuckermann 2016). Here the boy Nusret, who lives with his grandparents in an idyllic, self-sufficient village in Kosovo, decides himself when it is time to leave. His parents already live in Germany and they write letters, that he (and also the grandparents) should come because he has to go to school. The motivation to leave is to learn to read and write: “Da denke ich: Ja, ich gehe nach Deutschland und lerne lesen und schreiben, und die Kuh nehme ich mit, damit ich wenigstens etwas von zu Hause bei mir habe” [Then I think: Yes, I will go to Germany and learn to read and write, and I will take the cow with me so I can have at least something from home with me].

Another central issue when it comes to children and childhood is the family. In almost all of the analysed books, it is the members

very “Swedish” and the children have typically Swedish names (Jonas and Sara). Then the mother wakes the children in the middle of the night without explanation and they leave their home very quickly in a car with an unknown man driving and their escape from a war that the children were not aware of begins.

of the nuclear family that are the main characters: Mother and/or Father and one or more children. Only Karlinchen in *Karlinchen. Ein Kind auf der Flucht* has no family and must run away on her own and “niemand kümmerte sich um ein Kind, das allein war und voll Angst” [nobody cared about a lonely and very scared child]. In this book, there are – as mentioned in the introduction – non-human figures with central functions: Catfishes, waxwings and crows. Karlinchen asks them all for safety, but they send her away. In children’s literature, small creatures, toys and other things are often used as substitutes for humans. These subjects are categorised neither as child nor as adult, neither as full human nor as full animal, and can thus be seen as representations of the child’s otherness according to Druker (2017, p. 214–215). The characters are often incapable of influencing society at large, and stories with these kinds of characters can thus be seen as a form of social criticism. As mentioned above, the cat E.T. in *Flucht* is the narrator and thus has an important role when it comes to the reader and the human beings in this book.⁹

In *Aminah gehört zu uns* (Möntzer 2017) the reader knows nothing about the journey and thus the premise differs from the other books. This story is told by the German girl Ida who gets to know the new girl in the class, Aminah, who has come with her parents to Germany from Syria. In *Zugvögel* (Roher 2016) as well, the journey has already been made as Luka welcomes the migratory birds when they arrive to the tree where he lives. However, the migratory birds have to leave once again when the autumn comes. One of them, Paulinchen, does not want to leave and at the end she stays with Luka and Frau Lorenz, who has a big bird’s nest for those who do not know where to go (“Sie hat ein großes Nest für alle, die nicht wissen, wohin”).

The Arrival

As mentioned above, an increasing number of narratives about children on the move have been published in recent years. This topic, however, is nothing new:

⁹ There are several examples of non-human characters in children’s literature on this topic in other languages as well – for instance, *Om du skulle fråga Micha* in Swedish, where all the figures are scissors.

The most common story for young people is a circular journey, in which a central child character leaves home in search of an adventure or is pushed out of an ordinary home by the behavior of powerful adults, journeys to an unfamiliar place, and, after a series of exciting and/or dangerous experiences, either returns home, or chooses to claim the unfamiliar space as a new home. (Reimer 2013b, p. 2)

What differs from earlier narratives about children on the move is that the original home in most of the stories does not exist anymore. Accordingly, the children do not have the choice of returning home or naming the unfamiliar space his or her new home. They have to accept that they arrive in a foreign place, that they get a new ‘home’. They have to find happy endings “or at least, narrative closure – in remaining homeless at the end of their stories” (Reimer 2013b, p. 2), which very often results in homesickness and a state of sorrow.¹⁰ Below some of the difficulties that may occur due to the arrival in a foreign place are discussed and if/how these are thematised and/or problematised in the books.

Learning a New Language

In *Flucht* the family talks about the language difficulties to come while sitting in the boat out at sea. The mother tells the children that they are going to learn a new language, “das gehört dazu” [that is part of it], and that they will have special teachers for learning the new language. When the young girl Suzie asks how they are going to understand the teachers, it takes a while before the father answers: “Die Menschen werden euch verstehen – am Anfang mit den Herzen [The people will understand you – in the beginning with their hearts]. The father touches on a subject that may be even more difficult than different languages, namely the will to understand foreigners. This is also thematised in *Karlinchen. Ein Kind auf der Flucht*: Karlinchen does not arrive in a foreign language culture but still has communication problems because of her otherness; the crows do not understand her because she is not like them. In other books we can follow the language learning more as a process that takes time, such as in

¹⁰ According to Johannisson (2016), homesickness is like sorrow but lacks the status of sorrow.

Zugvögel: “Luka lernte die Vögel immer besser verstehen und auch Paulinchen konnte schon ein paar Sätze in Lukas Sprache” [Luka learned to understand the birds better and better, and Paulinchen too could already say a few sentences in Lukas’s language]. Wasim (*Wasims Weste*) has a teacher in Mrs Hubert in the asylum accommodation, who teaches the children German words and the funniest words like “Rettungsweste” [life jacket] and “Blumentopf” [flowerpot] Wasim and his sister whisper to each other before they fall asleep. Nevertheless, the learning of a new language is also a challenging process. Rahaf (*Bestimmt wird alles gut*) is very frustrated when her teacher explains things to her and she does not understand (but she has decided not to cry). However, a girl in the class teaches her by pointing at things and saying their names, a process that is ongoing: “Emma hat Rahaf auch am nächsten Tag wieder Wörter gesagt” [The next day too Emma taught Rahaf words] and after two years in Germany she can speak almost as good German as she does Arabic. In *Amani, sieh nicht zurück*, we have a similar situation with the Syrian girl Amani, who is taught by her friend Emma at school. In this book (written in parallel in German and Arabic like *Bestimmt wird alles gut*), we also have a metalevel: At the end of the book Emma gives Amani a book in German and Arabic (like *Amani, sieh nicht zurück!*) so that they can read together and understand the text. Also, the girl, Ida (*Aminah gehört zu uns*), is obviously prepared to teach the Syrian girl Aminah. She does not expect Aminah to speak German, so she speaks very slowly, whereupon Aminah gets angry: “Mit mir kannst du normal sprechen, ich bin doch nicht blöd” [“You can talk normally to me, I’m not stupid”].

Identity and Being the Other

In several of the books, feelings of being a foreigner or otherness are thematised. The concept of “otherness” has arisen from the theories of postcolonialism. In *Orientalism* (first published 1978), Edward Said discusses the dichotomy between East and West (where the Orient, i.e. the East, was depicted as the irrational, psychologically weak, and feminised, non-European “Other” in contrast to the rational, psychologically strong, and masculine West, i.e. the Europeans) that arose as a result of producing a discourse of “difference”. Posti points out that travel literature

has a tendency to focus on differences: “instead of noting the similarities between the ‘we’ that the narrator considers himself belonging to and ‘those’ who he meets during his journey or adventure, diversities and differences are described the more detailed” (Posti 2017, p. 184).¹¹ In the analysed books, the otherness is more or less pronounced, but in some way it is there in all the stories, for instance when Amani (*Amani, sieh nicht zurück*) feels homesick because everything in Germany is different from home: The weather is cold, she is freezing and the food does not taste of anything at all (p. 56). After a while in the new school, she still feels alone because there are so many things she does not understand (p. 60). The differences also appear clearly when Karlinchen is first being very kindly received at the places where she seeks protection. Then it turns out that she is different from the catfishes, the waxwings and the crows, and she has to leave because she is a foreigner and not like them. In *Aminah gehört zu uns*, Aminah’s otherness even leads to bullying by older children at school. This makes Aminah afraid of going to school, but Ida and the other classmates defend her and come to pick her up in the mornings even though they have to make a detour. One day Lea (one of the older children who is harassing Aminah) tells the others she is going to Kenya and that gives Ida an opportunity to make Lea reflect on her behaviour:

“Ich fahre in den Herbstferien ganz weit weg. Nach Kenia, das liegt in Afrika“, sagte sie stolz. „Hoffentlich sind die Leute da nicht so gemein zu dir wie du zu Aminah“, platzte ich heraus. „Da haben nämlich alle dunkle Haut. Außer dir.“ Da bekam Lea einen ganz roten Kopf. [“In the holiday, I’m going far away. To Kenya, that’s in Africa”, she said proudly. “I hope that the people over there are not so mean to you like you are to Aminah”, I burst out. “Over there all the people have dark skin. Except you.” By this point, Lea had turned red.]

It is not stated whether Lea’s unfriendliness is due to a fear of foreigners or not; however, she has to give up her unfriendliness.

¹¹ Original quotation: “i stället för att notera likheterna mellan det ‘vi’ som berättaren anser sig tillhöra och ‘de’ som berättaren träffar på under sin resa eller sitt äventyr, beskrivs olikheter och skillnader desto utförligare” (Posti 2017, p. 184). Translation from Swedish into English: Anneli Fjordevik.

In *Zugvögel*, Frau Lorenz tries to explain to Paulinchen why some people are unfriendly to foreigners: “Viele Leute haben Angst vor Fremden. Angst davor, mit ihnen zu teilen und sich für sie zu interessieren” [Many people are afraid of foreigners. Afraid of sharing things with them and afraid of showing interest in them].

Some of the protagonists worry about the work identity of their parents. Wasim (*Wasims Weste*) does his best to keep his father (who is a hairdresser) happy by letting him cut his hair, even if it is not needed, because “beim Haareschneiden wird er immer fröhlich” [when he cuts people’s hair, he is always happy]. His mother gets a sewing machine and starts to sew for them and for other people, which makes her smile sometimes, much to Wasim’s great relief. In *Bestimmt wird alles gut*, the father is not allowed to work as a doctor, so he often just sits doing nothing, which affects the children (and the mother): “Wenn Papa so traurig ist, sind die Kinder auch alle traurig. Und Mama auch” (p. 41) [When Dad is so sad, the children are all sad too. And Mum too]. Implicitly, the children long for everyday things, like having parents who go to work, living in a flat (and not in asylum accommodation) and going to school.

Expectations for the New Life

On the boat trip in *Flucht*, there are a lot of flashbacks of the life back home, discussions about the future (school, work, language, etc.) and questions as to whether or not they are doing the right thing. The young boy Daniel asks his father if they are going to have a piano in their new home; of course, answers the father, and they will also have lights and dimmers, which he has already ordered. Only the cat E.T. notices that the father is lying. Here, the reader realises that the adults know things that the children may not know (or will come to know). The father probably tries to live up to the expectations or wishes of the children when he lies, but he himself knows that the new life will not be easy. In the same book, the cat E.T. summarises the feelings of the family when they finally reach land after the dangerous journey on the sea: “Meine Menschen wollen glücklich sein, aber sie wissen nicht, wie” [My people want to feel happy, but they don’t know how]. They probably want to feel happy to feel confident about the decision to leave home, but the uncertainty that they feel is obvious:

Unsicher werfen sie einander Blicke zu. Dabei kreuzen sich ihre fragenden Blicke mit jenen der Menschen in den vorbeigleitenden Booten. [Uncertainly, they look at each other. Their questioning eyes meet the eyes of the people in the passing boats who also feel uncertain].

Also, in *Bestimmt wird alles gut*, the uncertainty is obvious when a woman on the train to Germany complains about the family in an unpleasant way because one of the small sisters is crying. “So sind die Menschen hier doch nicht” (p. 27) [That’s not the way people are here], the mother whispers to Rahaf, but Rahaf can see that the mother is crying. This worries her because mothers do not cry. When the conductor comes, they are afraid but have to admit that they are travelling without tickets, because they are from Syria and have no money left. The conductor just smiles, wishes them good luck and goes on to the next wagon. They wait for him to come back, but then they realise that they do not have to pay. The father smiles and says that this is the way people are in this country: “Jetzt wird alles gut” (p. 29) [Now everything will be ok].

Happy Endings as the Norm

A characteristic of children’s literature is the “feeling of optimism and innocence” which makes the happy ending be “the norm” (Hillman 1999, p. 3) in fiction for young readers, even though it has become less black and white since the 1960s. In the analysed books, we can see feelings of optimism at the end in all of them, sometimes with a clear message like in *Aminah gehört zu uns*, where it is stated that Aminah belongs to them [Ida and her friends] and that many young children can be stronger than a few older children: “Wir sind nämlich ganz schön viele!” [There’s actually quite a lot of us]. However, even though life in the new home seems to be fine upon first sight, there are often feelings of insecurity and confusion as well as duality that can occur when one lives with two different cultures, such as with the boy Nusret in *Nusret und die Kuh*. Nusret seems to be accepted right away in his new homeland; immediately, he makes friends with whom he speaks German (probably his parents have already prepared him for a life in Germany since they already live there). Everything seems fine but in the last letter to the grandparents

back in Kosovo, he reflects on the duality or so-called third space or third culture that migrators often feel: “Ich bin gern bei Mama und Papa und Lirije und Liridon und auch bei euch, aber ich weiß, das geht nicht gleichzeitig” [I love being with Mum and Dad and Lirije and Liridon and also with you, but I know, that is not possible all at the same time]. Bhabha (2004) explains the uniqueness of each person, actor or context as a “hybrid” (p. 55) in the space theory; a cultural “third space”, where children like Nusret often are mentally located.¹² The uncertainty is also present when the family in *Flucht* finally arrives after a long boat trip: In the pictures, we can see palm trees, a tent with the Muslim moon (as stated above, the family goes to Africa to seek protection from the war) and a big sign with “Refugees welcome” on it. The family looks for familiar faces but finds nobody they know. The author leaves the reader with the sense of confusion and insecurity that the refugees themselves probably feel.

In *Bestimmt wird alles gut, Wasims Weste* and *Amani, sieh nicht zurück*, where similar stories about a journey from Syria with a stay at asylum accommodation en route to a “real” home are told, the endings also have similarities. In *Bestimmt wird alles gut*, the children start school in a small town and the language problems as well as the father’s unemployment are highlighted as mentioned above. The narrator Rahaf sometimes feel homesick, but she is hopeful that everything will be better:

Aber bestimmt geht das eines Tages vorbei. Und bestimmt kriegen sie eines Tages auch eine schöne Wohnung. Und Papa darf wieder arbeiten. Bestimmt. (p. 42) [But certainly it will come to an end one day. And certainly they will also get a nice flat one day. And Dad will be allowed to work again. Certainly.]

Also, Amani in *Amani, sieh nicht zurück* is homesick but has found a new friend and most importantly, she has found peace. The story ends with her and her friend Emma reading a book together about a girl on the move. The book is in German and Arabic so that they both understand, and it is stated that Emma now understands how difficult it was for Amani to leave home

¹² See also Boëthius (2010) on Finnish child refugees during the World War II, *Hemma längtar jag bort, borta längtar jag hem*.

and settle in a foreign place. *Wasims Weste* is open-ended, with Wasim and his family living in asylum accommodation, although they will soon move to a flat. He misses his grandparents and friends back home, but he is also looking forward to school and getting to know other children. *Zugvögel* has a clearly happy ending. The young bird Paulinchen is allowed to stay with Luka (who is not a migrating bird) and does not have to leave with the other birds. However, she is warned by her protector, Frau Lorenz, that it is not going to be easy because of the fear of foreigners that many people have. Frau Lorenz also points out that Luka is not like them. Luka nods and puts his arm around Paulinchen. It begins to snow and everyone is happy.

Conclusion

As stated above, the narratives about children’s journeys and arrivals in a migration context include the home-away-home theme. However, the last home – or homecoming – is not always there. The journeys were mostly forced and the families cannot return to their home countries. In this sense Nusret’s status is different; he was born after the migration of the family and he has a choice to migrate himself and also to return. Also Paulinchen in *Zugvögel* differs from most of the stories in this sense: she chooses not to leave. The children who did not have this choice – the parents made the decision to leave – stay in a kind of no man’s land, which may be difficult for them to call home, like Wasim (*Wasims Weste*), Amani (*Amani, sieh nicht zurück!*) and Rahaf (*Bestimmt wird alles gut*). Even though the journeys sometimes are portrayed more as adventures than traumas like Warnqvist (2016) concludes and even though life in the new home country seems to be fine upon first sight, there are often feelings of uncertainty (like in *Flucht*) and confusion that may occur when one grows up as a “third culture kid”, a term coined by Ruth Useem in the 50s. Even though the third culture kid-space gives these children a sense of belonging, a mental place in the world, where they do not feel like “the other” or like foreigners¹³, there are short

¹³ See also the anthology *Third Culture Kids* (2017) by Ra Hidaya Modig and the article in *Dagens Nyheter* (2 October 2017), where Iskias Kashay says: ”När jag åker till Etiopien känner jag mig utanför, och när jag

mentions of not belonging anywhere or, like for Nusret, a wish to be in two places at the same time. In several stories the children's worries about the future are depicted through the behavior of the adults. They are – like the children – very afraid when they sit in small boats on the sea, and they cry and wonder whether or not they made the right decision. When they arrive in the new country, they do not have jobs, which makes them question their identity, and this affects the children. Also difficulties like learning a new language, homesickness and feelings of otherness are found in all of the stories. Instead of noting the similarities that may be present, diversities and differences are noted by the figures in the books. In *Aminah gehört zu uns*, the otherness even leads to bullying by older children at school. The narrative in all of the stories may sometimes be quite simple, but the sentences often contain formulations that encourage deeper understanding or reflection (such as when the cat E.T. in *Flucht* notes that “his people” want to feel happy, but they do not know how) and the illustrations are very effective and moving.

All the books discussed above have happy endings or at least the feeling of optimism that is characteristic of children's literature. Kevin Brooks, Carnegie winner 2014, says that children “do not need their books to have ‘patronizing’ happy endings”; they should learn “life is not always all right in the end” (Furness 2014). However, literature that deals with difficult topics such as migration, to which many children can relate, may differ somewhat from other literature in that way. This literature is about real people, real stories and real boat trips that have been made by thousands of children, and for many of them there is no way back. In these stories, the happy ending may be patronising, but it probably has to give the young readers (and the “hidden” adults) at least a glimmer of hope, just to reassure them that their decision was the right decision, that everything certainly (“bestimmt”) will be fine one day.

kommer till Sverige känner jag mig inte som svensk. Så jag har typ ingen plats. Men med ”third culture kid” finns det en tillhörighet.” [When I go to Ethiopia, I feel like an outsider and when I come to Sweden, I do not feel like a Swede. So there is like no place for me. But with the “third culture kid” there is a sense of belonging.] Translation from Swedish into English: Anneli Fjordevik.

References

- Bhabha, H. K. (2004). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Boëthius, U. (2010). “Hemma längtar jag bort, borta längtar jag hem.” Andra världskrigets finska krigsbarn i svensk barn- och ungdomslitteratur. *Barnboken – tidskrift för barnlitteraturforskning* 2010: 1, pp. 17–32.
- Boie, K. and J. Birck (pictures). (2016). *Bestimmt wird alles gut*. Leipzig: Klett Kinderbuch. Translation into Arabic: Mahmoud Hassanein.
- von Dall’Armi, J. (2017). Sich ein Bild von der Flucht Machen (können)? Das Eigene und das Fremde in aktuellen Bilderbüchern, in Dettmar, U., von Glasenapp G., O’Sullivan E., Roeder C. and Tomkowiak I. (eds.) *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Kinder- und Jugendliteraturforschung* 2017. Open Access, pp. 100–113. (Accessed 1 February 2018)
- Druker, E. (2017). Berättelser om flykt. Miniatyren som samhällskritik, in Andersson, M. and Druker, E. (eds.) *Mångkulturell barn- och ungdomslitteratur*. Lund: Student litteratur, pp. 201–216.
- Ewers, H. (2000). *Literatur für Kinder und Jugendliche*. Munich: Fink.
- Fuchshuber, A. (2016) *Karlinchen. Ein Kind auf der Flucht*. 2.edn. Berlin: Annette Betz.
- Furness, Hannah (2014). *Children’s books do not need happy endings, Carnegie Medal winner says*. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookprizes/10919492/Childrens-books-do-not-need-happy-endings-Carnegie-Medal-winner-says.html> (Accessed 17 October 2017)
- Glattauer, N. and V. Hochleitner (pictures). (2016). *Flucht*. Innsbruck and Vienna: Tyrolia Verlag.
- Hellquist Forss, M. (2014). *Flykten – en bok om att tvingas lämna allt*. Pupill förlag (online).
- Hillman, J. (1999). *Discovering Children’s Literature*. 2nd edn. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Holle, K. and L. Pierquin (pictures). (2016). *Amani, sieh nicht zurück*. Regensburg: neuDENKEN. Translation into Arabic: Abbas Amin.

- Kåreland, L. (2013). *Barnboken i sambället*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Modig, R. H. (ed.) (2017). *Third Culture Kids*. Stockholm: Ordfront förlag.
- Mönter, P. and S. Maier (pictures). (2017). *Aminah gehört zu uns*. Kerle, Freiburg.
- Nodelman, P. (2008). *The Hidden Adult. Defining Children's Literature*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1997). *Cultivating Humanity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Offermann, A., C. Tilly and A. Merten (pictures). (2017). *Wasims Weste*. Köln: Balance buch + medien verlag.
- O'Sullivan, E. (2000). *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C.Winter.
- Posti, P. K. (2017). Resor, äventyr och den andre. Exotism och det främmande i samtida svensk barnlitteratur, in Andersson, M. and Druker, E. (eds.) *Mångkulturell barn- och ungdomslitteratur*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, pp. 181–197.
- Reimer, M. (2013a). “No place like home”: the facts and figures of homelessness in contemporary texts for young People, in *Nordic Journal of ChildLit Aesthetics*, Vol. 4, pp. 1–10. (<http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/blft.v4i0.20605>, Accessed 5 October 2017)
- (2013b). Mobile Characters, mobile texts: homelessness and intertextuality in contemporary texts for young people, in *Barnboken tidskrift för barnlitteraturforskning/Journal of Children's Literature Research*, Vol. 36, (<http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/clr.v36i0.21583>, Accessed 5 October 2017)
- Roher, M. (2016). *Zugvögel*. 2.edn. Vienna: Picus Verlag.
- Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.
- Sjögran, V. (2015). *Om du skulle fråga Micha*. Gothenburg: Kabusa Böcker.
- Söderberg, N. (2017). 42 skäl varför man bör skapa en tredje kultur, *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 October.
- Tuckermann, A., M. Zaeri-Esfahani (pictures) and U. Krappen (pictures). (2016). *Nusret und die Kuh*. Munich: Tulipan Verlag.

Warnqvist, Å. (2016). “Jag fick en ny nalle. Jag fick ett nytt land.” Skildringar av flykt från krig i svenska bilderböcker 2014–2016, in *TFL* 2016:3–4, pp. 51–66.

Wilkie-Stibbs, C. (2008). *The Outside Child. In and Out of the Book*. New York and London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Östlund, M. (2013). Introduction, in *Barnboken tidskrift för barnlitteraturforskning/Journal of Children's Literature Research*, Vol. 36, pp. 1–3. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14811/clr.v36io.163> (Accessed 20 November 2017).

Same Urban Legends, Different Bad *Hombres*: The Risk of Narratives across Borders about Deviant Others

Gonzalo Soltero

National Autonomous University of Mexico

Introduction

When Donald Trump announced his presidential bid in June 2015, he mentioned that Mexico usually sent across the border: “people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists” (*Washington Post*, 2015). Since the third presidential debate he mentioned that there were “some bad *hombres* here”, that were going to be sent out when he took office. During his first telephone conversation with the Mexican president, there were claims that Trump offered (or threatened) to send troops to Mexico to take care of those bad *hombres* (Agren, 2017). All along, he repeatedly promised to build a wall along the Mexican border in order to keep such evil men out. Walls, however, have proved completely useless to fend off narratives that allow human groups to characterize others. This chapter is based on the transit of two urban legends regarding crime that became very prolific in Mexico and the United States, which have been called “Lights Out!” and “Burundanga”.

Allport and Postman declared rumor to be: “a specific (or topical) proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by word of mouth, without secure standards of evidence being present” (Allport and Postman 1947, ix). Urban

How to cite this book chapter:

Soltero, G. 2021. Same Urban Legends, Different Bad *Hombres*: The Risk of Narratives across Borders about Deviant Others. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 375–403. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.q>. License: CC-BY 4.0

(or contemporary) legend is a closely related term that usually refers to a more elaborate narrative, surprising and frequently shocking. These narratives pretend to be news about the immediate environment of senders and recipients, express an urgent social problem that needs attention and attempt control over ambiguous situations (Ellis 1990, 2–3). Brunvand declares that these apocryphal stories told as true concern alleged recent events, which usually happened to a “friend of a friend” (1981, p. xi; 1996, p. 730). Such social closeness is useful for understanding their process of transmission, by which they construct verisimilitude: when the events portrayed in these tales happen to ‘a friend of a friend’, or somebody equally close, they establish an arm’s length reliability upon the source of the story that usually belongs to the same group.

Fine and Ellis assert that the limits between these terms are so porous that: “it is impossible to maintain a clear distinction between rumor and legend” (p. 5), therefore, they will be used as partial synonyms. These short and fictive stories that pretend to be true have been examined by a number of perspectives and disciplines, such as folklore studies (e. g. Brunvand 1981, 1995, 2000, 2001. Dégh and Vázsonyi, 1983. Dundes, 1980, 1991. Ellis 1983, 2001), psychology (e. g. Knapp, 1944. Allport and Postman, 1947)) and sociology (e.g. Best, 1999. Donovan, 2004. Fine, 1992. Morin, 1970).

Rumors and urban legends can be very telling cultural phenomena when analyzing the social processes that give them existence and the meaning they convey. Their content, context and the way they spread can help to assess how the members of a society perceive reality and what they think about other groups. Furthermore, these narratives inform world visions which can alter reality: rumors influence how people from all levels of society think and react, individually and collectively. Fine and Ellis conclude that: “As the rumor process moves toward forming agendas of actions intended to protect a culture against a potential threat, it contributes to political decisions that, for better or worse, can lead to long-lasting social consequences” (p. 204). Donald Trump’s claims and proposals for policy above present the same prejudices contained in the transmission of the urban

legends that will be analyzed in this chapter. The following dictum by Clifford Geertz is a very adequate premise for this study: culture is the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves (2000). Urban legends are a very particular strand of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves – and about others. Some of these narratives, especially those legends about ongoing crime, usually contribute to the collective identity of a group by singling out others in opposition to those sharing the tale. Communities may share urban legends to strengthen alliances in difficult periods and to channel social stress, attributing causation to a difficult environment by supplying a fake responsible. In this sense, they are stories we tell ourselves about *Them*.

Brunvand proposed ‘a classification of urban legends which organizes them on the basis of subject matter and content; one of the ten major headings was “Crime” (Brunvand, 2001, pp. 73–76). *Crime legend* serves as a useful differentiation from the other subtypes of urban legends. This was also the term adopted by Donovan for looking at three urban legends discussed in internet newsgroups between 1995 and 1999 (2004, 3). The urban legends studied here carry a clear implication of risk for those who share them. They are not amusing stories that happened sometime in the past, but a warning about an actual ongoing threat, about the present and the immediate future. Even if these legends recount a horrible story that happened to a friend of a friend, it is not an isolated event: the criminals in the story are out there, on the streets. These narratives can cause considerable distress among those who share them, which largely accounts for their transmission, as recipients pass along the messages mainly to prevent friends and family from the threat the legend warns about. They show a remarkable ability to filter through different communities and all socioeconomic levels; in their oral, written or digital retelling regional details (such as names of streets or shops) are incorporated to become locally verisimilar and resist refutation attempts.

Shibutani argues that: “If rumor is a collective transaction, a satisfactory explanation of it would also require generalizations about *things that men do together in units*” (1966, 164). Groups are such units and will be understood as the different segments or

sums of individuals that constitute society, which usually identify around a collective self (*Us*) that is formed by characteristics such as ethnic background, social class, interests, education or type of work, but also in opposition to other groups (*Them*). These type of narratives play an important role in both binding and dividing human groups. Rumors play a functional role in the group that circulates them, therefore every rumor seems to have its own public, something Allport and Postman called ‘a community of interest’ (p. 180). One of the functions that they usually carry out is expressing dissent about innovations, modern society, its complexities and possible risks to the established social order (Fine, 1992).

Dunbar suggests that language evolved to allow our species to gossip, in order to tighten social bonds (1993, p. 79). Rumors could have followed as early by-products from that dawn of human communication. Folklore provides evidence of how such narrative differentiation of *Us* from *Them* has been going on for centuries, even millennia, as in the case of “The Mutilated Boy”. This urban legend circulates nowadays warning about the initiation ritual of a youth gang where its members, who generally belong to an ethnic or sexual minority, mutilate the genitals of an abducted boy in the fitting rooms of a shopping mall. Alan Dundes first showed that it branched from “The Blood Libel”, an anti-Semitic legend that circulated in Europe since the twelfth century (1991, p. vii). However, Bill Ellis has pointed out that it goes back even beyond that: anti-Christian versions of this legend “can be found as far back as 63 B. C., and it is probably at least a century older than that. It circulated actively in Rome and other major centers of the Roman Empire for more than three centuries” (2003, p. 50). The members of the gang change their characteristics along the specific time and context where the legend is told, but throughout its retellings and adaptations they always belong to an out-group (Christians, Jews, gays or African Americans).

The Second World War was the cradle of the academic study of rumor. The first authors to publish about the topic, Knapp, Allport and Postman, were psychologists who worked in clinics established in the United States in an attempt to stop the spreading

of rumors and war propaganda. Knapp appointed three main characteristics of rumor: it is transmitted by word of mouth; it provides information about a particular person, event or condition; and channels the emotional needs of a community (1944, pp. 22–23). Knapp provided a classification based upon the emotions that the legends gratify: *pipe-dreams* attend to wishes, *bogies* to fears and anxieties, and *wedge-drivers* to aggression or hostilities (1944, p. 22). From the 1,089 rumors received by the Massachusetts Committee on Public Safety during September 1942, over 60 per cent were wedge-drivers, reflecting hate and hostility to other social groups within the same society who were blamed for the predominant uncertainty (Knapp, 1944, p. 24).

There is an overall agreement in the literature of what functions these narratives serve: they provide a fictional sensemaking that helps explain an intricate world and alleviates the anxiety felt in current social environments, tightening the social bonds of the immediate group, with which the stories are shared (Knapp, 1944, p. 33. Allport and Postman, 1947, p. 5. Shibutani, 1966, pp. 62, 163–164. Fine and Ellis, pp. 20, 209). The factual information of rumors is almost always incorrect, but it can still be eloquent about the state of mind of whoever passes them on. They reflect the hopes, fears and anxieties of our time and can thus also provide an insight into the structure of the community (Knapp 1944, pp. 26, 27. Brunvand, 1981, p. 2).

In anxiety producing circumstances people seek a cause for their frustration. In such situations “any definition of the source and nature of danger is preferable to none” (Knapp 1944, p. 32). While trying to find the source, a plausible nearby target is sought to fix the blame on in order to explain the situation. Rumors succeed because they cast underlying emotional tensions into a target, frequently embodied by the *other*. The above is characteristic not only of wars. Urban legends address the mistrust that social communities have about those outside their bounds. Hence, multicultural societies are fertile terrain for this type of folkloric creations, as the identities of sub-groups rival among them (Heath 2007, 82. Fine and Ellis p. 201). Many urban legends feature a clear *other* that threatens a certain group. Fine and Turner have explored this by looking at the folklore of

black and white communities addressing each other in the United States (2001). Likewise, Neubauer mentions that during the First World War, German and French troops told very similar stories, adapting characters and other elements to each side (1999, p. 99).

The idea of *Them* condenses uncertainty into a particular threat and turns anxiety into a concrete fear. By being aware and making others aware of a specific *them*, these narratives give the illusion of addressing the situation. Trying to understand what caused the predominance of wedge driving rumors during war, Knapp indicated that: “[w]ith a ready scapegoat to look down upon, one never feels quite so inferior, never quite so guilty for one’s own misdeeds” (1944, p. 33). Paradoxically the price of certitude may be falsity, sentencing as guilty a group or individuals that are usually innocent. “People that accept a rumor reject all uncertainty and make an accusation. The public enemy is unmasked, which is already a relief” (Delumeau, 1978, p. 232 –my translation, as the following ones from sources not in English).

This can be exemplified by Bourke’s analysis of the rumors caused by the Bethnal Green panic during the Second World War in Britain, where 173 persons were crushed to death by a large group of people rushing to a bomb shelter.

While the official inquiry emphasised structural and procedural flaws, ordinary British citizens were more anxious to identify the “real” culprits. Scapegoating was one of the main responses to the Bethnal Green panic. [...] Foreigners, Jews, criminals and irresponsible young people became the symbolic scapegoats for all that went wrong at the Bethnal Green shelter. Of these four “enemies within”, foreigners were regarded as being the most blameworthy (2005, pp. 236–237).

The suspicions about foreigners regarding this accident were also extended to foreign imports, e.g. a faulty substance used to repair shoes that made some people lose their step and thus began the trampling (Bourke, 2005, p. 237). This is how ongoing crime legends condense uncertainty into a specific risk and give a solution to avoid it. The strain caused by social conditions is thus catalyzed into a perceived threat to the community (Best and Horiuchi, 1985, p. 496), that makes it possible to act against

it and feel the support of others instead of experiencing frustration alone.

However, the positive aspect of scapegoating works for *Us*. The negative one, as Morin observes, is for *Them*, “[o]nce the responsibility has been pinned down on certain individuals, all the rest are thereby exonerated” (1971, p. 135). This is where scapegoating brings forth catharsis: by charging the accused with all sort of crimes and vices, the accuser feels purified (Delumeau, 1978, p. 232). Such projection of guilt is part of the scapegoating process that allows conveying negative feelings towards already marginalized groups, by blaming them for the perceived decline of society and the uncertainty in the environment.

The absence of a concrete other as an enemy can cause confusion and anxiety. Consider the following quote from George W. Bush, former president of the United States: “When I was coming up, it was a dangerous world, and you knew exactly who they were. It was us versus them, and it was clear who them was. Today we are not so sure who they are, but we know they’re there” (in Weisberg, 2000). Here Bush contrasts the Cold War, where communists were a clear enemy of capitalism, with the current period that is far from being set in such binary terms. This explains why sometimes to face uncertainty an enemy is sought or even created, e.g. the *Axis of Evil* that Bush adopted while president as his international doctrine for action.

The Legends: “Lights Out!” and “Burundanga”

I will briefly describe the urban legends and their transit, as I have studied them at length elsewhere (e.g. Soltero, 2016a. Soltero, 2016b). “Lights Out!” has been one of the most commented urban legends on by scholars (e. g. Best and Horiuchi, 1985. Brunvand, 1995, 2000, 2001. Fine and Turner, 2001. Ellis, 2003. Donovan, 2004). It spread intensely in the United States in 1993 and in Mexico twelve years later. The text was almost identical in both cases:

BEWARE!!

There is a new “Gang Initiation”!!!!

This new initiation of MURDER is brought about by Gang Members driving around at night with their car lights off. When

you flash your car lights to signal them that their lights are out, the Gang members take it literally as "LIGHTS OUT," so they are to follow you to your destination and kill you!! That's their initiation. Be aware and inform your family and friends. Don't flash your car lights to anyone.¹

It is remarkable that with such brevity both spreads were very intense. There were several particularities that allowed this urban legend to cross the United States from coast to coast in a few weeks during 1993 causing considerable alarm (Brunvand, 2000, pp. 95–106. Donovan, 2004, p. 4). The transmission was not only oral, it also appeared in print, sometimes on headed paper, and was widely shared through fax machines (Brunvand, 1995). New technologies speeded the process and may have given the message extra credibility. A fixed date also helped to fuel the spate. Some versions of the legend said that September 25 and 26 would be the initiation weekend for the Bloods, the allegedly involved gang, which was described in multiracial terms applying to different ethnic groups (“Asians, Latinos, blacks and whites”) (Fine and Turner, 2001, p. 186). This probably has to do with the brevity of the warning: the description of the threat is so sparse that it allows any social group to fit as the villain.

The same urban legend had an even more acute spread in Mexico twelve years later with remarkable similarities in the process of transmission (Soltero, 2016b). It scattered intensively through email during October 2005 warning almost word by word (now through email and in Spanish) about the same gang, whose initiation rite would take place during the last weekend of the month (29th – 30th). A memo dated 21 October 2005 from the Director General of Interpol Mexico leaked to the media and had a very strong transmission from there. Contrary to the many apocryphal memos in headed paper that endorsed the transmission in the United States, this one was authentic, a detail that contributed substantially to the spread of the rumor. The height of the affair came on 27 October. The spokesman of the Mexican President declared in a press conference that they were aware of the presence in the country from members of this criminal gang that intended

¹ Typical flyer warning of the spread in the United States during 1993 (Fine and Turner, 2001: 184).

to kill drivers and that the Republic's General Attorney's Office (the Procuraduría General de la República – in charge of all federal police forces) was acting upon it. Police from at least eight different states declared a maximum alert and started special operations and checkpoints to detect cars driving without lights. The Senate approved an urgent measure asking the President to reinforce police vigilance in highways close to the southern border of the country. The media reported all these events and accelerated the intensity of the spreading cycle. (Soltero, 2016b)

Not long after “Lights Out!” caused such turmoil in Mexico a different urban legend started to spread through the country's email networks. It featured a victim, usually female, in the parking lot of a shopping center looking for a public phone. A man with one leg and crutches approaches her and asks help to dial a number from a piece of paper. When she holds the paper, she starts feeling dizzy, runs for her car and manages to get to the hospital just before passing out. When she recovers, a doctor tells her how fortunate she was as lately there have been several cases like this, but with far worse endings – some leading to organ trafficking. In slightly varying versions the victim is not so lucky and dies because of the ordeal. In all accounts the victim is drugged with a substance from Colombia called *burundanga* or *scopolamine*. Burundanga is capable of subduing whoever smells or touches it, transforming the person into a zombie and erasing all memories of what happens during the trance.

Folklorism has developed two useful categories: motif and cognate version. Brunvand has referred to *motif* as: “a traditional narrative unit such as a character, an incident, and object, or any other remarkable detail that occurs repeatedly in myths, legends, and folktales” (Brunvand, 2001, p. 271). In the case of “Lights Out!” a motif is the gang initiation rite; in “Burundanga”, another one is the one-legged man who baits the victim. The fixed set of motifs that forms the recognizable core of any tale or narrative is the cognate version. Most folk material will have a fixed set of motifs and a mutable one.

The “Burundanga” urban legend has several particular characteristics: spatial, compositional and temporal. There were previous strands of this legend to this spread. During the 1990s stories

that treated burundanga seriously appeared in newspapers in the United States and the United Kingdom. In 1995 *The Wall Street Journal* published an article with the following subhead and opening line: “If you thought cocaine was bad news, wait until you hear about Burundanga. Burundanga is a kind of voodoo powder obtained from a Colombian local plant” (de Córdoba, 1995). A 1999 article in *The Guardian* also refers to this period thus: “a mass panic of about five years ago that swept Colombia: the country was in the grip of a crime wave caused by the use of a plant drug known locally as burundanga” (Jay, 1999).

This situation and its media coverage left as a legacy the warnings in several Foreign Offices websites that, even if most aspects of the legend have been disproved, continue online. At the time of this writing, the Spanish Foreign Office reproduces verbatim fragments of the cognate version of the urban legend as a warning for its citizens heading towards this South American Country (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación, no date).² The British counterpart website warns that: “The British Embassy has received reports of criminals in Colombia using drugs to subdue their victims. This includes the use of scopolamine, which temporarily incapacitates unsuspecting victims. Drugs can be administered through food, drinks, cigarettes, aerosols and even paper flyers. Victims become disoriented quickly and are vulnerable to robbery, sexual assault, rape and other crimes. Avoid leaving food or drinks unattended and don’t take anything from strangers” (Foreign Office, no date). Meanwhile the U. S. State Department more objectively warns that: “Disabling Drugs: Criminals may use drugs to temporarily incapacitate unsuspecting victims and then rob or assault them. Avoid leaving food or drinks unattended at a bar or restaurant, and use caution if a stranger offers you something to eat or drink” (U. S. Department State, no date).

² The Spanish website literally warns: “Existe una droga que se denomina escopolamina o popularmente ‘burundanga’, que mezclada con una bebida, un cigarrillo o incluso inhalada (por ejemplo de un papel que se muestra con la apariencia de preguntar por una dirección), hace perder la voluntad en forma absoluta, siendo utilizada para robos, secuestros, asaltos a domicilios. Debe pues rechazarse cualquier ofrecimiento de bebidas, cigarrillos, comida, etc. de desconocidos, así como evitar que se pueda poner cualquier papel, tela u otro objeto cerca de la nariz.”

Due to the dates of the transmission and the subsequent official warnings that include the exact wording it can be asserted that both the Spanish and British Foreign Offices warnings have been nurtured by the urban legend. The British websites mentions de use of paper flyers by criminals, and the Spanish one goes to even more detail by saying that only smelling the drug impregnated on a piece of paper, as with an address that is asked about for directions, produces a complete loose of will, which is extremely similar to the motif of the urban legend where the man with crutches gives the woman a piece of paper asking for help to dial a telephone number. That Foreign Offices from developed countries incorporate information from folk risk narratives is a good example of how rumors and urban legends may shape institutional action and public policy.

Contrary to “Lights Out!” the specific cognate version of “Burundanga” I refer to, with the man on crutches and the female victim drugged by only holding a piece of paper, circulated first in Spanish through South America, and then spread upwards through the continent. I have found coverage of its trail in newspapers from Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Perú and Venezuela, ranging from 2003 to December 2005.³ None of these are debunking articles or columns (unlike the media stories that appeared in the United States during the 1993 transmission of “Lights Out!”), but newspaper stories that reproduce as real the urban legend featuring the shopping center parking lot and the one-legged man. The collected emails from Mexico range from December 2005 to December 2007. This suggests that although the internet crosses international borders, national and linguistic networks still seem to largely modulate the flow of its contents.

The website Snopes.com, specialized in urban legends, dates the beginning of the United States spread in May 2008, when it started its circulation in English. It rapidly became very prolific. Although with several variations, the warning about criminals using burundanga-soaked business cards to incapacitate their victims is basically the same that circulated through Latin America.

³ The South American newspapers are: *La cuarta* 26 June 2003 and *Con Tinta Negra* 2003 from Chile; *La Razón* from Bolivia 22 July 2004; and *El Universal* 23 December 2005 from Venezuela.

It still keeps some traces of this South-North transit, such as the unnamed victim being a neighbor of a “Jaime Rodríguez”, a character with a Hispanic name (Snopes.com, 2008).

Following Knapp’s classification, “Lights Out!” and “Burundanga” would clearly fit as bogy rumors that play upon the fears and anxieties of those sharing them, but they also have a distinct mark of wedge drivers that project such feelings as hostility towards deviant others. In the case of “Lights Out!” towards youth gangs, immigrants and even unknown drivers; with “Burundanga” towards foreign substances and people living on the street. The above concur with findings from other researchers about a widespread fear in large cities towards strangers that may attack randomly (Best and Horiuchi, 1985, p. 492. Best, 1999, p. xi. Donovan, 2004, p. 166). Therefore, any person that we do not personally know becomes a plausible threat. A belief that may have considerable implications for the social tissue of a community.

As mentioned, urban legends have two sets of motifs, the permanent ones that form the cognate version of legends and the mutable ones, which present enlightening mutations about how some social groups are perceived by others. In an example provided by Brunvand, “The Choking Doberman”, a woman arrives to her home and finds her dog gasping at the entrance. She takes it to the veterinary and returns home. When she arrives the phone rings. It is the veterinary who tells her to run out of her house without asking any questions. The police turn up and let her know that the dog had a couple of fingers stuck in its throat. They search the house and find the thief in a closet, bleeding from this wound. Several details differed among the versions that circulated through the United States: “Variations of this legend mention different breeds of dog, different hiding places of the intruder, and sometimes other numbers of fingers, often specified as ‘black fingers’ or ‘Mexican fingers’” (Brunvand, 2001, p. 71).

This last variation adapts the legend to local fears and relates to the topic of *otherness* in urban legends. Fine elaborates upon this point thus:

As the homogeneous cultures of industrialized nation-states mutate, becoming more multicultural, rumors that target recent immigrants (legal or illegal, temporary or permanent) frequently appear.

[...] Rumors detail the arrival of dangerous spiders, insects, or snakes in clothing, rugs, foodstuffs, or plants, claiming that innocent consumers have suffered the consequences of exposure to these deadly products from exotic locations. One can immediately sense parallels between these dangerous animals and migrants, often hidden as well (2007, pp. 3, 4).

The above strongly relates to specific motifs that appear in both urban legends reviewed here. The violent gang and the burundanga substance have similar attributes. Like the animals and items described in the previous paragraph, or the foreign substance used to repair shoes Bourke mentions from the Bethnal Green panic, they are foreign, evil and unpredictable. This is very similar to what Fine states about how mistrust in products from abroad is a projection towards immigrants. For example, in “Burundanga” the prejudices towards Colombians are expressed through the powers of the substance and reactions to it, as it will become clearer in the following section.

The Metaphorical Meaning

How is it possible that in the XXI century, amid so many advances in science, technology and communications, we still resort to rumors and legends, which usually carry false information, to understand what is happening around us? In this sense, what is revealing about ongoing crime legends is that even if their referential content is dubious, the meaning they carry is “true”, or goes beyond the notion of truthfulness as factuality. Urban legends frequently remain unassailable to debunking attempts: because they carry meaning. Donovan found that people believe and send urban legends by email because of the instrumental value they find in them as cautionary tales. It is not important if they actually happened or not, they are taken as useful warnings that let people understand the potential dangers of the world (Donovan 2004, p. 131). Some of the cultural subtexts these messages seem to carry are not expressed straightforwardly, but metaphorically: one of the ways in which narratives achieve meaning. I attempt to draw some insights from the metaphorical reading of these legends, their process of communication and political implications. In rumors and contemporary legends a clear displacement occurs: what they

depict and warn about is rarely true, but they reflect real fears and anxieties of the community which may not find other ways of being verbalized or channeled. Allport and Postman indicated that the legends expressive functions are more important than their informative role (1947, p. 198). Their true meaning is not in what they describe, but in what they may symbolize and signify: their metaphorical content. Dundes also spoke about the importance of this figure of speech: "I favor relying upon folk metaphors. I assume that metaphors are meaningful, not accidental, and that there are consistent patterns of metaphor in every culture" (1980, p. x). What will be now explored is precisely how metaphor in "Lights Out!" and "Burundanga" contributes to build meaning in those sharing the legends.

Metaphor is one of the most natural cognitive tools to fulfil effort after meaning: Lakoff and Johnson dedicated a volume to analyze why metaphor is so frequently present in everyday life, in language, thought and action (2003). They believe it is crucial for the way we understand the world, to the degree that: "[o]ur ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (2003, p. 6). Paul Ricoeur delved into Aristotle before starting to formulate his own work on metaphor: "'To metaphorize well', said Aristotle, 'implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars'" (Ricoeur 1978, p. 6). Lakoff and Johnson seem to agree with this principle, mentioning that: "[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (2003, p. 5) Ricoeur, who is interested in studying narrative in action, believes that the natural abode of metaphor is the verb *to be*. He writes: "[t]he metaphorical 'is' at once signifies both 'is not' and 'is like'" (1978, p. 7). To give an example, eyes are not stars, but the former have frequently been praised by comparing them with the latter.

While asking what metaphorical statements might say about reality, Ricoeur states that: "[t]his question carries us across the threshold from the *sense* towards the *reference* of the discourse" (1978, p. 216). He gives a first definition of metaphor as: "[t]he rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality" (1978, p. 6). In the case of contemporary legends metaphor may allow narrative to produce meaning through what could be called secular parabolic

observations about reality: simple stories from which important truths (meaningful representations) about society and others may be deducted. This function would be fundamental for understanding, especially during effort after meaning when facing change.

In the case of the crime legends analyzed here, what could be its metaphorical meaning? “Lights Out!” is metaphorical from its very title. The name came from the implication during its transmission in the United States that drivers alerting others driving at night without lights could end with their own lights put out – meaning murdered. The metaphor comprises a first comparison between lights and life which recalls the well-known verses from Shakespeare, where Othello muses about taking his wife’s life: “Yet she must die, else she’ll betray more men. / Put out the light, and then put out the light” (1997, p. 2163).

On another level, Giddens’ reading of Goffman provides a very relevant insight into the matter in the case of “Lights Out!”. The former author uses the studies of the latter about behavior in social situations, such as civil inattention and hate stares (2009, pp. 81–82). Civil inattention takes place when pedestrians who do not know each other cross on a sidewalk. They eye one another discreetly for a moment and then look away. Goffman refers to this operation as an act of courtesy in which: “the individual implies that he has no reason to suspect the intentions of the others present and no reason to fear the others, be hostile to them, or wish to avoid them” (1963, p. 84). It seems to work as a confirmation of a healthy social tissue.

Goffman’s observations took place in the United States towards the late 1950’s, where in the south some Caucasians were known to give “hate stares” to African Americans, reproving their sharing of the same public space (1963, pp. 83–84). Giddens puts forward as a complimentary and contrasting example the avoidance of eye contact in tough neighborhoods: “[a] lack of elementary trust in the possible intentions of others leads the individual to avoid catching their gaze, which might precipitate a potentially hostile engagement” (2009, pp. 81–82). Both behaviors relate to the penetration of persons of a certain type to specific social settings, which relates to efforts of avoiding what Goffman calls “contamination by undesirables” or physical assault (1963, p. 10).

Goffman's observations show the importance of visual interaction in social settings, and it is interesting how deeply it connects with conflict in the street. As representations in popular culture or personal experience show (one only needs to look it up in Google Images or try it in a bar), one of the most common phrases to engage conflict in several languages is: "What are you looking at?". Looking at someone in the wrong way could bring trouble or even be lethal. Similar to the example of metaphor that compares eyes with stars, lights can also denote metaphorically our sight. Goffman actually refers to the lowering of eyes that follows glancing briefly at strangers in civil inattention as: "a kind of dimming of lights" (1963, p. 84). In this context, the comparison also applies to the other forms of visual behavior mentioned above. Eye contact avoidance in tough neighborhoods would be equivalent to "turning your lights off" with the hope to pass unnoticed, and hate stares as putting the "headlights on high beam".

Giddens affirms that: "Civil inattention is the most basic type of facework commitment involved in encounters with strangers in circumstances of modernity" (2009, p. 82). It stands for the trust people who do not know each other may have in one another due to forming part of the same society, an expression of bodily language that means: "I can trust you and you can trust me." The metaphorical meaning of "Lights Out!" seems to deeply relate a perceived erosion of social fabric: it states that civil inattention, and other conventional ways of behavior in public that guarantee the peaceful coexistence of strangers, cannot be taken for granted any more.

Brunvand mentions about this legend that carrying out a socially caring act in the current environment can be misinterpreted as an aggression to drivers who are outsiders to those standards (2000, p. 105). These metaphorical associations would seem to confirm that "Lights Out!" speaks about the social tension felt in the environment, and about fears of outsiders unused to local conventions and dangerous for the local group. The people sharing the message assert that they cannot trust strangers because they may prove harmful even when the local community intends to do good.

Globalization has brought along constant and fast-paced change which can be a source of concern and anxiety. One of such

changes has been an increased rate of immigration almost everywhere. The arrival of migrants is frequently a cause of tension among the local population. Fine and Ellis assert that “Whether the concern is terrorism, immigration, or international trade, Americans—along with citizens of other advanced nations—see threats from abroad. [...] Unwashed masses seem to threaten our clean lives.” (2010, p. 2). These “unwashed masses” that the local population fears, sound very similar to Trump’s bad *hombres* mentioned in the Introduction. After years of being president he did not change his views, as can be deduced from his questioning of why the country he rules should receive immigrants from “shithole countries” referring to El Salvador, Haiti and African states (Dawsey, 2018).

It is interesting to note that in “Lights Out!” there is no hint of the criminals’ nationality, no description whatsoever, just the implication that they are young. Notwithstanding, during the transmission the criminal gang becomes identified with a particular nationality or ethnic group, which varies depending on the society or group passing the rumor. Brunvand followed the “Lights Out!” spread through the United States and collected all the news items in its wake. Among them was a story by AP which featured an author quoted in this chapter: “Fine voiced the opinion that ‘gang in this particular rumor is a code word for poor, young black men’” (in Brunvand, 2000, p. 102). While in the United States the gang was usually interpreted to be formed by African American youths, when the same legend circulated in Mexico it was associated by the media and police authorities with La Mara Salvatrucha, the Central American gang with Salvadoran origins. Such projection was intense enough to motivate the Parliament into demanding the Mexican president to increase the surveillance of the southern border. In “Burundanga” the criminals’ nationality is not spelled out, but as the substance is said to come from Colombia, they were implied to be Colombian as well.

The triggering Interpol memo declared that the alert had been received from Interpol Guatemala. One of the news stories in Mexico mentioned that the Interpol description of the Blood gang brought to mind the codes of the Mara Salvatrucha. In the same story the presidential spokesman is reported to have said that the gang members would use fire weapons (Arvizu Arrijoja, 2005).

The subhead of another story warned directly against a “group of Guatemalans” (Fernández and Herrera, 2005). Aguilar Padilla, the governor of the northern state of Sinaloa (over 2,500 km from the Mexican Southern border), confirmed that his state police forces would implement the actions of the national alert, watching bus and train stations, air terminals and ports, in order to proceed with a rigorous search of all Central American travelers (Cabrera Martínez, 2005). The text of the warning never touches upon the nationality of the gang or the weapons they might carry, as asserted in these political and journalistic claims. As it happened in the United States, the brevity of this warning allowed almost any deviant social group to fit as the villain.

The criminals in “Lights Out!” are gang members, bad *hombres* who belong to the unwashed masses. A cultural difference that can be ascertained from the comparison between the “Lights Out!” transits in the United States and Mexico is that what may be perceived as homogenous in one country, as happens with Latinos in the former, is identified as completely different in Latin-American countries. Fine and Ellis include as an example the opinion of a student in Hazelton, which showed the consensus felt by her whole family: “illegal Hispanic immigrants bring with them terrible violence [and] gang related crimes, and these two factors lead to the harm and death to unsuspecting innocent American citizens” (2010, p. 102). Similarly, one of the terms used by white residents of Hazelton, Pennsylvania, to name the incoming Latino population was “Mexicans”, although it was mostly conformed by Dominicans (Fine and Ellis, 2010, p. 98). This same dread is precisely what Mexicans felt about illegal Central American immigrants during the 2005 transmission of the warning in their own country (Soltero, 2021 pp. 141–142, 195–196). The fact that Mexicans migrate to the United States and are the common denominator of the Hispanic unwashed masses feared by local populations there, does not prevent the Mexicans that stay home to fear their own Southern neighbors with whom they clearly did not feel an immediate kinship. It seems that every country has their own “unwashed masses” to be weary of.

Let us now look at “Burundanga”. In this case its metaphorical sense may come out more clearly by putting together three

seemingly unrelated motifs or points: dirt, innocent gifts as apples and the mythical halcyon years of communities. Regarding the first point, Douglas explored the meaning of dirt in different societies and historical moments through the opposing but complementary ideas of “purity and danger” (1992). Douglas asserts that in any society dirt is what is considered to be out of place. In order to comprehend the differences of what is regarded as clean and unclean and why, it is necessary to take into account the particular social and historical context. The assigned values of purity and danger frequently have symbolic social meaning: “as we examine pollution beliefs we find that the kind of contacts which are thought dangerous also carry a symbolic load. I believe that some pollutions are used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order” (Douglas, 1992, p. 3).

Douglas contribution about this symbolical understanding of purity and danger is very relevant here, because the crime narratives studied in this chapter serve as metaphorical warnings about the danger of evil polluting a community which sees itself as originally good. As Brunvand noted about “Lights Out!”: “One persistent fear that both the general public and newspapers responded to was the idea of dangerous gang activity entering one’s own community from some outside source” (2000, p. 105). Fine and Ellis declare that assertions linking the incoming groups with dirt and disorder are common in the collective imagination, and apply even if the ethnicity and origin of the out-group changes through time (Fine and Ellis, p. 100). Again, outsiders of this kind are, clearly, part of the unwashed masses that arrive to a community self-perceived as “clean”.

In the 1970s and 1980s Halloween rumors caused a profound panic in the United States, to the point of nearly cancelling the “Trick or Treat” tradition, due to stories of people tampering with the treats (Best and Horiuchi, 1985, p. 490). One of the main motifs of this rumor was the idea that razor blades were introduced in apples and then given to children. When the emotions are drained from the tale its premise folds: it seems nearly impossible to hide a razor blade in an apple and leave the fruit unscathed. Even news media as *Newsweek* and *The New York Times* published articles warning about it. Although this panic has been

studied by several scholars (Dégé and Vászonyi, 1983. Best and Horiuchi, 1985. Glassner, 1999), so far, a folk motif profoundly related with Halloween has not been mentioned: how witches use apples for poisoning innocent victims, as happens for example in *Snow White*. Similarly, the idiomatic expression: “One bad apple spoils the whole bunch” seems very relevant here and the apple is also the forbidden fruit through which Paradise was lost. In all of these cases the apple is used as a metaphor of how danger or evil may contaminate an innocent party.

The substance used with criminal purposes in the legend of “Burundanga” could be seen as an equivalent to the apple in the fairy tale of *Snow White*. It is given in a deceivingly innocent presentation, similar to a piece of paper with a telephone number or a sample of perfume, but a horrible outcome awaits whoever bites into the plot. Just like Snow White, the victims lose their will and consciousness. The metaphoric function of the substance also links with the emotions provoked by the context of modernity and globalization referred to in here. Events and outcomes stop being in the hands of individuals who fall to the substance, as it may happen at times in the current social environment. The lack of control felt in the social context is made concrete in a foreign malignant substance.

Discussion: From Narrative to Action

But was the past really a pure and golden age? The historian Geoffrey Pearson set out to locate the idealized and harmonic past in Britain, but found that it remains elusive in actual historical time (Pearson, 1983). He made a comparative study that confronts this vision of the past with the notion in the United Kingdom according to which: “after centuries of domestic peace, the streets of Britain have been suddenly plunged into an unnatural state of disorder” (1983, p. ix). Pearson developed the expression of *respectable fears* to understand how the privileged groups of society hold responsible other groups for this sense of social decline – in other words how the center blames the periphery. The members of the groups held responsible were generally young males, sometimes immigrants, such as black people at the time Pearson’s work was published, but previously Irish and frequently

working-class adolescents. He contrasts historically this causal explanation against the nostalgic image of peace and order held by the center by going back during a century in periods of twenty years and comparing these notions with the actual state of affairs (pp. 9–11). In general, the perception of the past and its historical reality do not match. At each of these precise moments, separated from each other by two decades, the social perception voiced through politicians and the media is that the state of disorder is at its acme, unlike twenty years earlier (e.g. pp. 12–16). And through their institutionalized voices the center pins down the blame upon the aforementioned members of the periphery, such as immigrants and working-class youth.

What Pearson calls *respectable fears* resembles what Bauman underscores from Wacquant about deviant others: “Public display condenses attention on ‘recidivists, obtrusive beggars, refugees on the move, immigrants to be expelled, prostitutes on sidewalks and other kinds of social rejects’ who litter the streets of metropolises to the displeasure of the ‘decent people’” (in Bauman 2006, p. 145). Wacquant aimed to show how the policies recently adopted by governments that insisted on being tough on crime, served mostly to punish those cast out by neoliberal economic policy (2004). This is done not only judicially, but through the representations that such displays usually carry through their narratives. For example, in Trump’s quotes at the beginning of this chapter he characterizes Mexicans in the United States as “bad *hombres*”, rapists and drug dealers, criminalizing people that usually leave their country to seek better opportunities in another one. Such narrative paves the way and sets the agenda for a more severe immigration reform and border control. For Breton et al. social tissue is the social and normative infrastructure upon which society relies. Social fabric implies a covenant “that defines what individuals can expect from the society and what the society can expect from them [...] what individuals can count on when dealing with each other and with institutions and their agents” (2004, p. 4). The authors specify that one of the things that individuals expect from other members of society is not being taken advantage of, just as they are expected to feel an obligation in helping others (Breton et al., 2004, p. 49). This is the precise thread of the social fabric that the crime legends in this chapter grind down

narratively: the other stops being seen as a fellow human being to become a potential predator. These legends corrode trust among citizens who do not know each other personally and manifest the lack of confidence in institutions.

Bauman believes that the crisis of trust deeply affects human relations, which stop being realms of confidence and comfort to become sources of anxiety (2006, p. 69). Furthermore, as social bonds are the cornerstone of solidary action their dissipation seriously affects the latter (Bauman, 2006, p. 21). These narratives, their process of transmission, and the degree to which lost guardianship is felt question the larger *Us* of society and leaves precaution and protection to the narrower *Us* embodied by those who share the narratives.

Shariatmadari summarized some of the expressions used recently in the United Kingdom to refer to migrants: a swarm of people, marauding, a tidal wave, a flood or stream, which are equivalent to: migrants are insects and hence animals; an invading army; migration is equivalent to an inundation to the point of natural disaster (2016). All dehumanizing metaphors that fit with the populist xenophobic rhetoric so present in the political arenas of several countries. The most worrying part is that these expressions come from politicians, like the prime minister and the chancellor, and the media, even official broadcasters with a serious reputation like the BBC (Shariatmadari, 2016).

Fine and Ellis concur that rumors about migrants tend to suggest that they are evil and intend to import danger, which is exactly what Donald Trump has been suggesting about migrants from Mexico, and elsewhere. A metaphorical construction present here compares immigrants to a virus that feeds on the strength of a community or nation; they are taken for “potential sources of cultural infection” (Fine and Ellis, 2010, p. 78). This impression of a sick body subject to disease is a cultural image that has been used since long ago as symbolical currency in American politics. The authors extend this metaphor contained in the rumors to the reaction that newcomers arouse in older residents “metaphorically akin to the physical body’s immune reaction” (Fine and Ellis, 2010, p. 75). Such relations can be found in Trump’s rhetoric along with that of white supremacists.

The real danger that comes from these narratives is that they might enact such worldviews. These questionable understandings, that heavily rely on metaphor, may have a considerable part in the political action of shaping policies. Ricoeur believed that the importance of metaphor is that it both represents and reconstitutes reality (1990, p. ix). The following declaration from Lakoff and Johnson concurs and fits almost chillingly in this context regarding the potential impact of this figure of speech: “Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies”. (2003, pp. 156–157). The metaphors contained in the two urban legends analyzed for this chapter and the expressions used in Donald Trump’s discourse clearly belong here, making migration, a process already difficult for most that go through it, even more precarious.

Conclusion

In this chapter urban legends about crime have been defined as short and shocking narratives that pretend to be true, are widely believed and shared among social groups notwithstanding their background or socioeconomic level. These stories have been remarkably apt to cross whole continents and emphasize the prejudices some in-groups have about out-groups, sometimes affecting the social sphere by the way they influence our perception of reality. The crime legends “Lights Out!” and “Burundanga”, that spread intensively digitally between different countries, were analyzed finding that in their transit they managed to convince even carriers like the media, the police and political institutions, showing that they can shape public policy even at an international level. Their metaphorical contents and implications were examined to better understand how they express cultural subtexts and convey meaning. The fact that the same messages are adopted by different groups in different countries allow to see that local deviant social groups may always fit as the villains of these narratives, blamed for the growing uncertainty perceived in the environment.

These two urban legends form part of the negative narratives that cross borders regardless of boundaries and, paradoxically, promote the will to strengthen such boundaries in every possible way. They contribute to the rhetorical fuel that has been powering the resurgence of populism in different parts of the world. Narratives about bad *hombres* (and women) erode the social tissue in a way that migration does not, with political consequences that are beginning to be seen in the current threats to specific social groups and universal human rights.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by a Newton Advanced Fellowship of the British Academy (grant NAFR1180233) and the Program UNAM-DGAPA- PAPIIT (grant IN405420).

References

- Abbott, H. P. (2002). *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Agren, D. (2017). “‘Bad Hombres’: Reports Claim Trump Spoke of Sending Troops to Mexico,” *The Guardian*, 2 February [Online]. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/02/bad-hombres-reports-claim-trump-threatened-to-send-troops-to-mexico>
- Allport, G. and Postman, L. (1947). *The Psychology of Rumor*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Arvizu Arriola, J. (2005). “Confirma Presidencia amenaza de la Sangre,” *El Universal*, 28 October [Online]. Mexico. Available at: <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/312732.html>. (Accessed: October 2010).
- Bauman, Z. (2006). *Liquid Fear*. Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Best, J. and Horiuchi G. T. (1985). “The Razor Blade in the Apple: The Social Construction of Urban Legends,” *Social Problems*, 32(5), pp. 488–499.

- Best, J. and Hutchinson M. M. (1996). "The Gang Initiation Rite as a Motif in Contemporary Crime Discourse," *Justice Quarterly*, 13(3), pp. 383-403
- Best, J. (1999). *Random Violence. How We Talk about New Crime and New Victims*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Bourke, J. (2005). *Fear: A Cultural History*. London: Virago.
- Breton, R. et al. (2004). *A Fragile Social Fabric? Fairness, Trust, and Commitment in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Brunvand, J. H. (1981). *The Vanishing Hitchhiker. American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- (1995). "Lights out!'. A Faxlore Phenomenon," *Skeptical Inquirer*, 19(2), pp. 32-37.
- (ed.) (1996). *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland.
- (2000). *The Truth Never Stands in the Way of a Good Story*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois.
- (2001). *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*. London and New York: W. W. Norton.
- Cabrera Martínez, J. (2005). "Instalan alerta por pandilleros del grupo Sangre," *El Universal*. 26 October [Online]. México. Available at: <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/312621.html>. (Accessed October 2014).
- Dawsey, J. (2018). "Trump Derides Protections for Immigrants from 'Shithole' Countries." *The Washington Post*. 12 January [Online]. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-attacks-protections-for-immigrants-from-shithole-countries-in-oval-office-meeting/2018/01/11/bfco725c-f711-11e7-91af-31ac729add94_story.html?utm_term=.488off12ac27 (Accessed: January 2018).
- Ábalos, C. and Babul, F. (2003). "La burundanga llegó para quedarse." *Con Tinta Negra*. Available at: <http://www.periodismo>

- .uchile.cl/contintanegra/2003/octubre/sociedad2.html. (Accessed: April 2007).
- de Cordoba, J., (1995). "Drugged in Columbia: Street Thugs Dope Unwitting Victims," *Wall Street Journal*, 3 July, p. A1.
- Dégh, L. and Vázsonyi, A. (1983). "Does the Word 'Dog' Bite? Ostensive Action: A Means of Legend Telling," *Journal of Folklore Research*. 20 pp. 5–34.
- Delumeau, J. (1978). *La Peur en Occident* (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles). Paris: Fayard.
- Donovan, P. (2004). *No Way of Knowing. Crime, Urban Legends and the Internet*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Douglas, M. (1992). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Dunbar, R. I. M. (1993). *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language*. London and Boston: Faber.
- Dundes, A. (1980). *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- (1991). *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Ellis, B. (1983). "De Legendis Urbis: Modern Legends in Ancient Rome," *Journal of American Folklore* 96, pp. 200–208.
- (2003). *Aliens, Ghosts and Cults, Legends we live*. Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi.
- Fainé Brath, V. (2003) "Ojo con la burundanga: Droga mata la voluntad," *La cuarta*, 26 June [Online]. Santiago. Available at: <http://www.lacuarta.cl/diario/2003/06/29/29.07.4a.CRO..BURUNDANGA.html> (Accessed: April 2007).
- Fernández E. and Herrera. O. (2005). "Alerta máxima en Edomex ante supuesta pandilla," *El Universal*. 27 October [Online]. Mexico. Available at: <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/ciudad/71805.html> (Accessed: October 2014).
- Fine, G. A. (1992). *Manufacturing Tales: Sex and Money in Contemporary Legends*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

- Fine, G. A. (2007). "Rumor Matters. An Introductory Essay," in Fine G. A., Campion-Vincent V. and Heath C. (eds.) *Rumor Mills*. New Brunswick and London: Aldine Transaction, pp. 1-9.
- Fine, G. A. and Turner, P. (2001). *Whispers on the Color Line. Rumor and Race in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fine, G. A. and Ellis, B. (2010). *The Global Grapevine: Why Rumors of Terrorism, Immigration, and Trade Matter*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Foreign Office [Britain]. (no date). *Foreign Travel Advice: Colombia*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/colombia/safety-and-security> (Accessed: September 2017).
- Geertz, C. (2000). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Fontana Press.
- Giddens, A. (2009). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge MA and Malden: Polity Press.
- Glassner, B. (1999). *The Culture of Fear*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Behavior in Public Places. Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. New York: The Free Press.
- Heath, C. (2007). "Introduction [To Chapter II]," in Fine, G. A., Campion-Vincent, V. and Heath, C. (eds.) *Rumor Mills. The Social Impact of Rumor and Legend*. New Brunswick and London: Aldine Transaction, pp. 81-86.
- Jay, M. (1999). "Dupes, not dopes," *The Guardian*, 18 September. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/1999/sep/18/books.guardianreview3> (Accessed: March 2010).
- Knapp, R. H. (1944). "A Psychology of Rumor," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 8(1), pp. 22-37.
- La Razón*. (2004). "La 'burundanga' llegó a Bolivia y la Policía no se enteró," 22 July [Online]. La Paz. Available at: <http://www.bolivia.com/noticias/autonoticias/DetalleNoticia21651.asp> (Accessed: April 2007).
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson M. (2003). *Metaphors We Live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación [Spanish Foreign Office]. (no date). *Recomendaciones de viaje. República de Colombia*. Available at: <http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/es/ServiciosAlCiudadano/SiViajasAlExtranjero/Paginas/DetalleRecomendacion.aspx?IdP=42> (Accessed: September 2017).
- Morin, E. (1970). *Rumor in Orleans*. London: Heinemann.
- Neubauer, H.-J. (1999). *The Rumour. A Cultural History*. London and New York: Free Association Books.
- Pearson, G. (1983). *Hooligan. A History of Respectable Fears*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Ricoeur, P. (1978). *The Rule of Metaphor. Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*. London: Routledge.
- (1990 [1984]). *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Shakespeare, W. (1997). The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice in *The Norton Shakespeare*. New York and London: W. W. Norton, pp. 2091–2174.
- Shariatmadari, D. (2015). “Swarms, Floods and Marauders: The Toxic Metaphors of the Migration Debate,” *The Guardian*. 10 August [Online]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/10/migration-debate-metaphors-swarms-floods-marauders-migrants> (Accessed September 2016).
- Shibutani, T. (1966). *Improvised News. A Sociological Study of Rumor*. Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Snopes.com. (2008). *Burundanga/Scopolamine Warning*. Published: 11 May 2008. Updated: 27 November 2017. Available at: <https://www.snopes.com/crime/warnings/burundanga.asp> (Accessed: June 2008).
- Soltero, G. (2021). *Conspiracy Narratives South of the Border. Bad Hombres Do the Twist*. London and New York: Routledge.
- (2016a). “Crime Urban Legends in Mexico: A Case Study of Authorless Narratives that Contribute to Implicit Cultural Policy,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. 22(2), pp. 181–199.
- (2016b). “The Mexican Transmission of ‘Lights Out!’” *Journal of Folklore Research*, 53(3), pp. 115–135.

- U. S. Department State. (no date). *Colombia*. Available at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/colombia.html>. (Accessed: 19 September 2017).
- Uzcategui, L. J. (2005) “¡Cuidado con la burundanga!” *El Universal*, 23 de diciembre [Online]. Caracas. Available at: http://www.eluniversal.com/2005/12/23/imp_pol_art_23150A.shtml (Accessed: June 2008).
- Wacquant, L. (2004). *Punir les pauvres. Le nouveau gouvernement de l'insécurité sociale*. Paris: Agone.
- Washington Post*. (2015). “Full Text: Donald Trump Announces a Presidential Bid.” June 16 [Online]. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/?utm_term=.ff97db6e42ea (Accessed: September 2017).
- Weisberg, J. (2000). “Bush, In His Own Words.” *The Guardian*, 4 November [Online]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/nov/04/uselections2000.usa5> (Accessed: June 2010).

Travel in Rībi Hideo’s Novels or the Search for an Alternative Writing Style in Japanese

Dan Fujiwara

University of Toulouse – Jean Jaurès / French Research Institute on East Asia (IFRAE)

Introduction

Since the early 1990s,¹ the Japanese literary scene has seen the emergence of works which, although marginal in number, have come to be collectively categorized as “border-crossing literature” (*ekkyō bungaku*)² or “Japanese-language literature” (*nihongo bungaku*).³ Characterized primarily by being written in Japanese by non-native authors, these works have tended to be analyzed in the light of the globalized modern world, which anthropologist Aoki Tamotsu calls the “age of big movement of information, people and things” (*bito mono jyōhō no dai-idō no jidai*) (Aoki, 2001), and the challenges it faces, including multilingualism, multiculturalism and national identity crises. A number of studies have explored this literary genre within the context of today’s globalized world (Sakamoto, 2006; Yoshihara, 2000).

¹ The present chapter was originally a paper presented at the 12th National and 3rd International Conference of the Association for Japanese Studies in Spain (entitled *Japan: Tourism as a path to knowledge and development*) in Madrid on 5–7 October. The title of my presentation was: “Travelling as language trouble in Levy Hideo’s works.”

² Japanese words are spelled using the Hepburn Romanization system.

³ For a general picture of this literary genre, see Numano (1998), Kaku (2013), Tsuchiya (2009).

How to cite this book chapter:

Fujiwara, D. 2021. Travel in Rībi Hideo’s Novels or the Search for an Alternative Writing Style in Japanese. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 405–428. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.r>. License: CC-BY 4.0

Ribi Hideo (born 1950),⁴ whose writing style will be discussed in this chapter, is widely known as one of the most representative writers of “border-crossing literature” in Japanese, alongside authors David Zopetti (born 1962 in Swiss), Yang Yi (born 1964 in China), Arthur Binard (born 1967 in the United States), Jeffrey Angles (born 1971 in the United States), Shirin Nezamafi (born 1979 in Iran), and Li Qinfeng (born 1989 in Taiwan). Other famous members of this group are Tawada Yōko (born 1960)⁵ and Mizumura Minae (born 1951),⁶ both writing profoundly influenced by their experience abroad and foreign language knowledge. As is clear from the exteriority or the “exophonic”⁷ character of these writers, one of the most important challenges of these writers is to reconsider the definition of Japanese literature, or to be more precise, its national border that even today some tend, as Komori Yōichi states, to assume as being evident when talking about Japanese literature or even simply Japanese language (Komori, 1998: 5–9).

This recent—marginal but significant—attempt at crossing the national border of Japanese literature is not an unprecedented matter. So-called “Japanese literature of Korean residents in Japan” (*Zainichi chōsenjin bungaku*)⁸ and “Taiwanese literature in Japanese under the Japanese Rule”⁹ are fine examples for this. Yet “border-crossing literature in Japanese” I will discuss here is somewhat different from these postcolonial literary genres in terms of the context within which writers choose Japanese language for writing. Most of today’s border-crossing writers in Japanese use this language for personal—or even esthetic—reason, rather

⁴ The author’s real name is Ian Hideo Levy but in the Japanese public space (publications, talks), he systematically calls himself “Ribi Hideo,” using the Japanese writing system: リービ英雄.

⁵ She is living in Germany from the beginning of the 1980s and writes both in Japanese, her mother tongue, and German, her adopted language.

⁶ She grew up in the United States from the middle of the 1960s to the 1980s and her conception of literature is deeply inspired by modern Japanese literature, especially from the Meiji era (1868–1912).

⁷ In the words of Tawada (2003).

⁸ For more details and a larger perspective about this genre, see Kawamura (1999).

⁹ For more details and a larger perspective about this genre, see Tarumi (1995) and Kleeman (2003).

than for socio-political one originated in Japanese colonization in East Asia during World War II. Certainly, Ribí's biography, in particular his childhood still reveals cold war tensions in Asia in the 1950s and 1960s. However, it is evident that for Ribí, the decision of switching from English, his mother tongue and one of the major languages in our world today, to Japanese, a minor Asian language, is largely based on his personal literary sensibility and conviction for the possibilities of his adopted language, as the author repeatedly emphasizes in his essays.¹⁰

Indeed, Ribí's entire biography is inextricably linked to the idea of "border-crossing" (*ekkyō*), a concept he employs to characterize his own literary oeuvre (Ribí, 2007). Born in 1950 in the United States (Berkeley) to a Jewish father and a Polish-American mother, Ribí spent his childhood in Taiwan, where his father started his career as a Sinologist diplomat, and Hong-Kong, after his parents' divorce in 1960. Two years later, he came back to the United States (Washington D.C.) with her mother in order to provide medical care to his mentally disabled younger brother. Following his first trip to Japan in 1964, Ribí developed a deep fascination with its nature and culture, even obtaining in 1978 a doctorate in Japanese literature from Princeton University with his Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Hitomaro and the Birth of Japanese Lyricism*.¹¹ Thus, shortly after receiving his Ph.D., he launched an academic career at Princeton and then at Stanford. In 1981, he published an English translation of the first five volumes of Japan's first imperial poetry anthology *Man'yōshū* (*The Ten Thousand Leaves*) and won the National Book Award for Translation in the next year. However, as a regular visitor to Japan with a strong urge to live there permanently, Ribí began writing in Japanese in earnest in the mid-1980s, enthusiastically supported by the novelist Nakagami Kenji (1946–1992). Ribí's debut Japanese-language novel, *Seijōki no kiko enai heya* (*A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard*) (Ribí, 1992)¹², was published in the

¹⁰ See Ribí (2010).

¹¹ The dissertation was published by Princeton University Press in 1984.

¹² This work, combined with two other short novels, was published in book format by Kōdansha and won the 14th Noma Literary New Face Prize (*Noma Bungei Shinjin-shō*).

March 1987 issue of *Gunzō*, a leading Japanese literary magazine. In 1990, he definitively abandoned his distinguished academic career to settle in Japan and continue writing, always in his adopted language of Japanese. He has published seven fictional and twelve no-fictional books so far.¹³

It is no doubt that this Ribi's pluralistic origin and life course deeply influence his oeuvre, in particular its narrative setting, which systematically involves traveling and movement. The main character is invariably an American translator based in Tōkyō (or occasionally a university lecturer), born to multiethnic and multicultural parents, who travels between Japan, the United States, China and Taiwan. However, a careful reading reveals that in contrast to this mobility, which can be easily linked to the context of today's globalized world order, the travels described in Ribi's works are not so free-flowing, but rather, deeply related to the issue of what I conveniently call "language trouble." As Nagaoka (2009) has already discussed, Ribi's novels are above all concerned with language. Indeed, his traveling protagonists are constantly anxious and distrustful of everything around them, in particular the languages—English, Chinese, Southern Min, or Korean—they hear and use. As Kleeman (2013) argued, "multi-lingual simultaneity" is one of the most striking features of Ribi's works. The protagonists think in Japanese, going back and forth between this and the other languages, tortured by their realization that language is opaque. This realization of "language trouble" constitutes the main event of each trip and story. For Ribi's protagonists, the languages encountered in the context of traveling have no clear and transparent relation to one another; they do not circulate between each other but rather exclude one another.

For Ribi, traveling or "crossing borders" is above all a linguistic experience in the sense that it provokes critical thinking on the potential and limits of languages. Ribi's oeuvre, which highlights the asymmetric, instable and opaque relationship between languages, stands in contrast to the main aspects of the modern

¹³ For further details on the author's biography from 1950 to 2011, see Ribi (2011).

globalized and border-crossing world and could therefore be seen as a counter-model. Accordingly, this chapter seeks to analyze Rībi's novels by focusing on the "language trouble" brought about by the travel situations described. This analysis will then be developed to show how this "language trouble" can be linked to the author's search for his own style of writing in Japanese.

Travel in Rībi Hideo's Novels

Reading Rībi's novels we can distinguish four distinct travel destinations.

First of all, there is a trip from the United States to Japan, and more specifically, from the United States Consulate in Yokohama to Shinjuku in Tōkyō. This trip is described in the author's first novels (Rībi, 1992)—*Seijōki no kiko enai heya, Nobenbā* (The End of November), and *Nakama* (One of the Guys), all set in the late 1960s and featuring the main character named Ben Isaac, a seventeen-year-old American.

Secondly, there is a journey from Japan to China (or, as Rībi often writes in his texts, "the mainland," *tairiku*), the most frequent destination for Rībi's protagonists. In *Ten'anmon* (Tiananmen) (Rībi, 1996),¹⁴ the author's first novel dealing with this country, the destination is Tiananmen Square in Beijing. However, Rībi's protagonists also travel to more peripheral areas, far from the big cities. In *Manshū ekusupuresu* (Manchurian Express) (Rībi, 1998), the protagonist visits Manchuria (Northeast China) to find the childhood home of world-renowned Japanese novelist Abe Kōbō (1924–1993). *Ka to hae no dansu* (The Dance of Mosquito and Fly) (Rībi, 2002), *Henri Takeshi Rewitsuki no natsu no kikō* (Henry Takeshi Levitzky's Summer Journey) (Rībi, 2002), and *Gaze* (I Am) (Rībi, 2008a) are largely based on the author's travels to Kaifeng, known for being one of the oldest cities in China and its former capital during the Song dynasty. Here, the protagonist learns that a Jewish community (to which he belongs through his Jewish father) existed one thousand years ago. In *Kōsokukōro nite* (On a National Highway), *Rōkokudō* (An Old National Road)

¹⁴ This novel was nominated for the 115th Akutagawa Prize (*Akutagawa-shō*).

and *Kari no mizu* (Fake Water) (Ribi, 2008a), Ribi focuses on the city of Yan'an as the protagonists attempt to understand contemporary China, far from Beijing and Shanghai.¹⁵

The third place featured in Ribi's novels is the United States, which the protagonists travel to from Japan. The exact destination is always Washington, the city to which the protagonists are connected by family relationships. *Kokumin no uta* (Ode to the Nation) (Ribi, 1998), which describes the protagonist's journey to see his mother and mentally disabled brother, is one of the most important examples. Conversely, the narratives in *Chiji ni kudakete* (Thousands and Thousands of Pieces) and *Konechikatto abenyū* (Connecticut Avenue) (Ribi, 2005)¹⁶ are set in a more global context, specifically in the peculiar circumstances of 9.11, which Ribi experienced from a distance as he arrived at Vancouver airport on that day to catch a connecting flight to New York.

Lastly, there is a journey from Japan to Taiwan (a deeply personal destination for Ribi), as seen in the author's most recent work, *Mobankyō* (Model Village) (Ribi, 2016a)¹⁷. This country generally appears in reminiscences by the main characters on their childhood, although the exact destinations travelled to and the characters' names may differ. In this respect, it is significant that *Mobankyō* deals with the narrator-protagonist's journey to Taiwan to find this childhood home. Taiwan connects all of Ribi's novels and creates a strong narrative core throughout the author's entire oeuvre.¹⁸

These four destinations share certain common aspects. One of them is that the protagonists' movements (on foot or by taxi, bus, train, airplane, or other transportation mode) constitute the main event of each novel. So remarkable is this feature that it is no exaggeration to describe the narration of Ribi's novels as consisting in an endless variation on the basic sentence "I walk," one of the most frequently used verbs of movement in Ribi's texts.

¹⁵ The book won the 20th Itō Sei Literary Prize (*Itō Sei Bungaku-shō*). Ribi has written a non-fictional work about this journey. See Ribi (2008b).

¹⁶ The book won the 32th Osaragi Jirō Prize (*Osaragi Jirō shō*).

¹⁷ The book won the 68th Yomiuri Prize for Literature (*Yomiuri Bungaku-shō*).

¹⁸ See Sasanuma (2011).

However, the most striking feature is a close relationship between these four destinations the protagonists travel to—or recall—and the author's personal history. As I previously summarized, these destinations are places quite regularly visited or even lived by the author in his real life.¹⁹ This is significant, since it underlines the fact that Ribi's oeuvre is deeply rooted in his personal history, although suggesting some aspects of the modern globalized world to readers. Moreover, this autobiographical character is also clearly visible in the obvious similarities between the main characters and the author (age, origin, family relationships, setting in Tōkyō, Japanese as adopted language, profession, etc.). Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that these works, which can be read as being based on the author's real personal experiences, are not written as mere ethnographical travel reports. As Ribi mentions himself, he defines that his oeuvre is neither non-fiction nor pure fiction, but rather, has both of these two aspects at the same time, namely, being “structured by double narration” (*katari no nijūkōzō*) in his words.²⁰ Indeed, this “double narration,” or the ambiguity of narrative genres is the dominant trope of Ribi's oeuvre. *Mohankyō* just mentioned above has reinforced this by its meta-narrative discourse, since “I” narrator-protagonist, named precisely “Ribi Hideo,” does designate himself the author's other novels written as third-person narratives, narratologically distancing the protagonists featured in these narratives from Ribi himself. Thus Ribi's writing is developed in the interstices between his personal history and critical awareness of this.

Although each of these aspects merits fuller exploration, of most particular interest here is the main characters' obsession with the languages used by those around them as they travel. What makes this feature even more fascinating is the way the protagonists, many of them professional translators, try in vain to translate back and forth between Japanese, English and Chinese in their thoughts and speech, only to inevitably become aware of the asymmetry between languages, the opacity of languages. It is this that I term “language trouble” and which I posit is one of

¹⁹ See Ribi (2011).

²⁰ See Ribi (2016b, p. 223).

the most persistent thematic preoccupations of Ribi's novels. It should be noted that Ribi describes these "language troubles" in Japanese, essentially a foreign language for him. He could actually have chosen English, his mother tongue to show objectively and share widely this issue. Yet, whereas he sets all of his protagonists as native English speakers like himself, it is basically in Japanese that the narrators of his novels tell stories and express the protagonists' thoughts, feelings and speech. Certainly, this exophonic process of writing one's own personal history in other's language can be adopted for various reasons. Nevertheless, in the case of Ribi, the aim of writing seems not merely to reproduce faithfully his personal border-crossing experience. But rather, as I will demonstrate in the following section, it can be assumed that for Ribi the reason for the choice of Japanese language is linked to the search for the possibilities of re-presenting his personal history as literary creation in its strong meaning. That is why he needs to set his narratives in traveling situations where "language trouble" is highly involved and thereby literary creativity is strongly emerging.

The following section seeks to illustrate this point by analyzing specific examples and showing how the author creates his own writing style by featuring this "language trouble."

Language Trouble: Fragmentation, Untranslatability, and Challenging the Limits of Readability

The first example is taken from Ribi's debut novel, *Seijōki no kikoenaheiya*, published in the literary magazine *Gunzō* in 1987. This passage was chosen because it features the fundamental elements associated with "language trouble," namely, a situation that involves movement, a desire on behalf of the main character to read and understand other languages, and his ensuing feelings of unease and suspicion. And it should be noted that from his very first work in Japanese the author has already had a strong grasp and expression of the issue of ambiguous border between languages within the context of movement.

The traveling situation within which the story, set in the late 1960s, takes place is quite unusual because it actually follows Ben Isaac, a seventeen-year-old American, who runs away from the

United States Consulate in Yokohama, where his father serves as consul, to Shinjuku, where wide scale student protests are underway.²¹ In discovering the urban night life of Tōkyō with a Japanese student named Andō, who refuses to speak English with him, and developing a strong fascination with the Japanese language, the young protagonist becomes aware of various elements within his inner world—his origin and childhood in Taiwan—that ultimately provoke a feeling of unease about his identity, a situation that will be familiar to readers of Ribí's works. The following passage describes the teenage protagonist who has just boarded a train to Shinjuku for the first time:

Ben's eyes drank in their first full view of a Japanese city at night. Unlike during the day, the outlines of the buildings blurred, and everywhere he looked neon signs squirmed quietly in *kana* and *kanji*. They reflected the dreams and ailments of the city in colors to match: WHISKY, PHARMACEUTICALS, TURKISH BATH, and CLINIC. From station to station, they transmitted the city's secrets, which were not meant for the eyes of a young boy from *somewhere else*.

Indeed, Ben couldn't read most of the characters. And even if he could, he could not fully understand what they meant. For Ben was still a traveler who could barely read road signs. In Yokohama the train started gradually to fill with passengers. Some looked on him with pity, others with ridicule, others with shock, discovering in Ben's intense blue-gray eyes a burning desire to know the world around him. (Ribí, 1992, pp. 9–10. Trans. Christopher D. Scott, 2011, pp. 3–4)²²

In this example that we can find in the beginning of the novel, the teenage protagonist, who has just escaped from his father's place (the consulate), is looking at neon signs from the train window. Today, this Japanese urban nightscape has become quite commonplace; images of it have circulated around the world and have

²¹ In the late 1960s, a number of student protest movements arose in Japan, mirroring other countries like the United States and France. Contentious issues included the construction of Narita International Airport, the Vietnam War, and the renewal of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan (*Nichibeí Anzen Hoshō Jyōyaku*), also known in Japanese as *Anpo*.

²² See Appendices for the original Japanese text.

become “globalized.” However, this passage does not solely reproduce the stereotypical image. Instead it also depicts Ben’s feelings, musings, and physical reactions to the illegible Japanese characters impressed on each neon sign, as highlighted by the translator’s use of capital letters.²³ In other words, it illustrates the protagonist’s struggle caused by the conflict between his awareness of his inability to read and his “burning desire” to understand the “city’s secrets” concealed within these characters.

Moreover, what should be noted is that this conflict also influences the text. This is evident in the phrase “in Ben’s intense blue-gray eyes a burning desire,” which uses strikingly symbolical language to emphasize contrasts in color and temperature (blue/burning). The protagonist’s feeling of being alienated—“a young boy from *somewhere else*”—can be seen as another symptom of this inner conflict. Furthermore, the inner conflict is also visible in the narrative structure, within which the inside of the young protagonist is depicted precisely in Japanese, the language of “others” that he cannot read or understand, whereas in this context English could have been a suitable and logical choice for him since it is his mother tongue. This contradictory narrative structure might suggest that the narrator’s description in Japanese results from a “burning desire” or even fantasy of the protagonist who is eager to live precisely in this language of “others.”

Although the quoted section seems to describe a fairly short moment within the story, most of Ribi’s novels show the main characters as constantly obsessed with whether or not they can read, whether or not they can understand other people’s languages. The fact that many of the protagonists are translators is surely not irrelevant to this obsession.

However, Ribi’s work does not focus solely on describing the main characters’ troubled state of mind. As illustrated in the following quote from *Ten’anmon*, published in the January 1996 issue of *Gunzō*, the “language trouble” experienced by Ribi’s protagonists is also visible in the narrator’s descriptions themselves with a particular focus on another feature of “language trouble,”

²³ In the original Japanese text, the author puts these words in brackets in order to emphasize them.

namely, the idea of “fragmentation” (*dampen* in the original Japanese text).

Ten'anmon is Ribi's first novel to deal with China and sees the protagonist visiting Beijing's Tiananmen Square just a few years after the protests of 1989 to view the body of Mao Zedong. The following passage describes the protagonist ordering a glass of bourbon from a Chinese stewardess in the airplane bound for Beijing:

He tried to ask her in mainland Chinese if she was from the mainland but lost his nerve before he could even say “*Nǐ shì* (Are you) ...?” Then, like a black willow leaf suddenly shaken by the breeze, she moved down the aisle and disappeared from view.

It was the first time in thirty years such words had tried to leave his lips.

Nǐ shì yú dàlù chūshēng de ma ? Nǐ shì zài dàlù zhǎngdà de ma ?

Were you born on the mainland? Did you grow up on the mainland? Fragments of this language he had so often heard thirty years ago, in the mouths of exiled mainland generals in a provincial city on the defeated army's island, came to mind.

He tried to turn the sentence around by mentally spelling out “*Wǒ shì*... (I am...)” in mainland Chinese.

“Wǒ shì Riběn... (I'm Japanese...)”

He tried to remember how to say person (*rén*) in Chinese.

He started again: “*Wǒ shì Riběn de... (I'm a kind of Japanese...)”* Is that really how you say it, he wondered. The fragments of recently recalled words hung in his mind, then disappeared. (*Ribi*, 1996, pp. 14–15. My own translation. The sentences in italics appear in Chinese in the original text.)²⁴

In this passage, we can find the protagonist going back and forth in his mind between Japanese and “mainland Chinese” (“*tairiku no kotoba*”), a familiar situation to Ribi's works. However, it should be noted that the protagonist's thoughts on the act of translating is not so free flowing as the narrator depicts it with the idea of “fragmentation” (*dampen* in the original Japanese text). Instead, the focus is clearly put on the protagonist's hesitation in

²⁴ See Appendices for the original Japanese text. I particularly thank my colleague, Vanessa Teilhet, for her precious help in providing the pinyin transcriptions.

engaging in a conversation with the stewardess. Furthermore, it is interesting to see that the idea of “fragmentation” also influences the way the narrator constructs the description of this scene, with the sentences seeming to overlap one another. In the “language trouble” caused by the encounter with another language, the protagonist’s thoughts, as well as the language expressing them, cease to move fluently, “h[a]ng in his mind (*chūburarin to natte*)” like “fragments,” and cause the protagonist to fall silent.

Generally speaking, Ribi’s narratives do not develop in such a way as to see the “language trouble” resolved and replaced by a clear and transparent knowledge of other people’s languages. Instead, the protagonists remain deeply puzzled about the otherness of the languages they are trying to read and understand. Just like the main character in *Ten’anmon*, they ultimately decide not to say anything in front of their interlocutors and become silent, stuck in feelings of unease and suspicion caused by “language trouble”.

Chiji ni kudakete, published in the September 2004 issue of *Gunzō*, provides another more complete example of how “fragmentation” influences the author’s writing style. Indeed, this novel describes an unfinished journey in which the protagonist, a fifty-something man and long-standing resident of Tōkyō named Edward, is travelling to the United States to visit his mother and stepsister in Washington. By sheer coincidence, it is the day of the terrorist attack on New York and he is detained in Vancouver trying to catch his connecting flight to New York. After spending a week there, he is obliged to return to Tōkyō. The narrative thus focuses on the protagonist’s interrupted journey between Tōkyō and New York. The following passage describes the protagonist having just landed at Vancouver airport:

The Air Canada plane slowed down as it moved along the runway. Then suddenly, and yet completely naturally, it came to a halt, as if it had run out of breath and simply given up.

The ground and trees gently passing outside the window ceased moving and stood still under the white sky.

Edward heard people speaking quietly in English or Japanese, a little Chinese too. Above the buzz of conversation, the voice of a man in his fifties rang out over the loudspeaker.

Sometimes

It was the captain's voice. It sounded like an American speaking but the accent was softer than usual.

Edward had never heard this word *sometimes* in a captain's announcement.

Involuntarily, he murmured in Japanese: sometimes.

Sometimes a captain...

Sometimes a captain...

The captain's voice seemed to be hesitating, breaking a little. And then it continued slowly saying *must*.

... give bad news

That's what the captain was saying.

We've had some news

The voice from the loudspeaker stopped, again, briefly. The pilots might have heard the news several hours ago. In a flat voice the captain began again,

The United States

Then slowly, in a gentle tone, he continued,
has been a victim

The words made no sense to Edward. A strange translation formed in Japanese in his mind.

The United States has been a victim

of a major terrorist attack

The United States has been the victim of a major terrorist attack

I can't give any details yet

The voices speaking in English gradually subsided. A few Japanese and a group of Chinese continued talking, unaware. Others passengers in front and behind gave exclamations of surprise in an unrecognizable language. (Ribí, 2005, pp. 14–17. My own translation. The sentences in italics appear in English in the original text.)²⁵

As with *Ten'anmon*, what strikes at first glance is the hybridity of the author's writing style; in other words, the mixing of Chinese

²⁵ See Appendices for the original Japanese text.

(in the case of *Ten'anmon*) and English words and sentences in the protagonists' minds directly with the Japanese, illustrating the protagonists going back and forth between languages while struggling with feelings of unease and suspicion. It can be said that the hybridity of this passage visually reflects the primary feature of Ribi's oeuvre focusing on movements from one language to another.

However, at the same time, it is also necessary to pay attention to other effects resulting from this textual hybridity. Indeed, in the present example, the fragmented writing used to depict this "language trouble," also highlighted in the quote taken from *Ten'anmon*, does not take place merely in the protagonist's musings or the expressions the narrator employs. Ribi also physically breaks the text's linguistic unity and consistent phrasing. In short, Ribi's hybrid writing leads to fragmentation and disturbance of Japanese language that he adopted to recount the experience of 9.11. Each sentence is divided into several short phrases using numerous punctuation marks and frequent new lines or several blank lines in unusual manner comparing to standard written Japanese. This fragmentation in the "language trouble" characterizing Ribi's novels illustrates the protagonists' sense of incongruity and unease over the asymmetry between languages, a critical situation that could be called "untranslatability," as Numano (2008, p. 272) emphasizes in his commentary on *Chiji ni kudakete*.

The passage from *Chiji ni kudakete*, quoted as one of the examples of "fragmentation" in Ribi's texts, should be linked not only to its general context that it describes, that is, an unexpected halt at Vancouver airport, but also to the fact that the primary theme of the novel in which this passage is included is the protagonist's unsuccessful journey from Tōkyō to New York. Moreover, in taking into account the novel's title, *Chiji ni kudakete*, which literally means "broken in thousands of pieces,"²⁶ we can emphasize how deeply this passage pictures overall conception of this novel in a condensed manner and at different textual levels precisely owing to its fragmented writing style.

²⁶ This sentence is actually taken from Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694)'s *haiku*: "All those islands! / Broken into thousands of pieces, / The summer sea." (*Shimajima ya / Chijini kudakete / Natsu no umi.*) (trans. Makoto Ueda. *Matsuo Bashō*. Twayne Publishers, 1970).

The following passage from *Kokumin no uta*, published in the November 1997 issue of *Gunzō*, provides further evidence of how, in the textual space of Ribi's work, untranslatability and fragmented writing influence each other, creating the kind of highly complex sentences Makino Seiichi (2013) characterizes as "extreme syntax" (*kyūkyoku no shintakkusu*). The story follows the American protagonist, once again based in Tōkyō, visiting his mother and mentally disabled younger brother in Washington for Christmas. Although intimate family relationships connect him to this city, the journey appears to be as an emotionally painful one due to his frustrating communication with his mother and brother.

The passage in question appears early on in the novel and describes the protagonist on an underground train to the suburbs being suddenly overcome by a feeling of unease as he realizes that, despite being surrounded by his compatriots, he is unable to explain his feelings in anything other than Japanese, not even in his mother tongue, English. The scene is described as follows:

He had no inkling that he would become involved in a crime. He was just puzzled to find himself stuck on a train rushing towards a destination he didn't want to visit, surrounded by about one hundred foreigners, none of whom, as he realized uneasily, would understand the language in which he could explain this feeling, and so he nervously sat down near the door of the smooth-running train next to a *foreigner* sporting a red beard—perhaps a civil servant or soldier—who seemed to weigh over 80 kilos and who held a bag filled with things for Christmas on his huge knees. (Ribi, 1998, pp. 11–12. My translation.)²⁷

The second sentence includes several different narrative features—scenic description, the main character's mental and psychological analysis, his movements—, each of which could have constituted a short separate sentence. This lengthy sentence describes the main character's act of sitting down, yet the description is extremely drawn out and features multilayered dependent clauses that detail the protagonist's thoughts and feelings. Consequently, the act of sitting down, which in reality might span a very short amount of time, is depicted as an extremely long event, or to be more

²⁷ See Appendices for the original Japanese text.

precise, as being hidden under multilayered dependent clauses in which readers might get lost. If the protagonist's state of mind and act of "sitting down" had been described separately, using different sentences, readers might have interpreted these events and situations as happening at different moments or as being seen at different levels, thereby potentially establishing a causal or chronological relationship between them. However, these different features are put together in one single sentence, creating a striking contrast as if to illustrate that the protagonist's movement of "sitting down" happened while resisting his feeling of unease at the "language trouble." Ribí chose to construct a single sentence, albeit an extremely long and complex one, inserting frequent punctuation marks between the multilayered dependent clauses, despite this decision potentially rendering the act of reading quite difficult and slow. Nevertheless, this segmented and highly complex sentence, challenging the limits of "readability," allows the author to "translate" the protagonist's feelings of unease and awareness of the asymmetry and "untranslatability" of languages.

Thus, the striking feature of these four examples discussed here is that they are divided between a strong appetite for developing a distinctive writing style and an awareness of the "untranslatability" of languages, which interrupts the ordinary writing and reading process. However, this contradiction seems to be just on the surface. In Ribí's works, various feelings—unease, suspicious, solitude or alienation—provoked by "language trouble" in traveling situations not only constitute narrative contents, but also structure the author's narrative strategy, or even his written language in Japanese.

Conclusion

Ribí's novels are often read as a kind of resistance to the so-called "monoethnic ideology" (*tan'itsu minzoku shugi*), according to which Japanese literature should be written by Japanese authors, in the Japanese language, for Japanese readers. Indeed, Ribí has consistently opposed the national(istic) identity of Japanese literature in his essays and interviews, arguing that writing in Japanese, a language that is not his mother tongue, is a legitimate

claim to what he calls “ownership of the Japanese language” (*Nihongo no shoyûken*).²⁸ By this striking expression, Ribi denounces that for non-native writers in Japanese, this language is still only borrowed and their works can stand on their own if only eccentrically presented as being “written by non-native writer in Japanese” (*nihongo o bogo to shinai sakka ni yotte kakareta*) in parentheses. The fact that the national border is still working in Japanese literature can be evidenced by a glance at the list of the winners of the Akutagawa Prize, the most important literary prize in Japan, which has been awarded to non-native writers just solely for once in 2008.²⁹

It is true that this criticism of the “monoethnic ideology” could be seen as paralleling a vision of our world today as being (and becoming increasingly) globalized. However, as I have attempted to show in my examples, Ribi’s writing contains many aspects that do not fit this perception. On the contrary, the traveling situations described by Ribi in his novels are firmly connected to his own personal history and identity. Each of them acknowledges the unbridgeable gap between languages, especially between Japanese and English or Chinese. Ribi provides a revealing insight into this “untranslatability” by giving it a concrete—albeit complex—written form, creating structural coherence between his narrative and his writing style, even at the risk of challenging the limits of Japanese language within which he writes.

Thinking objectively, situations frequently occur when traveling in which we cannot go from our mother tongue to another language without some loss of meaning. Yet what makes Ribi’s novels so striking and unique is the skepticism they convey on the transparency of language. When attempting to picture our world today as globalized and globalizing, we sometimes tend to have a one-sided and optimistic view, according to which the interaction with others’ languages becomes more and more transparent.

²⁸ See Ribi (2001).

²⁹ So far, Yang Yi, a Chinese-born novelist writing in Japanese, is the only non-native writer who won the Akutagawa Prize (2008), which had been established in 1935 by Kikuchi Kan (1888–1948) in honor of Akutagawa Ryûnosuke (1892–1927), one of the most important novelists of modern Japan.

However, Ribi's texts exploring the borders between languages, in particular his written language featuring fragmented or highly multilayered sentences eruditely lead us to enhance critical awareness about this illusionary idea. As a result, they show that what I have described as "language trouble" is intricately linked to the art of writing literature as an act of language. For Ribi, whether or not the exchange between languages can be free-flowing seems to be secondary preoccupation. But rather, the focus is on if and how it becomes possible to go through the ambiguity of our world today, which is visible in his personal history, toward creating literary works in others' languages. At least, his texts and writing style seem to suggest this reading framework. In this sense, I would argue that it is difficult to read Ribi's literary works and the traveling situations they describe as merely a representation or testimony of our globalized world. The act of crossing from English into Japanese, creating a distance with one's own language, could instead be understood as a strategy for going beyond the modern globalized world order, which a number of studies mention as a file path to Ribi's border-crossing literature.

In the spring of 2016, Ribi published *Mohankyō*, a collection of short stories and essays in which he describes for the first time his trip to Taiwan. One of the texts, an essay on Pearl Buck entitled *Gōingu neitibu* (Going Native) finishes with the following words:

If "Going Native" truly exists, it means seeking our new life in the words created by original native speakers.

This is neither a matter of race nor of personal history but rather an issue of writing style. (Ribi, 2016a, p. 118. My translation.)

Like *Mohankyō* I mentioned above, this latest book is written entirely in the first person and sees the narrator-protagonist, named "Ribi," mention his other novels. In this sense, the quoted passage can be read as a metanarrative comment on the author's works. Read in this way, traveling or crossing borders in Ribi Hideo's novels could be understood as a writing style laboratory and thus a way of surviving our globalized and globalizing world. This would explain Ribi's need to write in Japanese, a language that is not his own, thereby escaping English, his mother tongue, one of the forces dramatically driving globalization.

References

Main texts

- Ribi Hideo (1992 [2011]) *Seijōki no kiko enai heya* [A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard], including *Nobenbā* [The End of November] and *Nakama* [One of the Guys], Tōkyō: Kōdansha. Trans. Christopher D. Scott, New York: Columbia University Press.
- (1996) *Ten'anmon* [Tiananmen], including *Pekin ekkyō-ki* [Crossing the Border to Beijing], Tōkyō: Kōdansha.
- (1998) *Kokumin no uta* [Ode to the Nation], including *Manshū ekusupuresu* [Manchurian Express], Tōkyō: Kōdansha.
- (2002) *Henrī Takeshi Rewitsukī no natsu no kikō* [Henry Takeshi Levitzky's Summer Journey], including *Ka to hae no dansu* [The Dance of Mosquito and Fly], Tōkyō: Kōdansha.
- (2005) *Chiji ni kudakete* [Thousands and Thousands of Pieces], including *Konechikatto abenyū* [Connecticut Avenue], Tōkyō: Kōdansha.
- (2008a) *Kari no mizu* [Fake Water], including *Kōsokukōro nite* [On a National Highway], *Rōkokudō* [An Old National Road] and *Gaze* [I Am], Tōkyō: Kōdansha.
- (2016a) *Mohankyō* [Model Village], including *Senkyōshi gakkō gojyūnen-shi* [Fifty Years Annals of the Mission School], *Gōingu Neitibu* [Going Native], *Mihosō no mama* [Still Dirt], Tōkyō: Shūeisha.

Other references

- Aoki, T. (2001). *Ibunka rikai* [Understanding different cultures], Tōkyō: Iwanami shinsho.
- (2010). *Sakka wa idō suru* [The Writers Move], Tōkyō: Shinshokan.
- Damrosch, D. (2003). *What Is World Literature?* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Kaku, N. (ed.). (2013). *Bairingaruna Nihongo bungaku* [Japanese Literature of a Bilingual Nature], Tōkyō: Sangensha.

Kawamura, M. (1999). *Umaretara soko ga furusato: zainichi Chōsenjin bungakuron* [Birth Land Is Native Land: On Japanese Literature of Korean Residents in Japan], Tōkyō: Heibonsha.

Kleeman, F.Y. (2003). *Under an Imperial Sun: Japanese Colonial Literature of Taiwan and the South*, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.

——— (2013). “Ribi Hideo no bungaku. Kan-gengoteki kūkan no kanōsei [Literature of Ribi Hideo. The Possibility of Literary Space between languages],” in Kaku, N. (ed.) *Bairingaruna Nihongo bungaku* [Japanese Literature of a Bilingual Nature], Tōkyō: Sangensha, pp. 74–93.

Komori, Y. (1998). *Yuragi no Nihon bungaku* [Waving Japanese literature], Tōkyō: NHK Books.

Makino, S (2013). “Nihongo no ika to tayōka. Ribi Hideo no kēsu sutadhi [Defamiliarizing and diversifying Japanese language. A Case Study of Ribi Hideo],” in Kaku, N. (ed.) *Bairingaruna Nihongo bungaku* [Japanese Literature of a Bilingual Nature], Tōkyō: Sangensha, pp. 47–73.

Nagaoka, M. (2009). “Gengo ni tsuite no shōsetsu. Ribi Hideo ron [Novel about language: study of Ribi Hideo],” *Gunzō*, 64 (6), pp. 80–101.

Numano, M. (1998). “Sekai no naka no nihon bungaku — arata na aidenthithi o motomete [Japanese literature in the world or the search for a new identity],” *Asuteion*, 49 (7), pp. 176–190.

——— (2008). “Kaisetsu. Futatsu no gengo, futatsu no ‘jigoku’ no aida de [Comment. Between two languages, two ‘hells’],” in Ribi Hideo, *Chiji ni kudakete*, Tōkyō: Kōdansha bunko, pp. 268–276.

Ribi, H. (2001). “Nihongo no ‘shoyūken’ o megutte [About the ‘ownership’ of the Japanese language],” in *Nihongo o kaku heya* [A Room Where I Write Japanese], Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten, pp. 46–49.

——— (2007). *Ekkyō no koe* [Voices of Border-crossing], Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten.

——— (2008b). *En’an. Kakumei seichi e no tabi* [Yan’an. A Journey to the Holy Place of Revolution], Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten.

- (2010). *Wareteki Nihongo. The World in Japanese* [My Japanese language. The World in Japanese], Tōkyō: Chikuma shobō.
- (2011). “Nenpu [Chronology],” in *Ten'anmon* [Tiananmen], Tōkyō: Kōdansha ungee bunko, pp. 312–327.
- (2016b). “(Taidan) *Mohankyō* o yomu [(Talk with On Yūjū) Read *Model Village (Mohankyō)*],” *Sekai* 887, pp. 222–234.
- Sakamoto, R. (2006). “Writing as out/insiders. Contemporary Japan's *ekkyō* literature in globalization,” in Allen, M. and Sakamoto, R. (eds) *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*, London: Routledge, pp. 137–157.
- Sasanuma, T. (2011). “Ribi Hideo ni okeru ‘Taiwan’ [Ribi Hideo in Taiwan],” *Bungaku kenkyū ronshū*, 29, pp. 1–14.
- Tarumi, C. (1995). *Taiwan no nihongo bungaku: Nihon tōchi jidai no sakkatachi* [Taiwanese Literature in Japanese: Writers under the Japanese Rule], Tōkyō: Goryū shoin.
- Tawada, Y. (2003). *Ekusofonī: bogo no soto e deru tabi* [Exophony: Traveling Out of One's Mother Tongue], Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten.
- Tsuchiya, M. (ed.) (2009). *Ekkyō suru bungaku* [Literatures Crossing Borders], Tōkyō: Suiseisha.
- Yoshihara, M. (2000). “Home Is Where the Tongue Is: Ribi Hideo to Mizumura Minae no ekkyō to gengo [Home Is Where the Tongue Is: Border-crossing and Language of Ribi Hideo and Mizumura Minae],” *Amerika kenkyū*, 34, pp. 87–104.

Appendices

1. The original Japanese text of the quote from *Seijōki no kikoena* *heya*:

はじめて一望のうちに見渡せる日本の夜の都会を、ベンは食い入るように眺めつづけた。昼間と違って家とビルの輪廓は霞み、いたるところでネオンの仮名と漢字が静かに蠢いていた。よその少年に解るはずのない都会の秘密を、駅から駅へと伝えていた。「ウイスキー」と「製薬」、「トルコ」と「医院」、

それぞれ適切な色をもって、かわるがわる映ってくる都会の夢と病の文字。

ベンはその多くの文字を知らなかった。そして、たとえ知ることができても、けっしてその意味を解くことはできなかった。ベンはまだ、標識をほとんど読めない旅人だった。実際に、横浜駅からすこしずつ乗りこんできた他の乗客たちの眼には、そのことを憐れんだり、嘲ったり、ときにはベンの読みたいという強烈な青灰色の眼に気づいて驚いている表情もあった。(The emphasis is the author's)

2. The original Japanese text of the quote from *Ten'anmon*:

「君は大陸の人ですか」

と大陸の言語で聞こうと思ったが、「你是（ニーシル）」が口を出る寸前に勇気がなくなり、黒い柳の葉叢が風の向きによって突然揺れてしまったように、彼女は通路の斜め後ろの方へ動き、かれの視野からいなくなった。

「你是（ニーシル）」という音がかれの口を出ようとしたのは、三十年ぶりだった。

你是於大陸出生的嗎 （ニーシルユーダールーチューシエングデマー）？

你是在大陸長大的嗎 （ニーシルヅアイダールーチヤングダイデマー）

君は大陸で生まれたのか？ 君は大陸で育ったのか？ 敗軍の島の地方都市で、三十年前のかれの耳を満たした、大陸を失った将軍たちの大陸の言葉が、切れ切れに甦った。

「我是（ウオシル）…」

とかれは逆のことを告げようと、頭の中で大陸の言葉を綴ってみた。

「我是（ウオシル）日本…」

その後続くはずの「人（レン）」が、すなおに出てこなかった。

「我是日本的（ウオシルルーベンデ）…」と頭の中で言い直してみた。

「我是日本的（ウオシルルーベンデ）…」、なんだろうか、なんとはいいいのだろうか。断片的に甦った言葉が、断片のまま宙ぶらりんとなって、やがては消えた。(The phonetic guide on the Chinese words is in the original text.)

3. The original Japanese text of the quote from *Chiji ni kudakete*:

エア・カナダ機がスピードを落とした。滑走路の上を動いた。そして、最後の一息が切れて残りの数十メートルをあきらめたかのように、とつぜん、だがとても自然に、途中で止まった。

窓の外でゆっくりと流れていた敷地と、その向こうに連なる森林も、その動きが止まり、白い大空の下でじっとたたずんでいた。

まわりから、英語と日本語と、すこしだけの北京語の静かな声が耳に入った。それらのざわめきの上で、スピーカーからは、五十代の男の声が聞こえた。

Sometimes

機長の声だった。機長の声は、米語のようだが、米国人の米語よりやわらかに聞こえた。

機内に流れる機長のアナウンスの中で、**Sometimes**ということばをエドワードはこれまで聞いたことはなかった。

ときには、とエドワードは思わず日本語でささやいた。

Sometimes a captain...

ときには、機長というものは...

機長の声は、ためらっているようで、わずかに途切れた。それから、ゆっくりと**must**と言って、つづいた。

...悪いニュースを伝えなければなりません

機長は、そんなことを言っていた。

連絡が入りました

スピーカーから流れるその声は、もう一度、一瞬だけ途切れた。たぶん、機長室にはその連絡がすでに何時間も前に入ったのだろう、平板な声で、

the United States

と機長がまた言いだした。

それから、ゆっくりと、優しげな口調となって、

has been a victim

と言いつづけた。

耳に入ったそのことばは、意味をなさなかった。頭の中で奇妙な日本語が響こうとした。

アメリカ合衆国は、被害者となった

of a major terrorist attack

アメリカ合衆国は、甚大なテロ攻撃の被害者となった
くわしいことは、今伝えられません

機内での英語の音がすこしずつ静まった。いくつかの日本語の声と、一かたまり二かたまりの北京語の音が無邪気につづいていた。何語ともつかないおどろきの音も何列か前と何列か後で起った。

4. The original Japanese text of the quote from *Kokumin no uta*:

犯罪に遭うという可能性を、かれはすこしも意識していなかった。かれはただ、百人近くの外人の中に閉じこめられて、行きたくないところへ、疾走する車輻に運ばれている、しかもそんなためらいの気持ちを表現できる言語は、まわりの誰にも通じないという不安にとらわれながら、清潔でなめらかな動きで走る車輻のドアの近くの二人席に、体重が八十キロもあるだろう赤ひげの、役人だろうか軍人だろうか、クリスマスの買物をあふれんばかりにつめたショッピング・バッグを巨大な膝の上に乗せた**外人**のとなりにこわごとと腰掛けたのである。(The emphasis is the author's.)

A “Spiritual Journey” Through the “Middle” Kingdom: Travel and Translation in François Cheng’s Translingual Novel

Shuangyi Li

Lund University

In 2000, the French academician François Cheng wrote an additional preface in Chinese for the Chinese translation of his French-language novel *Le Dit de Tianyi* (Prix Femina 1998),¹ where he describes retrospectively the process of his literary creation as a “spiritual journey” (心路历程), the kind of journey that is shared by all great works of literature, from Chinese classics such as *Chu Ci* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* to the Western canon such as *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Ulysses* (Cheng, 2009b, p. 2). He then regretfully questions if it is still possible for such a “spiritual journey” to take place on “this land of hardship cracked open by turmoil” (这片动荡而裂开的难土) (ibid.). The phrase “great works of literature” may sound obsoletely Platonic today, but it expresses, as Richard Rorty argues, “the hope for a

¹ The original French title, which literally means ‘Tianyi’s saying’, has been rendered rather differently in English as *The River Below* (2000) by Julia Shirek Smith. Unless otherwise specified, the English quotations from this novel will be based on this translation. Where I see in the English translation a significant morphological or lexical departure, the French original words and expression will be provided in parenthesis. Not all of Cheng’s works are available in English. Where the published English translation is unavailable, I will translate the text myself with references to the French original. For greater clarity in in-text citations, this primary text will be abbreviated to *The River*.

How to cite this book chapter:

Li, S. 2021. A “Spiritual Journey” Through the “Middle” Kingdom: Travel and Translation in François Cheng’s Translingual Novel. In: Jonsson, H., Berg, L., Edfeldt, C. and Jansson, B. G. (eds.) *Narratives Crossing Borders: The Dynamics of Cultural Interaction*. Pp. 429–454. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbj.s>. License: CC-BY 4.0

religion of literature [and art in Cheng's case], in which works of the secular imagination replace Scripture as the principal source of inspiration and hope for each new generation" (Rorty, 2005, p. 275). By "this land of hardship", Cheng means not only the planet we all inescapably inhabit, but also more specifically "that self-proclaimed 'Middle' Kingdom" ("中"國). He subtly puns on the historical name of China to suggest to the Chinese readership a time-space for spiritual journeys, or at least for the spiritual journey that has taken place in the novel. The "Middle" Kingdom here does not imply, as it used to, China as the centre of the world; but rather, a *decentred* China. It points to a metaphysical space of relation in which China can dynamically engage with multiple planetary cultural forces (but currently dominated by the West), and where there could be "transcendence" for all parties. This space is characterized as a kind of "essential emptiness" in-between according to Cheng's Daoism-infused conception of the *vide médian* ("middle void", or sometimes rendered as "median void" or "middle emptiness" by different English translators). In a nutshell, Cheng conceptualizes the *vide médian* as a third type of Daoist *qi* ("air" or "breath") which has the power of pulling the yin and the yang into positive interaction, "with a view toward a mutual transformation, as beneficial for one as for the other" (Cheng, 2009a, p. 66). This transformative process signals a spiritual exaltation and a form of ceaseless transcendence.² As I gradually unfold the various layers of travel and translation in the novel, it is crucial to keep in view Cheng's broader intellectual and artistic enterprise of cultural transcendence.

In terms of both structural design and narrative arrangement, the notion of journey is fundamental in Cheng's conception of *Le Dit*. Depending on the critical angle, *Le Dit* can be generically categorized as autofiction, *Bildungsroman*, *Künstlerroman*, romance, historical novel, adventure story, travel writing, memoir, and so on. The generic indeterminacy, blurring and blending, or hybridity,³ brings to the forefront profound *frictional* qualities in

² For an interesting exposition on the problematic of approaching the Western notion of transcendence from the perspective of Daoism and, by association, Zen Buddhism, see Braak (2012).

³ There are scholars who oppose this description of Cheng's novel as "hybrid." Chu Xiaoquan (2014), for example, argues for a holistic approach,

the novelistic fabric of *Le Dit*, between myth and reality, between ethnography and imagination, and between fact, fiction, and reflection. In fact, the generic border-crossing itself is a literary embodiment of Cheng’s physical and intellectual journey in life and in fiction, which constantly calls for movements of understanding on the reader’s part.

This chapter proposes to concretely examine a variety of travel motifs in Cheng’s translingual novel, and how they function as a consistent structural and thematic frame, in which different literary generic qualities and traditions dynamically interact with each other. Drawing on theories of cultural translation, initiated notably by Homi Bhabha, I additionally argue that these travel motifs ultimately create a liminal space where both European and Chinese literary and artistic traditions are set in motion towards a planetary possibility of cultural transcendence.⁴

Temporal and Spatial Movements of Travel

To begin with, the tripartite structure of the novel – “epic of departure”, “a turn in the road” (“*récit d’un détour*”), “myth of return” – is already redolent of a Western travel writing tradition going back to Homer’s *Odyssey*, which recounts, in Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs’ words, ‘an epic journey’ and ‘episodic adventures’ that “offer a blueprint for romance, indirection, and danger of travel as well as the joy (and danger) of homecoming” (Hulme & Youngs, 2002, p. 2). Tianyi’s journey spans through much of the turbulent twentieth century (1925–1968), from wartime China (Sino-Japanese War and Civil War) to post-war France and

especially in the light of Cheng’s Daoist vision. However, I am not so much concerned with the *generic definition* of the novel here. For me, the hybrid characterization of the text is aimed at a variety of critical frameworks in our reading.

⁴ By “planetary possibility” I mean to evoke Spivak’s conception of “planetaryity” as a way to “overwrite” globalization. Whereas the latter implies the “imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere,” “the planet,” Spivak argues, “is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan” (2003, pp. 72–73). I make a critical connection here between Spivak’s ‘planet’ and Cheng’s ‘land of hardship’, thereby putting Cheng’s “transcendence” in relation to the idea of alterity.

back to a radically changed Communist China. Significant geographical displacements also take place within China and Europe with different motives.

Time and movement are essential factors behind Tianyi's physical and psychological growth. Both growth and transformation are, of course, defining notions of Bildungsroman (Beer, 2000, pp. 97–103) and its subgenre Künstlerroman. Despite the innumerable Eastern mysticism-infused philosophical digressions, the narrative of *Le Dit* is firmly rooted in our historical sense of time. Many chapters—including the first and the last, as well as the prologue—typically start with a date. The novel begins with a sentence that carries biblical overtones, which is then immediately followed by an event date, a historical duration, and a personal date of birth, “in the beginning there was the cry in the night. Autumn 1930. China with its five thousand years of history, and I with almost six years of life on earth, for I was born in January 1925” (*The River*, p. 3).⁵ The growth of the protagonist as well as other main characters, constantly interacts with historical events. The images of naked and raped women from the Nanjing Massacre carried out by Japanese soldiers in 1937 are a shocking revelation to Tianyi, in particular the relationship between beauty and evil in the light of human sexuality and cruelty (ibid. pp. 27–31). The literary vocation of the poet Haolang—known as l'Ami—is deeply shaped by the cultural and political movement launched by revolutionary left-wing writers such as Lu Xun and Hu Feng during the 1920s and 1930s, who advocate a devoted study of exclusively “foreign” literature and a radical rupture from “burdensome” classical Chinese literary traditions (ibid. pp. 51–52, pp. 62–63). The protagonist's vicissitudes after his dystopian return to China in search of l'Amante and l'Ami⁶ are profoundly affected by catastrophic historical events such as the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), the Three Years of Natural Disasters (1959–1961), and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The closing chapter of the novel begins again with a date—“Autumn 1968”—which

⁵ For a brief analysis of how biblical overtones are intertwined with Daoist imagery in the opening passage, see S. Li (2017a, p. 201).

⁶ The etymological and morphological ambiguity of “amant(e)” (“lover”) and “ami” (“friend”) is not quite played out in English.

marks the arrival of the Communist Red Guards at Tianyi and Haolang’s labour camp in the Great Northern Wilderness (*ibid.*, p. 406). Indeed, this interlacement between personal stories and historical events in Cheng’s novelistic fabric is self-referentially announced by the protagonist himself, as he reflects on Haolang’s ardent writing of “minor events” (“*petites histoires*”) towards the end of the novel: “But are there any minor events? Isn’t every minor event tied up with major ones? His personal history was so tied up with history on the grand scale that the two came to be hopelessly entangled. In his struggle for survival, he ended up forgetting the only weapon he possessed: writing. Now he has found it again” (*ibid.*, pp. 257–258).

The precisely stated, linear temporal progression is countered by a circular, or even pendular movement⁷ through space and place, which crosses, challenges, and transcends both geographic and cultural borders. Tianyi embarks on a return journey between China and Europe, and his loose bulk of unfinished personal writings are then brought back to France and rearranged by a narrator who has allegedly “translated” them from Chinese into French and turned them into the book we are now reading. Further still, this fictitious “pseudotranslation” (Toury, 1984)⁸ was subsequently translated into Chinese with a new Chinese preface signed by the author—as opposed to being written by a fictional narrator—and has been overwhelmingly received by the

⁷ Theorists of travel writing such as Ottmar Ette (2003, p. 39; 43) make a hermeneutic distinction between circular and pendular movements. Generally speaking, the former implies “the improvement of the knowledge about the Other” that is “bound to a gain of knowledge in the country of origin of the traveler”. In comparison, during the latter pendular movement, “the images and spaces do not melt together; they constitute hybrid bodies that subvert clear borderlines between one’s own and the foreign space”. Interestingly, the protagonist Tianyi and the author Cheng seem to occupy these two different theoretical positions. The epithet we usually attribute to Cheng—the *passeur* (between Western and Chinese cultures)—is particularly relevant to the pendular movement of understanding here.

⁸ Cheng’s second novel *L’Éternité n’est pas de trop* (2002), translated in English as *Green Mountain, White Cloud* (2004), also purports to be a reconstruction of a lost book written and brought back by a French Jesuit missionary from China.

Chinese readership.⁹ In a word, the text, both within and outside the narrative, travels in translation.

Moving through Mountain-Water

There are also micro-movements through which the human agent appreciates and interacts perceptively with natural landscapes, resulting in episodic transformations in the protagonist. Cheng's recurrent word-image approach to natural landscapes and phenomena constitutes another significant travel motif in the novel, which is deep-rooted in the classical Chinese traditions of both pictorial art and travel writing. The two most celebrated natural landscapes in *Le Dit* are mountains and rivers. Indeed, Cheng reminds us in his theoretical writings that "mountain" and "water" constitute the Chinese word for "landscape", *shan-shui* 山水 ("montagne-eau") (Cheng, 2006 [1989]).¹⁰ Linked to the Chinese cosmological order of yin-yang, mountain-water embodies the concept of duality which entails the perpetual, mutual transformation of the two entities, as Cheng (2014, p. 90, my translation) clarifies in his calligraphic work: "Here are the two great earthly entities brought together, paired and complementary, the mountain incarnate the principle of yang, and the water the principle of yin. Without relief and difference in altitude, water would not flow; without the nourishment of water, the mountain would dry out. The mountain and water are profoundly joined together". In *The Analects*, Confucius famously employs the analogy of mountain-water to moralize about the human virtues of intelligence and kindness: "The wise delight in water; the humane delight in mountains. The wise move; the humane are still. The wise are happy; the humane live long".¹¹

⁹ But the last part of the novel where the author openly criticizes the severe mismanagement of the Communist regime during the Cultural Revolution has met with state censorship in mainland China. In a way, the fictional narrator of the preface has almost predicted such an operation by the Chinese government.

¹⁰ I should add that "water" and "river" share the same character 水 in classical Chinese.

¹¹ Cheng translated this saying from Chinese to French himself. The English translation here is provided by Burton Watson. See Cheng (2006 [1989], p. 168); see also Watson (trans.) (2007, p. 45)

Moreover, the Chinese “mountain-water” is almost always accompanied by mist or cloud. In effect, it is the movement of the cloud that animates the mountain and the river and puts them in a dynamic reciprocal relation, just as the essential “middle void” (*vide médian*) energizes the vital breaths (*souffles vitaux* or *qi*) of yin and yang.¹² According to Cheng, this visual and symbolic representation of the *souffle* as the cloud in mountain-water paintings has fascinated classical Chinese artists and aesthetic theorists for more than a thousand years. To demonstrate this fundamental philosophical underpinning of classical Chinese landscape painting, Cheng has gathered together a rich body of Chinese theoretical writings on pictorial art from the Tang (618–907) to the Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, translated them into French and turned them into an anthology which he entitles *Souffle-Esprit* (literally “breath-spirit”) (1989). These writings will leave their marks on Cheng’s novelistic depiction of Mount Lu. But before we move on to Cheng’s passage in the novel, let me cite the following examples from *Souffle-Esprit* that pinpoint the relationship between mountain, water, cloud, and breath in classical Chinese landscape painting:

(From Jing Hao [855–915]) In order to convey the real physiognomy of a landscape, there should be harmony between the *vital breath* and the *formal structure*. In addition, one should know how to observe and distinguish the *multiple elements* that constitute a landscape. As for the mountain, a pointed summit forms a *feng* [peak], [...] A path that moves through the mountain creates a *gu* (valley). Where the path reaches an impass is a *yu* (ravine). A watercourse that runs through a ravine is called *xi*. (Cheng, 2006 [1989], p. 115)¹³

(From Guo Xi [1020–1090]) The mountain has watercourses as its arteries, trees and herbs as its hair, mists and clouds as its expression. Thus, the mountain owes its life to the water, its beauty to the trees and herbs, its *mystery to the mists and clouds*. [...]

¹² Cheng elaborates on this Daoism-informed ternary thinking on many occasions (Cheng, 1991, pp. 58–61; 2006 [1989], pp. 162–163).

¹³ Cheng translated all these passages himself from classical Chinese to French. My English translation is based on Cheng’s French translation. The emphases in this and the following passages are mine.

Those who are learning to paint landscapes should not go about things otherwise. They must bring themselves close to mountains and water and let the spirit [of mountains and water] penetrate them entirely. A real landscape must be seen both *from afar* so that we can capture the lines of force, and *from close quarters* so that we can draw from the substance. The atmosphere of the clouds which *animates* a mountain landscape is not the same in different seasons [...]. (pp. 117–119)

(From Tang Dai [1673–1752]) The clouds are born out of the mountain's womb. Incidentally, this is why we call the rocks (of a valley) *roots of the clouds*. Indeed, around the rocks, *water and breath are mixed together and they give birth to clouds*. The first state of the clouds is called the *lan* [ascending vapour]. [...] In painting, there is cause for making a distinction between clouds and mists. For clouds, we can differentiate stable clouds, moving clouds, crepuscular clouds, etc. For mists, there are differences among light mists, morning mists, evening mists, etc. The faintest state of clouds is called *ai*; the *ai surrounds the tops and the peaks in the distance with an aura*. The most condensed state of clouds is called *wu*: the *wu* makes everything *blurry and elusive*. (ibid., p. 133)

(From Shen Zongqian [1736–1820]) We should attend to the creation of depth in the painting. The composition should include at least three planes. [...] We should not forget to handle carefully the *intermediate spaces of emptiness across the painting, in the form of clouds or watercourses, in order to facilitate the circulation of the breath*. (ibid., pp. 139–140)

Let us now examine how Cheng incorporates these theoretical observations into his novel:

Two and a half years had passed since the night of the cry. I now lived with my parents in our home for years to come, a humble cottage at the base of Mount Lu, in northern Jianxi [*sic.*] Province, not far from the Yangzi River. [...] ‘Mists and clouds of Mount Lu,’ so famous they had become proverbial, referring to something *elusive and mysterious*, a beauty hidden yet bewitching. With their capricious, unpredictable movements and their never-fixed hues—pink or purple, jade green or silver gray—they turned the mountain magical. *They developed amid Mount Lu's countless peaks and hills; then, lingering in the valleys or rising toward the heights, they maintained a constant state of mystery*. At times they

dissipated abruptly, revealing to the human eye the mountain in all its splendor. With their silkiness and their scent of moist sandalwood, these clouds and mists resembled a being both fleshly and unreal, a messenger come from elsewhere, who might *converse with the earth* for a minute or for hours, depending on his mood. *Some bright mornings* they stole silently through shutters and entered the dwellings of men, caressing them, *surrounding them, gentle and intimate*. Should anyone try to grab hold of them, they would move off as silently as they had come, out of reach. *Some evenings the heavy mists rose and met up with clouds in motion*, producing moisture and bringing showers; the pure water would pour into jars and jugs the villagers set out under their walls. With this water they made the best tea around. Once the downpour had ended, the clouds broke up rapidly, and under clear skies the highest mountain would be briefly visible. The surrounding hills in no way detracted from the mysterious lofty beauty of this peak, which, unobstructed, reflected the diffuse evening light and displayed its fantastic, dangerously towering crags crowned with a vegetation no less fantastic. Meanwhile, the clouds, re-forming in the west, would turn into a wide, slack sea, *on whose waves floated the setting sun like a dream ship gleaming with a thousand multicolored lights*. And very soon the summit would be draped in a mauve mist, becoming invisible once more. As was indeed appropriate, since this was the hour for Mount Lu’s daily journey westward to pay homage to the Taoists’ Lady of the West and to greet Buddha. At that moment, the universe appeared to disclose its hidden reality: it was in perpetual transformation. What was apparently stable melted away into the moving; what was apparently finite sank into the infinite. There was no fixed, final state. And is that not the real truth, since *all living things are but condensation of the breath?* (*The River*, pp. 5–7, my italics)

The striking lexical similarities and shared conceptual formulations—such as the mountain-water-cloud relation and the quality, movement, and typology of the mist/cloud—between the aforementioned theoretical texts and this Mount Lu passage may even run the risk of diminishing Cheng’s literary originality. However, what we can clearly discern in this example is that both linguistic and cultural translations are inherent in Cheng’s creative process; in fact, they largely define Cheng’s translingual aesthetic. Cheng is one of the “remarkable number of translinguals” who

“have been active and important as translators, brokers who position themselves between the language of an author and the language of the reader”—importantly—“as if these projects were an extension of their own translanguing program” (Kellman, 2000, p. 32).

Yet, there is a significant contextual difference: whereas those theoretical texts aim to give technical instructions to artists, the Mount Lu passage is attributed to the intuitive perception of a young protagonist in nature at the moment of artistic initiation, of finding his artistic vocation (in the etymological sense of “inner calling”). The presence of a receptive human agent in the landscape, who is inspired (again in the etymological sense of “breathing in”) and makes his first attempt to use the “magical power of brush and ink” (*The River*, p. 9) to establish a relation—a “physical communion [communion charnelle]” (ibid., p. 6)¹⁴—between nature and man, is crucial to our generic acknowledgement of the novel as a *Künstlerroman*.¹⁵ Furthermore, rather than “intellectual”, it is the “sensuous” experience of the human agent through the landscape that gives rise to the quality of travel literature in the classical Chinese tradition.¹⁶ To this end, in addition to “mountain-water”, Cheng introduces another closely related Chinese aesthetic concept—“sentiment-scenery” (情景)—that explicitly puts man in relation with mountain-water:

It is with these two great entities [mountain-water], with their respective virtues, that Chinese literati liked to identify the two tendencies of their sensibility [yin and yang]. This conforms to an important notion of Chinese aesthetic, that is, the *sentiment-scenery*. This notion points to the interpretation of human spirit and of the living universe, through which all authentic artistic creations take place. (2014, pp. 90–91, my translation)

¹⁴ The French adjective “charnel” is repeatedly used in the novel to describe man’s relation to natural phenomena. It echoes strongly with Pontian phenomenological discourse, e.g. “la chair du monde”, and Cheng (2009a, p. 11) also describes himself as a “slightly naive phenomenologist”.

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of Tianyi’s artistic initiation and vocation, see S. Li (2017, pp. 154–176). For a broader treatment of *Le Dit* as a *Künstlerroman*, see M. Bertaud (2011, pp. 165–186).

¹⁶ This remark is informed by Yu Guangzhong’s formulation of “landscape journal”, see Yu (1983, cited in Hargett, 2016, p. 113).

J. M. Hargett (2016, p. 113) duly observes that classical Chinese travel literature typically adopts a cinematic-like word-picture approach to places, places authors “want readers to ‘see’ by *reading a text*”. The critic continues:

In its Chinese context, “place” refers to a particular environmental setting with identifiable traits, such as a distinguishing name, special topographical features, and/or specific historical, cultural, and literary associations. Traditionally, the Chinese attached great value to such places. “Space”, on the other hand, is a larger construct, abstract in nature. Imagine a giant tableau, onto which is inscribed a cultural construct that includes all places, their unique characteristics, and the relationships among them. As travellers move across and through the giant tableau, they perceive both how individual places are unique, *and* how they all ultimately assemble together into some sort of unity [...]. (ibid., pp. 113–114)

Hargett’s insightful comment on the spatial configuration in traditional Chinese travel writing describes almost exactly the progression of the Mount Lu passage. The protagonist arrived and settled at the foot of Mount Lu with his family. His account of the natural beauty of Mount Lu begins with a proverbial name (“mists and clouds of Mount Lu”) immortalized by the verse of the classical poet Su Shi from the Song dynasty (960–1279). It then goes on to elaborate the way the “capricious” cloud that animates and transforms the various topographical features of the mountain (“countless peaks and hills”, “the valleys”, “its fantastic, dangerously towering crags”, “vegetation”, “the diffuse evening light”, “the summit”), and the way the cloud through its different forms affects the local inhabitants. This paradisiacal scenery stimulates the protagonist’s imagination of a certain Daoist divinity or the Buddha of the West.¹⁷ Finally, Tianyi understands this “giant tableau”, where everything is changing and nothing is fixed, in the light of the Daoist cosmogony (“all living things are but condensation of the breath”).

To reaffirm the distinctive quality of travel writing in *Le Dit*, it may be helpful to compare the Mount Lu passage to that of a

¹⁷ As I will expound soon, in ancient China, ‘the West’ generally refers to today’s India.

“real” travelogue on Yellow Mountain by China’s greatest travel writer Xu Xiake (1587–1641):

From time to time a dense fog would move in and move off. When the first bank of fog moved in, nothing could be seen. Looking out towards the various heights of Lotus Flower [Peak], most of them were enveloped in fog. As I alone ascended to Heavenly Capital [Peak], when I moved to the front of it the fog would retreat to the back of it, and as I crossed over to the right, the fog would then exit from the left. As for the pines, they were still twisted and upright, sweeping this way and that. The cypresses, although as big as a [man’s] arm, all clung flatly to the surfaces of rocks in the manner of lichen. On such lofty mountains the wind is formidable, and the foggy mists come and go as they please. Looking at the various peaks below, at times they appeared [out of the fog] as emerald isles, while at other times they were completely enveloped in a silvery sea. But looking further down the mountain, I beheld a completely different view: there the sunlight glittered brightly and brilliantly. (Cited in Hargett, 2016, p. 121)

As can be seen, the visual details of this scenery are strikingly similar to the Mount Lu passage. The amorphous presence of the moving cloud, mist, or fog, largely guides the narrator-protagonist’s—and by extension, the reader’s—perception of the visual appeal of the landscape. There is a strong tendency to describe the “actions” of individual topographical features, such as the vegetation, rocks, and peaks, in anthropomorphic terms. In fact, some of their imagery, like the sea and the sun, is so closely related that one could seamlessly complement the other: the “emerald isles” were thus “completely enveloped in a silvery sea” [“a wide, slack sea” in Cheng’s version] on whose “waves floated the setting sun like a dream ship gleaming with a thousand multicolored lights” [“there the sunlight glittered brightly and brilliantly” in Xu’s version]. However, there is arguably a slight difference in the intention of the two accounts. Whereas Xu’s first priority is, as Hargett stresses, “*narration of the journey*” (ibid.)—hence the spatial precision of the traveller’s route—Cheng is visibly keen to engage in the Daoist philosophical discourse which will later inform Tianyi’s artistic vocation.

Apart from Mount Lu, Tianyi’s travel itinerary and wandering destiny, as well as his intellectual and artistic development,

are strongly identified with a number of well-known rivers: from the Yangtze River which fostered Daoism to the Yellow River that cradled Confucianism, from the Seine which embraces and protects the cultural heart of France to the Loire that has “fashioned an entire tribe of fine-featured, bright-eyed, levelheaded folk” (*The River*, p. 185), the list goes on. The protagonist describes himself as the “child of the river” (*ibid.*). At the end of the novel, Tianyi compares his life journey to the water in the river, it evaporates, turns into clouds, and falls as rain back to the source of the river like the “circulating breath [...] at the Great Return”: “we have gone from river to river to this last river. The loop of destiny ends here, of that we are certain” (*ibid.*, p. 277). The cross-cultural and spiritual significance is thus conferred on Tianyi’s geographical and topographical displacement (Fraisie, 2010, p. 639). It is worth mentioning that Cheng actually first intended to employ “là-bas le fleuve” (“there the river”) as the title of the novel, which was rejected by his editor due to its dearth of literary resonance for French readers. If the mountain—lofty, rock-solid, unchanging, finite—embodies the yang principle, Cheng expatiates on water/river—the yin *par excellence*—to express, to borrow Fraisie’s words, “the infinite in the finite” and “the incomplete in the complete” (*ibid.*, my translation). This should add to our understanding of Cheng’s “spiritual journey”, a journey that is far beyond the human individual’s growth and transformation.¹⁸ In this respect, the river for Cheng is readily comparable to the sea for Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad (Beer, 2000, p. 217), and all the more so for Nietzsche (Gillespie & Strong 1988).

River landscape in Cheng not only becomes “the point of departure” and the “staging of theory”, it also establishes a cross-cultural network, a model of comparison, which stimulates “movements of understanding and mediation that [...] are passed

¹⁸ It would be difficult for an article of this length to explore Cheng’s fascination with various rivers in the same way we did for Mount Lu. However, it must be stressed that there is indeed a long tradition of the so-called “river diaries” since the Song dynasty, which describe lengthy trips along rivers. These river diaries “helped to establish the prototype of the literary travel diary in traditional China, which proliferated during the subsequent Ming and Qing dynasties” (Hargett, 2016, pp. 118–119).

to the reader” (Ette, 2003, p. 33). It is on the Yangtze River, just before he leaves for France, that Tianyi listens to a certain Professor F. explain the river “as a symbol of time” in the Daoist tradition:

...we sail through the native region of our beloved Laozi. As you know, he is the founder of Taoism. He developed the concept of the Way, the irresistible universal movement driven by the primal Breath. [...] And yet, if we look at the river as we are now doing, it appears to be heading in a straight line toward its destruction, whereas the Taoists say the Way moves in a circle. [...] So what has given us the idea that the irreversibility of time’s imperious order can be disrupted? Enter the middle Voids inherent in the Way. Breaths themselves, they impart to the Way its rhythm, its respiration; most important, they allow it to effect the mutation of things and to return to the Origin, the very source of the primal Breath. For the river, the middle Voids take the form of clouds. The river, with its origin in the Way, takes its appropriate place in earthly order as well as in the heavenly. Water evaporates from the river, condenses into cloud, falls back into the river as rain, feeding it. (*The River*, pp. 129–130)

This teaching later inspires the protagonist to creatively apply a Daoist reading of Proust’s fluid conception of time:

An explanation I would remember in France upon reading *In Search of Lost Time*. Differing with Proust, I might have written: “In search of time to come.” The law of time, for me at any rate, in keeping with what I had just experienced with the Lover [l’Amante], was not based on the accomplished, the finished, but on the postponed [*différé*], the unfinished. I had to pass through the Void and the Exchange. (*ibid.*, p. 131)

Similarly, before deciding to return to China, Tianyi spends his last days visiting the Loire with Véronique, retracing its source; and the protagonist thinks of his childhood experience of discovering the Yangtze River with his father: “The man in exile who contemplated the vast landscape, was he not the child of Asia who had gazed upon the River Yangzi with his father and who had gone up other rivers, to other sources? Then and now, it was the same discovery: a long, wide river begins as a tiny trickle of water buried under impenetrable grass” (*ibid.*, 187).

Surrounded by “foreign” landscape, Tianyi seems to become ever more conscious of his “revised” theoretical position:

Upriver to the source. Would it be the beginning of a new life? Or the end of another? That time is cyclical and that each new cycle brings changes both foreseen and unexpected was an old theme, an integral part of my vision, and I no longer doubted its validity. [...] In this foreign country, now a new person, by an act of will couldn't I cut the roots of the past, untie the most inextricable knots? Cut the roots? Maybe. Since man is merely a creature gliding over the surface of the earth, an animal the culture hands a few tried and true ways, is he really so deeply rooted that he can't imagine being transplanted? (ibid., pp. 187–188)

The Daoist cyclical vision of river as time still holds true for Tianyi. However, a new theoretical issue of “route” and “root” is raised in this foreign land. Thus, to echo Ette's remark, “the theory of the landscape turns into a landscape of theory” (Ette, 2003, p. 33).

Quests for Knowledge and Love

Tianyi does not, of course, move through mountains and rivers simply out of aesthetic pleasure or theoretical reflection. His cross-cultural return journey is indelibly marked by the notion of quest. While Tianyi's departure for Europe under a governmental study grant can be perceived as a quest for knowledge, his resolute return to a much altered, dangerous China to join his loved ones, practically declining a romantic invitation to stay in Europe, is reminiscent of Odysseus's homecoming quest for Penelope in Ithaca after twenty years away. The title of the final part of the novel, “myth of return”, seems to encourage such a reading.¹⁹

The quest for “Western knowledge” is a key *twofold* travel motif in the novel, which puts cross-cultural history in dialogue with the present. Prior to Tianyi's journey to Europe, he has voluntarily followed a Buddhist Chan master and received careful instructions on Chinese painting and calligraphy. The Chan master

¹⁹ But “myth” here can also be understood in the vulgar sense describing something that did not happen and is untrue, since the author himself did not return to China in reality.

subsequently recommends Tianyi to Professor C., who is seeking recruits with the skills to work at the Dunhuang Caves, a Buddhist archaeological site which can be traced back to the fourth century and was rediscovered in the twentieth century. By introducing Dunhuang to the narrative, Cheng naturally invokes the *topos* of the Silk Road, as Tianyi depicts: “Dunhuang was in the far western region of China, in the modern province of Gansu, on the old Silk Road” (*The River*, p. 112). In ancient China, “the West” is generally used to refer to today’s India. It is by this road that Buddhism was first indirectly transmitted from India to China, and for centuries, especially from the fourth century onward, Chinese Buddhist monks made pilgrimages along the Silk Road to the “Western regions” (西域) in order to obtain sacred Buddhist scriptures. From around the fifth century, the prosperous city of Dunhuang “began serving as a place of exchange between China and the outside world as well as a stop for Buddhist pilgrims” (*The River*, p. 112).

One of the best-known pilgrim monks is called Xuanzang from the early Tang dynasty. His legendary travel to India (AD 626–645) in search of Buddhist knowledge is a milestone in Chinese religious history. After his return to China, he devoted himself entirely to the translation of hundreds of Buddhist texts directly from Sanskrit to Chinese.²⁰ He organized sophisticated, large-scale “translation forums” (译场) for collaborations and significantly advanced contemporaneous Chinese translation theories (notably from the dominant ‘literal’ or ‘simple’ *wen* style) (ibid., p. 7).²¹ Moreover, at the Tang Emperor’s politically motivated request, Xuanzang authored *The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* (大唐西域记) (AD 646) which provides an unprecedentedly comprehensive account of an allegedly 128 kingdoms (Ji, 1990 [1985], p. 112) along the journey, elaborating on their geopolitical and social aspects. The popular Chinese idiom *xitian qujing* 西天取经 (pilgrimage to the West for Buddhist Sutra)

²⁰ For detailed calculation of the “rolls”, the “fascicles”, and the “volumes”, see Ji (1990 [1985], pp. 6–7).

²¹ For a schematic comparison between early Chinese and Western translations of religious texts and how they consequently influenced thinking on translation in each tradition, see Bassnett and Lefevere (1998, pp. 12–24).

derives from this historical event, which is now generally used to mean “learning from the West”. The transhistorical comparison between Xuanzang and Tianyi, and by extension, Cheng, becomes all the more compelling if we remind ourselves of Cheng’s other career as a literary translator of ancient Tang poetry from Chinese to French, and of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Apollinaire, and Michaux from French to Chinese.

The Chan master explicitly draws Tianyi’s attention to the analogy between China’s profoundly consequential encounter with Indian thought and art centuries before and that between China and the West today:

Didn’t our masters of the eighth through the eleventh centuries assimilate Indian art? Because they were steeped in their own living tradition, they could absorb outside influences without renouncing their own world. The more familiar they were with the finest in their own tradition the more easily they recognized the finest in another. I’m telling you this because you, you will have to face what is different. Once this war is over, I think it inevitable for China and the West to encounter each other on a deeper level, especially since the West is so free and so receptive to outside influences, even Asian. (*The River*, p. 111)

In studying the turbulent migrant, transcultural experience of Jean-Christophe from Romain Roland’s eponymous Bildungsroman, Tianyi himself becomes aware of the exigencies of ongoing dialogues for intercultural transformation:

With all its dramatic events, the tumultuous history of Jean-Christophe, seeking fulfilment through three cultures—German, French, and Italian—inspired every one of us at a time when we too aspired to metamorphoses. We knew that, after its long dialogue with India and Islam, Chinese culture had reached a point where the West was an essential voice and could not be ignored [*plus qu’essentielle, incontournable*]. (*The River*, p. 53)

However, the kind of spiritual knowledge which defines Tianyi’s quest is not Buddhism, or any particular theological enquiry per se. As has been argued elsewhere, “Cheng’s true religion is art.”²²

²² This is a crucial connection between Cheng and Proust in the light of the former’s self-proclaimed “*démarche proustienne*”. For an extensive exploration of this literary relation, see S. Li (2017a, pp. 153–219).

A fundamental epistemic contribution of Tianyi's cross-cultural journey is the consistent construction of cultural and artistic "parallels" and "equivalents" that bridges our understanding and appreciation of both Western and Eastern cultural heritages. The discussion of the protagonist's learning about one particular artistic medium—painting, calligraphy, literature, theatre, or music—is typically provoked by an encounter with something epistemically new in one culture, then compared and contrasted with what the protagonist already knows about that medium in another culture. The respective theory and historical development are then fleshed out. The actualization, cross-fertilization, and blending of, and the constant re-negotiation between two different cultural traditions, result in a kind of transcultural, intermedial aesthetic epitomized by the novel itself. Cheng firmly believes in the "primacy of the arts in spiritual life" and "he understands the highest and most sacred achievement of art as creating 'dialogue'—dialogues between cultures, art and nature, self and other—aiming at 'transcendence' and universal harmony" (S. Li, 2017a, p. 199).²³ If time and movement are crucial to the protagonist's physical and psychological growth, cross-cultural exposure and contact, as well as intellectual and artistic training, signal moments of transformative epiphany, which profoundly shape Tianyi's (and by extension, Cheng's) migrant identity, highlighting his liminal disposition with regard to cultures. There is a clear parallel between the physical and the inner in Tianyi's journey.

The departing quest for Western knowledge is complemented by a return quest for love. Whereas Tianyi's journey to the West conveys a clear sense of geographical destination, his home-returning is portrayed paradoxically as a myth-infused "downward", meandering, and seemingly perpetual journey of a transient nature. To be reunited with his loved ones is to be home; the return to the "root" effectively becomes the continuation of another "route". As in mythology where "our world has always been a middle earth, with different forms of experience above and below it" (Frye, 1990, p. 216),²⁴ Tianyi's return journey shows a palpable

²³ In this section of the book, I offer many concrete examples with detailed analysis of Cheng's 'comparatist' approach to the arts.

²⁴ This idea of "middle earth" should add to our understanding of Cheng's formulation of the "Middle" Kingdom discussed in the introduction.

sense of *vertical* movement, echoing the myth of Orpheus and that of Dante. Tianyi returns to China after l’Amante’s calling (‘Return! [...] Here you are at last! Here we are at last!’) (*The River*, p. 188), only to find out, like Orpheus looking back at Eurydice near the threshold of the underworld, that l’Amante is lost forever. Instead, he learns of the survival of l’Ami and decides to undertake another journey to join l’Ami from the South to the Great Northern Wilderness (北大荒) of China. At the beginning of the final part, Tianyi remarks: “to rejoin the Lover [l’Amante]! [...] I know that returning to an altered, unrecognizable China will be a veritable descent into hell” (*The River*, p. 191). Towards the end, after rejoining l’Ami, Tianyi says: “I am accompanying my friend on his journey through hell” (*ibid.*, 256), like Dante in Virgil’s company through the nine circles of hell. Resonating with Orpheus’s turning of passion to boys after his eventual failure to retrieve Eurydice, Tianyi’s reunion with l’Ami quickly develops into a kind of homoerotic companionship.

The myth of Orpheus is explicitly compared to the Buddhist legend of Mulian, “just as when my mother died, I think of the Buddhist legend of Mulian in hell. Mixed into it now is a European legend, that of Orpheus” (*ibid.*, p. 191). Tianyi learns about this legend from the wall painting at the above-mentioned archaeological site of Dunhuang. It recounts how the devout Buddhist Mulian descended to the underworld, facing a thousand trials to free his deceased mother’s soul. The earliest source of this Buddhist legend is indeed found in the Dunhuang Caves. It is generally suspected to have a certain Indian origin, but there is not yet any concrete evidence. The Buddhist story of Ksitigarbha, one of the four principal bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism, shows a diegetic similarity, i.e. the descent to hell, and this latter legend is also depicted in the Dunhuang Caves.²⁵ The apparent, and in many ways, surprising emphasis on “filial piety” in the Buddhist tale of Mulian is in all likelihood due to the influence of Confucianism in China (Bary and Lufrano, 2000, pp. 93–95). It can already be regarded as a *sinicized* version of the “original” myth, an exemplar of cultural translation and amalgamation between ancient

²⁵ For an introduction and analysis of the manuscripts found in Dunhuang, where these legends were first recorded in China, see Mair (1989).

India and China. Therefore, in comparing the myths of Mulian and Orpheus, Cheng, again, subtly draws the analogy between China's two historical encounters with the "West". Cheng's fascination with myths in his "comparatist" approach to cultures may be best explained in Tianyi's following words:

Since my stay in Dunhuang and my visit to the Campo Santo of Pisa where I saw the frescoes of the Master of Death, [...] I have come to believe that *only a mythic vision* allows mankind to assume control of what cannot be fully verbalized. Who among us can claim to take the measure of real life, to know how deep it sinks its roots, how far it extends its branches? (*The River*, p. 259, my italics)

Travel as Translation

Historical progression, geographical displacement, landscape appreciation, cross-cultural encounter, personal quests, artistic pilgrimage, and transhistorical analogy, these are essential components of Tianyi's—and to some extent, the author's—journey, inner and outer, in space and in time. They constitute the most recurrent and important travel motifs in the novel, each establishing a "layer" of structure. My approach to these issues combines the critical angles of Bildungsroman, Künstlerroman, and travel writing. Because of the deliberate fictionalization and imaginative reconstruction of the narrative, *Le Dit* may not count as a "real" piece of travel writing in its strict definition.²⁶ However, as has been explored, not only is the novel saturated with the above-mentioned travel motifs, some of the novel's particular methods of observation and enquiry are directly informed by established travel literature, especially in the classical Chinese tradition, creating a palpable transcultural intertextual presence.

The relationship between travel and translation is brought to prominence in Cheng's translingual creative practice.²⁷ In general

²⁶ For a snapshot of the debate on the problematic definition of travel writing, especially in relation to the factual and the fictional, see T. Youngs (2013, pp. 3–5).

²⁷ The theoretical relation between travel and translation has been extensively studied by scholars in both travel literature and translation studies. See J. Clifford (1997), M. Cronin (2000), and L. Polezzi (2006).

terms, travel writing is a “translating genre insofar as each individual experience is transformed into collective reservoirs of knowledge or at least will be set into relation with them but also because cultural forms of expression of the Other as foreign have to be rendered into the language of one’s own” (Ette, 2003, p. 26). Both travel and translation are “frequently seen as metaphors of mobility and flux” (Polezzi, 2006, p. 175). In *Le Dit*, this relationship is made all the more compelling—the novel fictionally “stages” a sophisticated theory of such a dynamic relationship. Cheng’s fictional exploration of the notion of translation goes far deeper than the “apparently general application” of the term “used for comparison in a strategic and contingent way” (Clifford, 1997, p. 39),²⁸ which says little more than the mere etymology of “translation” as “carried across”. I have extensively quoted Cheng’s work of translation from classical Chinese to modern French to demonstrate the author’s sensitivity to the bilingual textuality and bi-cultural reality in his novelistic fabric, which entails a heightened self-reflexivity. *Le Dit* is not an ordinary travellers’ tale about the foreign land told in his or her native tongue, it is a *mise en scene* of a migrant’s liminal self-positioning between two cultures through languages. Tianyi is not simply a traveller who constantly crosses national borders; rather, he is, like Cheng, a cultural *passeur* (“ferryman”) or commuter who linguistically translates, epistemically transforms, and spiritually transcends his own individual experience of *migrance*.²⁹

The “liminality of migrant experience”, “the migrant culture of the ‘in-between’” and the “space of the translation of cultural difference *at the interstices*” are of course defining characteristics of Homi Bhabha’s (1994, p. 224, italics in the original) influential formulation of “cultural translation” beyond the strict linguistic

²⁸ Clifford’s rather vague employment of the term “translation” in the context of travel writing has met with serious criticism from scholars working in translation studies (Cronin, 2000, pp. 102–104; Polezzi, 2006, p. 175).

²⁹ I draw on Caroline Quignolot-Eysel’s (1999) astute French formulation of *migrance* (in the context of migrant women’s writings): ‘à la fois migration et errance, souvent souffrance mais, au bout du compte, renaissance dans la jouissance’. The ideas of ultimate ‘renaissance’ and ‘jouissance’ through his translingual creative practice are all-pervasive in Cheng’s (2003) inaugural address at the Academie française.

medium. Much like Cronin and Polezzi's objection to Clifford's loose, metaphorical use of "translation" for travel writing, critics of Bhabha's concept of cultural translation—which employs Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* as a prime example—also voice serious reservations about calling it "translation", as it "does not involve two texts, or even one text, and certainly not more than one language" (Trivedi, 2005). In this respect, Cheng's version of cultural translation, a kind of "theory as fiction", quite rightly addresses the critical problem by attending to both the metaphorical and the linguistic notions of translation. Indeed, other than the number of Chinese texts that have been identified as the "sources" of Cheng's linguistic and cultural translation, critics have also duly observed how this translation process has visibly affected Cheng's creative use of the French language, creating a style unique to Franco-Chinese writers (Croiset, 2010; Li, 2017b, pp. 191–193). Perhaps even more significantly, while fictionally putting travel and translation in a multifarious relation, Cheng also assumes a certain ethical responsibility for cultural representations, which is why he self-consciously adopts a "comparatist" approach to even the smallest cultural details, makes cross-cultural analogies, and creates liminal spaces in which differences and power relations can be constantly renegotiated.

For Cheng, in-betweenness, liminality, or interstitiality, seems to be the *sine qua non* of cultural transcendence through exchange, as he asserts: "True transcendence, paradoxically, is located in the *between*, in that which bursts forth most intensely when decisive exchange between beings and Being takes place" (2008a, p. 18). Travel and translation produce narratives crossing borders. But the travel motifs and the idea and practice of translation in *Le Dit* do not in fact presuppose or posit a journey—be it metaphorical or literal—from A to B; rather, they aim at a linguistic and cultural reorientation of both A and B *towards* a C that is always in the process of becoming, "à venir" ("to come"), and "dans le différencié" ("differing and deferring").³⁰ Indeed, Cheng's configuration of self and other in relation to the idea of transcendence is

³⁰ These two phrases are borrowed from Tianyi's reflection on Proust's conception of time mentioned earlier. Here it is cited from the French original to highlight the poststructuralist vocabulary (*The River*, p. 192).

recognizably in line with other well-established poststructuralist thinkers’ works,³¹ from Derrida’s “deconstructive” openness for new meanings (Stoker, 2012, p. 20), to the ethical acceptance and negotiation of one’s own boundaries with the other in Luce Irigaray’s formulation of “horizontal transcendence”,³² and finally to Gayatri Spivak’s (2003, pp. 72–73; 2015, pp. 290–292) theory of “planetarity” which points to a strong sense of alterity, a kind of fundamental intention towards the other. In sum, what we can see in Cheng’s *Le Dit* are both an embodiment and an allegory of travel and translation, which signal fundamental human interaction that inspires informed imagination and provokes lateral thinking about cultural representations, simultaneously engendering something “new” and recreating something “old” for a planetary possibility of cultural transcendence.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my colleague at Lund University Peter Sivam who kindly let me consult his personal collection of books on the Silk Road.

References

- Bassnett, S. & Levefere, A. (1998). *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Beer, G. (2000). *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bary, W. D. de and R. Lufrano. (2000). *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. Volume Two. Second Edition. New York: Columbia University Press.

³¹ For a brief introduction of Cheng’s intellectual training and active participation in the structuralist and poststructuralist debate in France in the 1980s, see S. Li (2017, pp. 129–130).

³² For an argument on Irigaray’s horizontal transcendence as self-limitation, see A. Halsema (2008, pp. 822–823).

- Bertaud, M. (2011). *François Cheng: Un cheminement vers la vie ouverte. Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée*. Paris: Hermann.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Braak, A. V. D. (2012). "Nishitani's Rethinking of Transcendence as Trans-Descendence," in Stoker, W. and Merwe, W. L. V. D. (eds.) *Culture and Transcendence: A Typology of Transcendence*. Leuven: Peeters, pp. 207–216.
- Caroline, Q.-E. (1999). *De la migration à la migrance, ou de l'intérêt de la psychanalyse pour les écritures féminines*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.limag.refer.org/Textes/Iti27/Quignolot.htm> (Accessed 20 April 2017).
- Cheng, F. (1991). *Vide et plein: Le langage pictural chinois*. Paris: Seuil.
- (2000). *The River Below*. New York: Welcome Rain.
- (2003). *Discours de réception de François Cheng*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/discours-de-reception-de-francois-cheng> (Accessed 20 April 2017).
- (2006 [1989]). *Souffle-Esprit: Textes théoriques chinois sur l'art pictural*. Paris: Seuil.
- (2009a). *Way of Beauty: Five Meditations for Spiritual Transformation*. Rochester and Toronto: Inner Traditions.
- (2009b). 中文序 [Chinese Preface]. In: 天一言 [Tianyi's Saying]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, pp. 1–4.
- (2014). *Et le souffle devient signe: Portrait d'une âme à l'encre de Chine*. Paris: L'Iconoclaste.
- Chu, X. (2014). "Le Langage romanesque de François Cheng dans Le Dit de Tianyi," in *François Cheng à la croisée de la Chine et de l'Occident*. Genève: Droz, pp. 39–48.
- Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Croiset, S. (2010). "Écrivains chinois d'expression française: l'étrangeté entre respect et altération de la langue," in Kassab-Charfi, S. (ed.) *Altérité et mutations dans la langue: Pour une stylistique des littératures francophones*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia Bruylant, pp. 83–97.

- Cronin, M. (2000). *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*. Cork: Cork University Press.
- Ette, O. (2003). *Literature on the Move*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Fraisse, L. (2010). *La Petite Musique du style: Proust et ses sources littéraires*. Paris: Classiques Garnier.
- Frye, N. (1990). “The Journey as Metaphor”. In: R. D. Denham, ed. *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays, 1974–1988*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, pp. 212–226.
- Gillespie, M. A. & Strong, T. B. (1988). *Nietzsche’s New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Halsema, A. (2008). “Horizontal Transcendence: Irigaray’s Religion after Ontotheology,” in de Vries, H. (ed.) *Religion: Beyond a Concept*. New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 813–825.
- Hargett, J. M. (2016). “Chinese Travel Writing,” in Thompson, C. (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*. London: Routledge, pp. 112–124.
- Hulme, P. & Youngs, T. (2002). “Introduction,” in Hulme, P. and Youngs, T. (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–16.
- Ji, X. (1990 [1985]). “前言 [Preface],” in Ji, X. (ed.) 大唐西域记校注 [The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions by Xuan Zang]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, pp. 1–138.
- Kellman, S. G. (2000). *The Translingual Imagination*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press.
- Li, S. (2017a). *Proust, China and Intertextual Engagement: Translation and Transcultural Dialogue*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- (2017b). “Transcultural Novels and Translating Cultures: François Cheng’s *Le Dit de Tianyi* and *L’Éternité n’est pas de trop*,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 53(2), pp. 179–199.
- Mair, V. (1989). *T’ang Transformation Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Polezzi, L. (2006). “Translation, Travel, Migration,” *The Translator*, 12(2), pp. 169–188.

- Rorty, R. (2005). "On the Inspirational Value of Great Works of Literature," in Lee, M. (ed.) *Debating the Canon: A Reader from Addison to Nafisi*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 271–278.
- Spivak, G. (2015). "Planetarity". *Paragraph*, 38(2), pp. 290–292.
- (2003). *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stoker, W. (2012). "Culture and Transcendence: A Typology". In: W. L. V. D. Merwe & W. Stoker, eds. *Culture and Transcendence: A Typology of Transcendence*. Leuven: Peeters, pp. 5–26.
- Toury, G. (1984). "Translation, Literary Translation and Pseudo-translation," in *Comparative Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 73–86.
- Trivedi, H. (2005). "Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation". [Online] Available at: <https://iwp.uiowa.edu/91st/vol4-num1/translating-culture-vs-cultural-translation> [Accessed 20 April 2017].
- Watson, B., trans. (2007). *The Analects of Confucius*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Youngs, T. (2013). *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yu, G. (1983). "The Sensuous Art of the Chinese Landscape Journal," *Renditions*, 19–20, pp. 23–40.

About the Authors

Mattias Aronsson (PhD) is Associate Professor in French at Dalarna University, Sweden. His main research area is contemporary French literature (twentieth and twenty-first centuries), and he has published articles and book chapters focused on reader-response, gender, postcolonial and translation studies.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1332-5467>.

Lovisa Berg is a senior lecturer of Arabic at Dalarna University and the head of the Arabic department. She has a PhD in Arabic and Islamic studies from Edinburgh University (2017) where she wrote on the topic of masculinity formulation in the fiction of Syrian female writers during the 20th century. Her main research topics are modern Syrian literature, Syrian drama series and gender studies. She teaches Arabic literature and language on both undergraduate and graduate level.

ORCHID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9343-1878>

Arianna Dagnino holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of South Australia and an MA in Modern Languages from the Università degli Studi di Genova. In 2017 she was granted a SSHRC postdoctoral fellowship to conduct research on literary self-translation at the University of Ottawa. She is currently teaching as a Sessional Lecturer at the University of British Columbia. Her research interests are in the fields of transcultural studies, translation and film adaptation of literary texts. Her publications include the transcultural novel *The Afrikaner* (Guernica Editions, Toronto, 2019), which she self-translated from Italian and is now adapting to the screen, and *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility* (Purdue University Press, 2015), which consists of a creative nonfiction piece and of a critical exegesis on transnational flows, identity and belonging.

ORCHID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7298-9116>

Veronica De Pieri is currently a Research Fellow at Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna on female journalism, trauma studies and testimonial narratives. She is also an Honorary Fellow and a former PhD in Japanese studies at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Her interests have been focusing on testimonial narrative, trauma studies and the ethics of memory since 2011, with a comparative literature perspective (Shoah literature, atomic bombing literature, post-3.11 literature). De Pieri has been collaborating with Kyoto University for the translation of atomic bomb testimonies (NET-GTAS) for the Hiroshima Peace Museum since 2013. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0041-2710>

Rita Dirks is Associate Professor of English at Ambrose University, Calgary. Her PhD dissertation “The Symbolist Novel as Secular Scripture: Huysmans, Wilde, and Bely” explored the idea of French, English, and Russian Modernism and Decadence in relation to religious thought of the *fin-du-siècle*. Her research and publishing interests in Decadence and Modernism continue into the present, with recent and forthcoming publications on Bliss Carman, Arthur Symons, and Oscar Wilde. She is co-editor of *Peter Svarich, Memoirs, 1877–1904* (1999). Currently she is working on a manuscript on the novels of Canadian author Miriam Toews.

Chatarina Edfeldt is a senior lecturer of Portuguese and a member of the Literature, Identity and Transculturality research group at Dalarna University. She is a member of research program “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular Dynamics in World Literature” (Sweden) and of the research group “Intersexualities” at ILCML (Institute of Comparative Literature) at the University of Porto. Her research focuses on Portuguese-speaking literature and culture, and World literature from a Feminist, Gender and Post-colonial perspective. She has published books and articles on the topics of gender issues, literary historiography and Portuguese-speaking women writers. Her most recent book is a co-edited volume *Transcultural Identity Constructions in a Changing World* (Peter Lang 2016).

Katalin Egri Ku-Mesu is Teaching Fellow on the distance MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL programme at the University of

Leicester. In her research, she has focused on post-colonial literature, first from a literary theoretical, then from an interdisciplinary perspective. She has published on Ayi Kwei Armah, the interpretation of hybrid texts, the survival of African literature and has contributed to *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia* (Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001). Her book on *Cultural Reference in Modern Ghanaian English-language Fiction* is forthcoming from Rodopi.
 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/000-0003-4264-1896>

Anneli Fjordevik is a senior lecturer in German at Dalarna University (Sweden), where she teaches German. She has written articles and teaching materials in the fields of Intertextuality, Intermediality, women's writing around 1800 in German literature, fan activities and German digital literature. She presented her doctoral thesis at Uppsala University: *Heinrich von Kleists Amphitryon. Ein Lustspiel nach Molière unter dem Aspekt der Intertextualität im Gesamtwerk* in 2004.

Dan Fujiwara is associate professor at University of Toulouse – Jean Jaurès and research fellow of French Research Institute for Eastern Asia (IFRAE). He has been also teaching fellow at INALCO and University of Strasbourg. After having received his Ph.D. from University Paris Diderot, he shifted from modern French Literature to modern and contemporary Japanese literature. His current research focuses on representations of adolescence and family in modern and contemporary Japanese novels, “border-crossing literature” (*ekkyō bungaku*), especially the works of Ribí Hideo, Mizumura Minae, and Tawada Yōko, post-3.11 literature, and narratology.
 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3010-0868>

Billy Gray is Associate Professor of English at Dalarna University, Sweden. He is one of three Series Editors for the Peter Lang Cultural Identity Series and edits the section on history, politics and culture in the peer-reviewed journal *Nordic Irish Studies*. He wrote his Phd thesis on the influence of Islamic philosophy on the work of Doris Lessing and has published widely on writers such as Hubert Butler, Chris Arthur, Patrick McCabe, Owen McNamee, Derek Lundy, J.M. Coetzee and Jenny Diski, amongst others. He is coordinator of the MA programme in English

Literature and currently active in the ISTUD research group at Dalarna University as well as a member of the DEDAL-LIT research group, based in Lleida, Spain, which primarily focuses on issues relating to Literary Gerontology.

Hiroko Inose is a senior lecturer in the Japanese department at the Dalarna University (Sweden). She has taught courses on Japanese-English translation, Japanese literature, as well as Japanese popular culture. Her main interest includes cultural translation, literary translation and translation of popular culture, especially manga. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1259-6553>

Bo G Jansson is Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at Dalarna University. In 1990, he defended his doctoral thesis at Uppsala University. Between the years of 1992 and 1996, he was employed as Senior Lecturer of Swedish and Researcher in Comparative Literature at the Institute of Scandinavian Languages and Literature at Aarhus University while also teaching periodically at the Department of Literature, Uppsala University. He became associate professor in Comparative Literature at Dalarna University in 2005 and in 2010 Professor. His research focuses mainly on issues of narrative theory as well as on the relationship between modern print culture and post-modern internet-culture.

Dunja Jelesijevic is Assistant Professor of Comparative Study of Religions & Asian Studies at Northern Arizona University. She holds a Ph.D. in Japanese religion from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She studied at Nagoya University as a Japan Foundation Fellow. Her research interests include premodern Japanese religion, literature, and performance arts, with a specific focus on religious aspects of Noh theater. Her broader interests include East Asian Buddhism and East Asian folk religions, as well as Chinese religion, philosophy, and literature. Dr. Jelesijevic has written and presented on the topics of religion and ritual in a number of Noh plays.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2914-8450>

Herbert Jonsson received his PhD in Japonology from Stockholm University in 2006. He is associate professor of Japanese at Dalarna University, Sweden, where he has taught Japanese

language and literature since 2007. His main field of research has been Japanese *haikai* poetry and the theory of verse linking in the 17th and 18th centuries. He has published articles on the poetics of classical *haikai* and a monograph on the linked poetry of Yosa Buson. At present, he is working on a research project about the poetics of sketching in modern and contemporary Japanese haiku by female poets.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8111-7603>

Carolina Leon Vegas holds a PhD in Spanish Literature from Lund University and currently works for Dalarna University as assistant professor. In her doctoral thesis she studies the male characters and desire in three plays by Federico García Lorca. In the last years, her research interest has moved to contemporary literature written in Spain and its portrait of the financial crisis from 2008. She has studied writers such as Marta Sanz, Isaak Rosa, Javier Moreno and Belen Gopegui and focused on aspects related to urban space, otherness, activism and migration.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3287-6763>

Shuangyi Li is a Research Fellow in French and Comparative Literature at Lund University, funded by the Swedish Research Council. He received his Ph.D. at the University of Edinburgh (UK) and had also studied at the École Normale Supérieure (Paris) and l'Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium). His first monograph Proust, China and Intertextual Engagement: Translation and Transcultural Dialogue (Palgrave: 2017) won the ICLA Anna Balakian Prize 2019. He is interested in travel/migrant/transcultural writings as well as translation studies. Shuangyi is currently completing his second monograph on Franco-Chinese literature and visual arts.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0161-1925>

Carles Magrinyà Badiella, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer at Dalarna University and Uppsala University. His background is in Hispanic Literary Studies and his research interests include contemporary Afro-Hispanic migration narratives. Other research areas are Western Esotericism studies, alchemy and esoteric disciplines in the literature from the Spanish Golden Age. He is currently a member of the editorial board of the Cultural Identity Studies

series, Peter Lang, and participates in the project *Temporalities and Subjectivities of Crossing: Contemporary Public Migration Narratives in Europe*, in collaboration with the University of Oslo. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6082-1749>

Jamie Matthews, PhD, is Senior Lecturer in Communication and Media at Bournemouth University. His research interests include international communication, journalism studies, with a particular interest in disaster journalism, media framing of crises and conflict and its intersection with public opinion dynamics. Some of his recent work has been published in journals including *Asian Journal of Communication*, *International Communication Gazette* and *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. He is the co-editor of *Media, Journalism and Disaster Communities* (2020). ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0621-6086>

Amelia Miholca is a Ph.D. candidate at Arizona State University. For her Art History dissertation, she is researching how the Romanian avant-garde magazines of the 1920s continued and restructured the Dada movement while taking into account Romanian Jewish identity, exile, and nationalism. Amelia presented on the Romanians of Dada Zurich at the 2018 College Art Association Conference in Los Angeles. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5109-8560>

Eriberto Russo holds a PhD in German literature from the University of Salerno (Italy). He is currently Adjunct Professor of German language and translation at the University of Naples Suor Orsola Benincasa. His scientific interests focus on the concept of structuring intercultural and transcultural identity within the German-written literature, on the relationship between literary canon and intercultural literature. He has written and is planning publications on Kafka, Tawada, Meerbaum-Eisinger, Janeczek, Hoffmann and Özdamar. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4637-481X>

Cecilia Schwartz is Associate Professor of Italian at Stockholm University. Her research is focused on transnational Italian literature and she is currently participating in the research programme *Cosmopolitan and Vernacular Dynamics in World*

Literatures. With Laura Di Nicola she has edited the volume *Libri in viaggio. Classici italiani in Svezia* (2013). Some of her recent publications include the articles ‘Semi-Peripheral Dynamics’ (2017) and ‘Worlding the library’ (2019), as well as chapters in the volumes *World literature. Exploring the Cosmopolitan-Vernacular Exchange*, edited by Stefan Helgesson et al (Stockholm University Press 2018), *Sociologies of Poetry Translation. Emerging perspectives* (Bloomsbury 2019) edited by Jacob Blakesley and the forthcoming volume *Topics and concepts in literary translation* (Routledge, 2020), edited by Roberto Valdeón.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5751-8834>

Gonzalo Soltero is an author and professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in León, Guanajuato. He has published five books of fiction and several academic articles and book chapters. His key research interest at the moment is the role of narratives in the construction of social problems and public policy, such as the War on Drugs, toxic masculinity and justice. As part of a Newton Advanced Fellowship from the British Academy he is currently finishing a book about conspiracy narratives in Mexico.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2974-7987>

Which is the identity of a traveler who is constantly on the move between cultures and languages? What happens with stories when they are transmitted from one place to another, when they are retold, remade, translated and re-translated? What happens with the scholars themselves, when they try to grapple with the kaleidoscopic diversity of human expression in a constantly changing world?

These and related questions are explored in the chapters of this collection. Its overall topic, narratives that pass over national, language and ethnical borders includes studies about transcultural novels, poetry, drama, and the narratives of journalism. There is a broad geographic diversity, not only in the collection as a whole, but also in each of the single contributions. This in turn demands a multitude of theoretical and methodological approaches, which cover a spectrum of concepts from such different sources as post-colonial studies, linguistics, religion, aesthetics, art, and media studies, often going beyond the well-known Western frameworks.

The works of authors like Miriam Toews, Yoko Tawada, Javier Moreno, Leila Abouela, Marguerite Duras, Kyoko Mori, Francesca Duranti, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, Riibi Hideo, and François Cheng are studied from a variety of perspectives. Other chapters deal with code-switching in West African novels, border crossing in the Japanese noh drama, translational anthologies of Italian literature, urban legends on the US-Mexico border, migration in German children's books, and war trauma in poetry. Most of the chapters are case studies of specific works and authors, and may thus be of interest, not only for specialists, but also for the general reader.



ISBN 978-91-7635-143-7



9 789176 351437