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The AALITRA Review

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(Re)translating Colette: Reflections on gender, performance and feminism

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How does Colette sound – and look – in twenty-first-century English? A shapeshifter herself, French writer Colette performed on stage and wrote autofiction *avant la lettre*. Her work and persona have since been interpreted and reinvented through retranslations, performances, and adaptations, while her ambivalent relationship to feminism has been repeatedly reframed. In this article, I reflect on the challenges of "performing" Colette anew in my translation of her novel *La Vagabonde* (OUP, 2025). I situate the translator's work at both the macro level of cultural context and the micro level of word choice, asking: What role does translation play in the repackaging of an author for a different moment – particularly amid shifting norms around gender, sexuality and racial identity? I argue for a translational practice that works in doubles rather than binaries, and I conclude with key insights from my process of inhabiting Colette's voice today, which may be useful for translators and scholars navigating similar dynamics.

Introduction

French writer Colette is in the spotlight again. In 2023, the literary world celebrated the 150th anniversary of the writer's birth; in 2024, 70 years after her death, her oeuvre in French came out of copyright; in the post-MeToo era, in the anglophone world, we've seen the release of several new English translations of her works, including two of *Chéri* and *The End of Chéri* (Careau; Eprile), *The Cat and the Masked Woman* (Constantine), my translation *The Vagabond* (Egan) and more forthcoming in 2026, together with the making of the British biopic *Colette* (2018). The independence, 'shame-free sexuality', and 'gender fluidity' that Colette lived and portrayed are perhaps more resonant now than ever (Holmes).

This context and renewed demand for Colette tells us something about the wider culture that shapes translation – from the macro questions of text selection to the micro choices on the page. I came to translate Colette's *La Vagabonde* seemingly by chance. I had pitched an obscure and untranslated author to Oxford University Press; the publishing house rejected my proposal but said they wanted to commission new translations of Colette – was I interested? Of course I was! Who wouldn't want to immerse themselves in Colette's world? Still the question must be asked: why another translation of Colette? There are already three English translations of *La Vagabonde*: Charlotte Remfry-Kidd's in 1912 (long out of print), Enid McLeod's in 1954 (in widespread use) and Stanley Applebaum's in 2010. Why not commission a new author, one not yet heard by Anglophone ears?

There are different theories on *re*translation; some argue that translations age faster than originals; some that each retranslation moves closer to the source text (ST) (Berman); some that retranslating is the work of 'continuance and variation', but not 'progress' (Briggs 47). I like Susan Bernofsky's (in Hond) take:

> I am not convinced that a good translation 'ages' as fast or as fully as some like to claim. I love the early-twentieth century feel of Helen Tracy Lowe-Porter's 1927 translation of *The Magic Mountain*. When I think about 'updating' it, it's less because the language needs replacing than it is that I, in the twenty-first century, see different things in Mann's text.

Where every translation is a rewriting of the ST in some way in line with target culture ideology and demands (Lefevere), each reveals some new angle of the ST *and* tells us something about

the society and culture of the translation's production. Whether translations are seen as timeless or not can tell us something about whether a culture grants value to them as objects in themselves. Enid McLeod's 1954 translation of Colette's *La Vagabonde* for example, still offers a pleasurable read and a fascinating study: it opens a window onto Colette, her protagonist, and Belle Epoque France, but also stages a particular relationship – between McLeod and Colette, French and English, 1910 France and 1950s England – and offers a snapshot of British cultural mores and translation trends.

Which hidden parts of Colette's *La Vagabonde* can I see from my positionality, époque and language today? Which aspects of her work jump out, seeking the spotlight, and which rub at uncomfortable angles? In this article, I ask: What is the role of translation in the repackaging of an author for a different time, specifically in the context of changing gender and cultural norms? I will first introduce the author and the text in question, exploring both the heart of *La Vagabonde*'s appeal, which translation needs to recreate, and its shifting value for readers from different contexts. I will then turn briefly to translation theory on performance – what can help us understand the translator's task? – before elaborating some sticky questions, particularly in terms of identity, and articulating key insights from my process.

Colette and *La Vagabonde*

La Vagabonde was published in 1910, first in serialized form in the magazine *La Parisienne*. The novel is a work of autofiction *avant la lettre:* a fictionalized account of Colette's own life immediately after her divorce in her early thirties, when she performed on stage to make a living. We follow protagonist Renée Néré backstage in the music-halls of Paris and wider France, getting an unprecedented woman's perspective on theatre work and people, and accompany her as she alternately avoids and basks in the attentions of a new suitor. Renée's indecision and difficulty reconciling love and financial and social independence as a woman in the Belle Epoque has had lasting resonance with readers. Indeed, Judith Thurman describes *The Vagabond*, in her introduction to the 2001 edition (McLeod translation) as 'a novel that anticipates, by ninety years, the contemporary fashion for wry, first-person narratives by single, thirty-something women'.

Ahead of its time – or timeless? Central to Colette's appeal, and nowhere more so than in *La Vagabonde*, is the way readers have explored their own fears, complexities, passions, and contradictions through identification. From Americans Vivian Gornick, Erica Jong and Alison Bechdel, to Turkish-born Elif Shafak, to later French thinkers and writers like Simone de Beauvoir and Mona Chollet – so many in different times and places have turned to Colette to better understand a woman's place in the world, and to explore feminisms and queer experiences. Colette had a complex relationship with feminism. On the one hand, she famously detested the suffragettes, saying: 'Me feminist? Oh no! You know what the suffragettes deserve? The whip and the harem.' (Colette, Paris-Théâtre, 1910) And, initially, in France, she was celebrated for her anti-feminist, yet 'feminine' writing, with 'instinctive' descriptions of nature, people, and love (Antonioli 68). On the other hand, her life and writing are transgressive, full of complexity and play with gender roles; she's always been a feminist in the domestic and social sense, if not in the political.

In response to shifting norms, gender politics and audience demand, new editions are released, with new paratextual material; new translations are commissioned. Kathleen Antonioli has articulated the repackaging of Colette in the US context: from the way *The Vagabond* was first received as a trivial novel in the thirties; to being sold as feminist (complete with promotional material in places like Ms Magazine) with the emergence of second wave feminism, where it responded perfectly to new calls for sexual liberation and an understanding of the personal as political; to being depoliticized again as romance (with quotes from the right authors on the cover) in the eighties. While a full look at this packaging in different contexts is

beyond the scope of this piece, a quick snapshot reveals how much reception and interpretation of Colette and *La Vagabonde* are tied up in shifting cultural and gender norms. Today, headlines in the Anglophone press for the 2018 biopic, and the 150th anniversary, are unequivocal; Colette *is* a feminist – feminine and 'racy' too, since these are no longer at odds – (Waxman), though cracks might appear under an intersectional lens (Dize).

Our edition – from OUP, myself, and Helen Southworth, who wrote the critical introduction to the volume – of *The Vagabond* enters this context. Our notes, mediated through marketing, produce a backcover that describes the novel as 'unambiguously feminist and unabashedly sensual', and the translation as 'highlight[ing] Colette's depiction of gender, race, class'. The cover image evokes both Renée's time – a man's (André Derain 1906) vision of a dancer/sex worker at a club – and captures the modern demand for an insight into the subject's interiority, as the woman gazes intriguingly back. So how then to understand the translator's task, within this paratextual, and sociohistorical context? To what extent does/should this wider packaging and expected reception shape translator choices?

Translation as performance

As a translator, I am first a reader, and second a mimic, interpreter, performer. The translator must jump between: bridge the distance between worlds and minds and bodies, to inhabit and speak the author's voice. From Australia to France, 2025 to 1910, from the quiet shadows of translation to stage and spotlight, from my writing voice and my feminism to Colette's. On the one hand, Colette, Renée and I have things in common: gender, age, questions and experiences. I grapple with my own indecision as Renée hesitates over big life choices. I find the gaps between my world and Colette's narrow in certain parts of the text and yawn open in others, as the voice jumps from poetic, meditative, dialogic, epistolary, argotic. Colette's lyrical descriptions of colour and nature feel almost outside time and place, like they can be captured in my English, if I just work hard enough. But other aspects are rooted in bodies, neighbourhoods, milieus, and resist materializing in my voice. Language that feels old-fashioned, offensive, or unintentionally strange (danses nègres, faire la grue, vieille fille); terms of endearment (mon ami, mon vieux) which I can't quite feel or hear in my text. I search for reference points, the voices of other anglophone writers, rummage through my vocabulary repertoire: old chum, dear friend, my love. Translation choices loom large.

Edith Grossman (11-12 qtd. in Bermann), describes translation as performance: 'Like an actor, a translator might be said to 'perform' a source text for her new public, hearing the 'voice' of the author and the sounds of the text in her own mind and then interpreting through different words, in her own voice.' Similarly, Brian Nelson (2023) describes it as 'an art of imitation' which 'involves a multiplicity of exact choices concerning rhythm, register, sound, syntax, tone, texture'.

My goal is textual, on the one hand. I seek to replicate Colette's voice by imitating her rhythm, underlying patterns, word order. I don't read the earlier translations, until I have a solid draft of my own, wanting to hear Colette's voice inside *my* head. I make sure the natural and abstract have agency in my English, like it does in Colette's French (it's the spring that winds back time, the thoughts fleeing across the rooftops, the dawn 'bursting naked and blushing out of a milky sky'); I search hard for the perfect colours, like Renée does, as a writer within the narrative ('the words to describe the yellow of the sun, and the blue of the sea'); I copy the excitable form that holds the protagonist's spirit (Oh, to write!)[1]. I use what English can do, compensating somewhere for an aspect lost elsewhere, switching order where necessary, changing punctuation, but never losing the essence. I love this play with words to get the sounds

[1] This paper builds on my "Translator's Note", further contextualising and elaborating examples and challenges within a theoretical framework.

and images right. And in those timeless and placeless parts of the text, getting it 'right' seems possible. The choices will still bear my mark in some way – *my* preference for certain words, *my* way of speaking, what *I* hear in Colette – but I can find the perfect alliteration, le mot juste, the patterns that make Colette the writer she is.

And yet, voice is not only on the page. In a performance, there are also bodies, a stage, an audience, a location, a society. Michaela Wolf describes the 'performative turn' in translation studies as marking a 'movement away from words, artefacts and textual research towards the understanding of the performative processes of cultural practices'. The text alone does not have all the answers. As we move to slang, dialogue and letters, decisions loom large. Which English does Renée speak? How will distinctions be made, in this new context, between the troupe of vagabonds, whose speech is embedded in their class, gender, milieu? What does replicating register and outdated – now sometimes offensive – language mean, with such huge asymmetries in tools and readership (see Bala on moving away from equivalence)? Getting it 'right' is thrown into question: right for whom? According to which criteria for success? And my intuition doesn't necessarily seem like the right guide, in this realm of the political, where stakes are high.

I bring up tricky terms, controversial references, to everyone: friends, colleagues, family, passing acquaintances, my class of students. I can't help myself, being so ensconced in the text for a time. I raise dilemmas – *danses nègres*: should it be 'Negro dances', 'black dances', the name of a dance that is associated with black culture from the time? People often respond from intuition, their *sense* of the right answer, or justifiably turn the question back on me, to what I want to achieve and to the 'done thing':

- Do you want the reader to enjoy the text, escape into a readable novel, or teach them about Colette, her writing, her time?
- Modernize it or evoke the period feel?
- Censor, or give readers the gritty, raw, problematic truth?
- What does the editor say?
- What does the translation community/scholarship/profession say?

Translation theory has often been spoken about in binaries: Venuti's foreignization and domestication, or Nida's dynamic or formal equivalence. But scholarship has always complicated these poles, as has practice, and there is no one 'done thing'. None of the binary questions make sense to me anyway: I keep wanting to answer *both*. My voice and Colette's, our place and hers. Sandra Bermann (360) discusses how 'translation as performance' implicates a range of voices: not only a 'me' and a 'not-me', but also intertexts, previous translations, and an invitation for audience response. Similarly, Gabriela Saldanha (167) describes a 'conscious embodiment of doubleness', and Kate Briggs asks: 'What is it about this activity, in its difference from single-handed original authorship – the way it complicates the authorial position: sharing it, usurping it, sort of dislocating it.' (20)

When I'm revising my draft, I go to France, I trace Colette's footsteps. Walk to the Palais-Royal, jog in the Bois de Boulogne, take a photo of the Bataclan, flâne along the Canebière in Marseille. Renée's world is both close and distant. I can picture her in the bois, alongside her dog Fossette, but my experience is in 21st century activewear, and there are crowds of people having parties in the park. The Bataclan has been marked by tragedy; a sign in the Palais-Royal announces Colette's former apartment, as a celebrity figure of the past, not a day-to-day presence. A palimpsest. Is this experience of doubling what the translator should evoke for the reader?

How can translation give readers access to the immediacy of Renée's emotion, mindset, and day to day, in their terms, but equally stage the distance, guiding them to Belle Epoque

Paris and that encounter with otherness, with lives that have come before? I play around with finding terms that can do double work: words that were in use in the period, but don't jar too much for readers today ('prudishness' say, instead of 'chastity'; 'acting coy', instead of 'being a harlot'…); French terms that are also accessible to English readers, particularly in context ('soirée', 'centime', 'banlieue'). I avoid terms that pull us out of Renée's world ('penny', say) or that locate us too narrowly or obviously in one region of the Anglophone world. But questions of gender and race remain sticky.

Gender and translation

Patriarchal and gender norms have often shaped translation practices. Feminist translation scholarship has highlighted these trends and sought to revive forgotten voices, revisit previous translations, and even intervene in the gender politics of the ST (see von Flotow, for example). Working on an author like Colette means one pays close attention to the portrayal of gender roles in translation. Past gender norms have informed previous English translations of *La Vagabonde*. Enid McLeod, for example, translates 'collage' (a slang term for living together without being married) as 'living in sin'; 'terrible petite noceuse' (where 'noceuse' is the feminine version for someone who likes to party) as 'terrible little tart'; and 'sacrées petites charognes' (where 'charogne' means a carcass or corpse, but is equally slang for someone disgusting and vile) as 'wretched little sluts'. The mores of 1950s England come through, especially in the sexualization of insults for women, a common trend outside translation too (Montell).

I notice my own biases – albeit different ones to McLeod's – coming through inadvertently at first. For example, when the narrator describes the behaviour of Renée's suitor Max as 'un peu catin' (where 'catin' is an outdated word for prostitute), the first term I try is 'sleazy': a word I associate with masculinity. However, a masculine descriptor erases Colette's subversion of gender roles. My next try, pushing the English towards gender neutral at least, is 'flirtiness' (the phrase: 'with that sly flirtiness men have'). I consider old-fashioned equivalents to 'catin', with terms like 'harlot', 'trollop', 'strumpet', or perhaps the more timeless 'whore', but none work in my sentence, and feel much more jarring for my readers than 'catin' was for Colette's. Even so, I can't help but wonder if my rendering is too soft, if I've sanitized the text by not explicitly referring to prostitution.

I am conscious of working within, and often in resistance to, several tendencies, including:

A. The normalizing tendency of a standardized language (Berman), which would flatten Colette's playful and often unexpected use of gender roles. Elsewhere, for example, Max is described as the 'courtesan' and 'tart', his eyelashes 'feminine, long and glossy'.
B. The pull of default masculine and patriarchal culture, which has at least historically denigrated that which is feminine and favoured and universalized that which is masculine.
C. A (misguided) feminist instinct to soften degrading gendered language, which would negatively affect Colette's complex and raw depiction of gender relations.

In my translation practice, I aim first to avoid sexualizing, denigrating, or exoticizing what is neutral or intentionally ambiguous in the original, even if readers of the ST could interpret certain connotations from context and culture. For example, the narrator describes the young women who are often hanging around Montmartre, wearing skimpy clothes and 'working'. The reader understands the work to be sex work, but the text uses neutral terms, like 'girls' and 'women', to describe those in question. When the narrator notes how the men call them 'sacrée petites charognes' (explained above), since 'they're the kind who don't give in, who don't admit to being hungry, or cold, or in love, who die saying, 'I'm not sick'...", I seek an insult

that readers can interpret themselves. I use ‘witches’ for ‘charognes’ which, like the ST, is gendered feminine but not sexualized, and which evokes the sense, important to this context, of resisting death through mysterious wiles or fierceness.

Second, I don’t gender what would often be neutral in English. Since no language expresses gender in the same way, the different possibilities of English mean sometimes changing the grammatical gender of the ST produces similar cultural resonance. Nouns describing people are inescapably gendered in French – not so in English. ‘Noceuse’ (explained above), for example, could be a ‘party girl’ (Appelbaum), could connote promiscuity, which McLeod interprets for the reader with ‘tart’, and could be the neutral ‘partier’ of my text, since the rest of the passage contextualizes the character’s womanhood and rowdy behaviour. Following my strategy of using terms that could work in Colette’s time and ours, I don’t opt for something like ‘party animal’, whose use can only be dated to the 1970s (OED). With pronouns too, I translate masculine pronouns with masculine pronouns where the signified is clearly a man, but not where it’s an object (eg. the personified ‘love’ is ‘him’ in McLeod’s version, and simply ‘Love’ in mine), or where the default ‘il’ clearly refers to people of different genders (eg. in the context of an unnamed and hypothetical artiste on stage, I use ‘they’). Some might argue that I’m introducing a strange or anachronistic neutral but, as Baron notes, the singular ‘they’, where the gender of the antecedent is unknown or irrelevant, dates back to the 14th century.

My translation grapples with the gendered norms of its language and time to replicate another dynamic. Berman’s (368) work on ‘performing translation’ interestingly highlights how translation enables gaps, slippages, openings in the repetition of gender norms:

> While translation is hardly drag, it can enact a similar theatrical repetition and questioning of social and historical norms. Using the citational potential of its mode, it can exaggerate, highlight, displace, and queer normative expectations across genders and cultures as well as languages.

This perspective reminds us that there is rarely a neutral approach, or one-to-one relationship; rather, translation calls everything into question. It creates space for Colette’s play with gender to infiltrate and shift normal use in English, but also for English responses to Colette’s text to offer new angles on our understanding of the source culture, and form new synapses between French and English.

Race, identity and offensive language

In 2023, when I was working on my first draft, controversy over new bowdlerized English editions of Roald Dahl was in the news. Editors had cut words like ‘fat’ and ‘ugly’ from his writing, and replaced ‘female’ with ‘woman’. With this backdrop of outrage over political correctness, I mulled over certain decisions. There are big differences between my task and the new editions of Dahl of course. For one, Dahl wrote children’s books, where education and socialization are key considerations, and reading critically is not always understood as a given, even if it is desirable (Smith 2023). For two, there is already a perfectly readable text available, which the audience can understand. In my case, I’m working from the French, not from previous translations, and targeting a readership who can’t access the source. Interlingual translation makes everything a decision. The notion of ‘changing’ or even ‘censoring’ the ST in translation can start from a false assumption – that there was a neutral default to begin with, from which to diverge. Even with the closest of language and culture pairs, subtle differences create choices.

Coming back to what to do with ‘danses nègres’: is ‘nègre’ ‘Negro’ or the n* word? Both are options in the bilingual dictionary. Does ‘nègre’ simply mean ‘black’? Would it make

more sense to start with the signified: what dance are we describing, and how can we evoke it in English? The context and intention of use is of course critical: whether the writer is purposefully depicting racism, claiming the label or, as in Colette's case, simply using the normalized language of the time. But none of this information gives us one answer. Different words for black have taken on connotations – with slavery and racism, art movements and négrophilie – which constantly shift; no term evokes the same thing for different readerships, in different contexts.

Informally, I gauged reader response, from non-translators and translators alike, from professional writers and editors, and students. There was the lay reader: the friend or family member, often white, often Australian, who instinctively reacted negatively to terms like 'Negro', even 'black' ('couldn't you describe the dances another way?'); the professional translators who conversely warned me off 'sanitizing' or 'censoring' the text. Later, I read Kaiama L. Glover's nuanced discussion of her English translation of Haitian author René Depestre and her complex attention to audience*s*. Recognizing the heterogeneity of (in her case a post-colonial) readership and the problems of only gauging a Western and urban reader's response', Glover decided to purposefully *not* give value to how a 'non-professional' anglophone reader would react, and to target an Afro-diasporic readership in translation and packaging. Glover's (41) analysis shows how going with instinct, or what has 'a nice ring to it', can be hugely problematic, depending on translator positionality, articulating examples where translations have unintentionally exoticized blackness through a colonial lens.

Colette's lens on blackness and race is of course different – already an exotic, colonial viewpoint, which romanticizes the Roma and so-called primitive art – as is the Oxford World's Classics target readership of undergraduate students studying Colette, likely in the UK and US. But the postcolonial scholarship offers important insight into the potential problems of privileging what sounds right *and* of foreignizing (see Davies 378-379 on the potential pitfalls of a foreignizing approach) – and the need to navigate a tightrope between 'opening a window into an "Other(ed)" culture' and staging stereotypes (Watts 11). Finding language to replicate the racial and cultural relationships in *La Vagabonde* is complex. In the end, I choose 'black' for the dances, as it keeps the racialized language, rather than obscuring it, but does not increase the slur with a seeming equivalent (which has picked up new connotations in time and through the US influence on English) or jarringly offend, in a way at odds with Colette's work. 'Black' aims for the 'doubling' effect I've been seeking, through a term in use in Colette's time and in ours. I'm lucky to be able to embrace footnotes, given the publisher and the objectives of the Oxford World's Classics series, and put layers of history, race relations and art world context there.

In a different example, the French word 'chaloupée' (from 'swing') is used to describe a violent dance between pimp and partner. Other words circulated at the time to describe this dance, including 'danse apache', which was used in both Francophone and Anglophone contexts. 'Apache', from the native American term, entered the French in a meandering way, complete with problematic connotations of savagery, to eventually mean a Parisian gangster. Despite this racialized history, I use 'danse apache' in my translation, as it signifies a specific cultural artefact, which Anglophone readers can find out more about, and critically read into the social structures of *La Vagabonde'*s demimonde backdrop. This term doesn't have the looseness of 'Negro', where shifting meanings could lead the reader who looks no further down the wrong path; 'danse apache' can only take the reader closer to Colette and Belle Epoque France.

As a final example, the narrator describes herself as a 'romanichelle', and a 'bohème'. Previous translations have rendered these 'gypsy' and 'bohemian' respectively. To describe Renée in English today as a 'Romani' person is jarring in terms of cultural appropriation; while this does not necessarily rule it out, with notes of course, the term also fails to effectively evoke

now the romantic connotations of wandering that Colette is calling upon. 'Gypsy' does better but the jump from 'romanichelle' to 'gypsy' is far from straightforward. Critically, choices made in translation produce relationships between languages and cultures, as much as reflect them. I go with 'bohemian' for both terms, since the word came to English through French, and picked up the artistic and European connotations, for Anglophone readers, that suit Renée. Not only is the historical link with the Romani there, for those who know the history, but so too is the French *artiste* and 'vagabonde' with an unconventional lifestyle.

Conclusion

What is paralyzing and liberating in translation is that it throws doubt on meaning. The ways we understand people, society, gender, race, are up in the air, open to slippage, reconfigurations. My goal, embracing 'thick translation', notes, polysemy, and those doubling tactics, is to stage some of that relational work that translators themselves navigate, to evoke Colette's world and ours for the reader. For the reader cannot reach Colette on their own, and is not of her time – what they can access is Colette from our English and culture today. What this means is replacing the binary questions with something more multiple and relational.

- Are you modernizing or keeping the period vibes? Both, with phrasing that works for Colette's time (at least from our vantage point) and ours.
- Anglicizing or Frenchifying? Attentive to the range of Englishes, and multiplicity in the French ST
- Making it sound natural/good or strange? For whom?
- Sanitizing? From which starting point?

My choices are complicated, messy. So I'll end with some of the takeaways, which sum up my strategies on identity, gender, and race.

- Replicate the gendered, racialized, dynamics. (careful of unintentionally increasing the slur with seeming equivalents, and of flattening).
- Avoid sexualizing, denigrating, exoticizing what is neutral, even if readers can interpret these connotations from the ST .
- Question naturalized equivalents or shortcuts, even those in the dictionary, or well established in existing translations.
- Keep connection to original context, yet don't be lazy – work to capture immediacy for new readers.

These are not meant to be prescriptive, rather strategies I developed to guide my own work on Colette. Even so, they may be useful to others navigating sticky questions of identity, if adapted to the specific text and context at hand.

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The Translation Front: Reflections *à propos* of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract

The publication rate of translations into English of Ukrainian literary texts increased after the beginning of the Russian Federation's war on Ukraine in 2014 and again after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Yet, for at least the four reasons adduced in this paper, the likely impact of this development on public awareness of, or attitude toward, Ukraine should not be overstated. First, the correlation between the public availability of literary works and public sentiment is difficult to measure. Secondly, poetry, which comprises a significant proportion of the Ukrainian literature translated, commands only a niche audience in the Anglosphere. Third, English-language translations of Ukrainian literature seldom appear with major publishing houses which possess powerful distribution and publicity networks. Fourth, Ukrainian literature in English is at a disadvantage relative to translated literature from cultures, most relevantly the Russian, with long traditions of presence in English. Many translators who render Ukrainian works into English and the publishers of such translations cite ethical considerations and a commitment to fairness as the pre-eminent factors that motivate them to continue their activity.

In the following, I survey developments in literary translation from Ukrainian to English since the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of 24 February 2022, but also since the war's beginning with the illegal annexation of Crimea and Russia's commencement of aggression in Ukraine's east in 2014. I draw attention to translators' and publishers' motivations, in the context of the war, for trying to bring Ukrainian literature to the attention of English-reading publics. I share the optimism of many commentators that flows from the notable increase in the number of Ukrainian literary works translated into, and published in, English. But I also sound notes of caution about raising too high the expectation that this welcome shift will greatly and swiftly alter perceptions of Ukraine in the target societies. I end by drawing attention to the fact that, now as ever, translators and publishers of Ukrainian literature in translation alike regard their endeavour as justified, above all, by the ethical principle that a culture long occluded by an oppressive colonialism deserves at last to be seen, known and respected by people of good will.

Before addressing the topic of translation *from* Ukrainian, let me mention the role that translation *into* Ukrainian has played in the cultural history of Ukraine. The project to build a modern nation for the people of Ukraine began in the early nineteenth century. At the time the educated elites of that people in large part had been assimilated to the cultures dominant in the empires in which Ukrainians found themselves. In the tsarist empire, the supervening culture was the Russian. In the Ukrainian lands annexed by the Habsburgs during the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of the eighteenth century, the cultures of power were the Polish (by inertia) and, to a less pronounced extent, the German. As in other Central European national revivals, in Ukraine the Romantic valorisation of folklore and literary creativity in the language spoken by ordinary people was part of an endeavour to create a Ukrainian national high culture able to take its place as an equal at the imaginary round table

of European cultures. In this process, translation played a vital role. The text generally regarded as the first work in vernacular (as distinct from learned or ecclesiastical) Ukrainian was Ivan Kotliarevsky's *Eneida*, whose first parts were published in 1798.[2] *Eneida* was a travesty of Vergil's *Aeneid*: a transposition into an incongruously popular and comic style of a revered classic familiar to the educated elite of the period. Translation enriched and refined the Ukrainian literary language, whether in the nineteenth century through Panteleimon Kulish's translations of the Bible and Shakespeare; or in the 1960s, when the masterly translations of Mykola Lukash, Hryhorii Kochur and Maksym Rylsky were defiant statements in defence of Ukrainian language and identity against Russification in the USSR; or in the 1980s, when the journal of translations *Vsesvit* brought global literature to readers of Ukrainian and, with it, ideas and aesthetic models that challenged the Soviet status quo.[3]

Today the abundance of works in translation from European, North and South American and other literatures that fills the catalogues of Ukrainian publishing houses attests to Ukrainian society's appetite for westward integration. On 10 November 2025, for example, the first page (of a total of 142 pages) of the online catalogue of books in print issued by the reputable Lviv publishing house Stary Lev (Old Lion) listed fifteen books in Ukrainian and thirteen in translation from several languages (Vydavnytstvo Staroho Leva).

Traditionally, there has not been a symmetrical appetite for Ukrainian literary (and other cultural) production in the Anglosphere. The contrary, rather, has been the case. One scholar has observed from a postcolonial studies perspective that Ukrainian literature has been burdened with the affliction of "non-translation," a phenomenon comprising "deliberate omissions [which] contribute to shaping knowledge in significant ways" (Odrekhivska 7). English is not among the leading languages into which Ukrainian literature has been translated. According to the Ukrainian Book Institute, the largest number of translations from the Ukrainian are published in the countries of central Europe: Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia, Romania and the Czech Republic. The United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Canada follow (House of Europe). However, the situation as regards English-language translations has trended favourably in recent years, especially since 2022, as is evident from Figure 1.

[2] The names of contemporary authors who have published in English are given as they appear in their English-language publications. In the body of the article, names of other persons and titles of works are transliterated from the Cyrillic using the Library of Congress romanisation system modified for ease of reading (Є, Ю and Я at the beginning of names are rendered as Ye, Yu and Ya and the ending -ий as -y; the soft sign is not transliterated). In citations and the Bibliography, however, the LC system (without ligatures) is used without modification.

[3] Chernetsky provides a lucid account of the role of translation into Ukrainian in the evolution of Ukrainian national identity. See also Kal′nychenko.

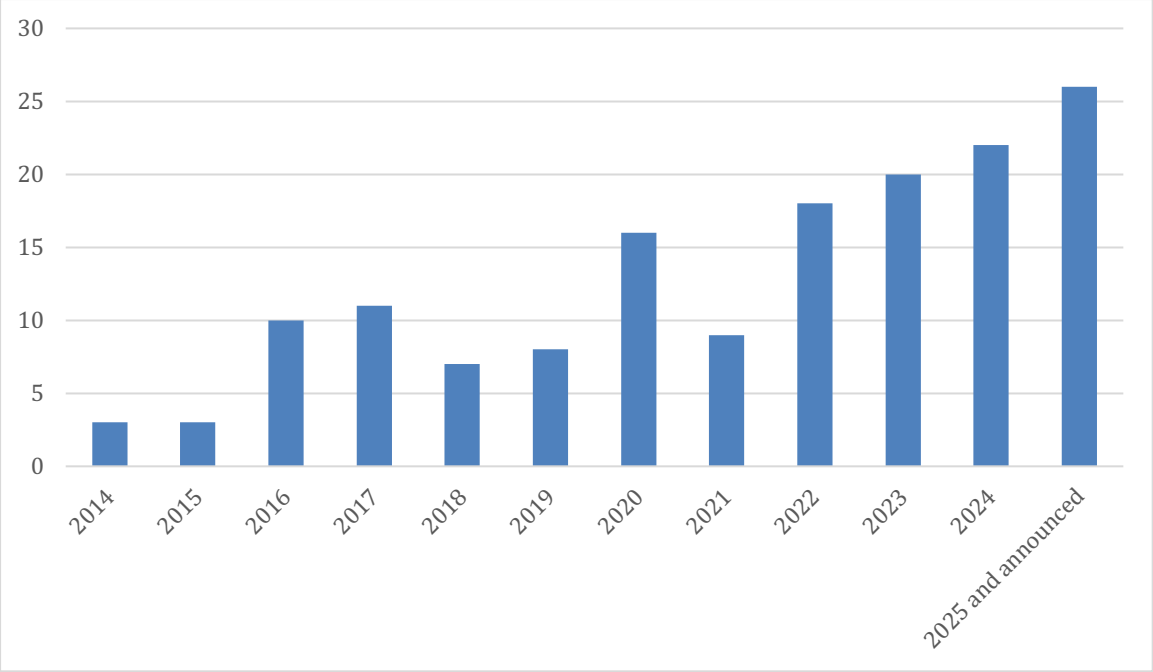

Figure 1. Ukrainian literature in English translation: Number of book titles per year

Furthermore, the full-scale invasion of 2022 boosted demand for translations of Ukrainian literature already in print. Christine Lysnewycz Holbert of Lost Horse Press, a small United States publishing house with a series dedicated to contemporary Ukrainian poetry, reported that, while the invasion of Crimea and the beginning of the war in 2014 had sparked little interest in books published by Lost Horse, the reaction to the events of February 2022 was very different: "Now we can't keep books in stock, our printer here in Spokane can't print them fast enough! I can hardly keep up with the orders, the requests for review copies, and the interest in interviews with the authors, translators, and even myself" (Wright and Lysnewycz Holbert).

Even so, the number of titles translated is not large. To my knowledge, from 2014 until mid-November 2025 there were 153 such titles. This includes books that were announced as forthcoming on publishers' web pages and one book which had not been so announced, but whose translation rights had been purchased by a major United States publishing house (Wood). The increase is scarcely surprising, given the war and the plausible conjecture that its topicality would increase interest not only in Ukraine's geopolitical situation and history, but also its culture. Soon after the full-scale invasion, the journalist Alexandra Alter wrote in the *New York Times*:

> Bringing nuanced and reflective writing from Ukraine and about the war to English-language audiences is a project as political as it is cultural, several translators and Ukrainian authors said. Part of Putin's justification for the invasion rests on his claim that he is 'liberating' culturally Russian areas from Ukrainian rule. By highlighting Ukraine's vibrant literary and linguistic heritage, translators hope to emphasize the country's distinction from Russia, and to draw attention to a rich cultural landscape that could be endangered under occupation by the forces of an increasingly authoritarian leader.

In similar spirit, the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, calling for donations in support of its Translating Ukraine Summer Institute, stated in its promotional e-mail that "every translated book is a voice breaking through silence – telling stories of resistance, memory, and hope" (HURI Books).

In the course of the online search that yielded Alter's and many similar observations, I typed the phrase "motivations for publishing translations of Ukrainian literature" into the browser's search line and received the following text, generated by artificial intelligence:

> Motivations for publishing literary translations of Ukrainian literature include promoting Ukrainian culture and identity against Russian propaganda, satisfying reader demand for Ukrainian stories, providing support for Ukrainian colleagues, leveraging government translation programs, countering narratives about Ukraine, and recognizing the intrinsic literary value of Ukrainian works. These efforts are part of a broader cultural diplomacy strategy to showcase Ukraine's vibrant culture on the international stage, especially during a time of historical upheaval and war.

To my annoyance, this is a rather good summary of what publishers whose opinions about this matter appear online have had to say. Notably, AI did not identify making a profit from the sale of such books as one of the reasons for publishing them. Some publishers have expressed the view that publishing translations of Ukrainian literature at a time when Ukraine is resisting invasion is a moral duty. As Anna Schmidt Andersen of Forlæns Publishing in Denmark put it in 2023, "How could we help – besides, of course, donating directly to relief agencies and receiving Ukrainian refugees? In our line of business the answer was, of course, to publish (more) Ukrainian titles" (House of Europe).

Books are, of course, only one of the media through which Ukrainian literature, especially works in such short genres as poetry and the essay, becomes available to the Anglophone public. Sites like *Poetry International*, *Washington Square Review*, *Small Orange* and *Modern Poetry in Translation*, to name but a few, enable readers who actively seek out Ukrainian texts to find a great deal of contemporary or recent Ukrainian short-form literature online. Fifteen Ukrainian poets appear in English on the *Poetry International* site, compared with eight from Poland, fourteen from Belarus and sixteen from Romania. These representations are not orders of magnitude smaller than those of western European literatures in translation (35 from France, 36 each from Germany and 71 from Belgium) (Poetry International). The poetry of Serhiy Zhadan, today probably the foremost Ukrainian novelist and poet who is also renowned as a popular musician, political activist and wartime military volunteer, is available for free in English translation in several online locations.[4]

Also relatively well represented online, though perhaps less easy to find, is literature of the Ukrainian nineteenth and twentieth-century canons. *Ukrainian Literature: A Journal of Translations*, which presents English-language translations of works from the full range of Ukrainian literary history, is accessible online through the University of Toronto, as is a bibliography of such translations, comprehensive up to 1989 (Tarnawsky). Many English-language translations of Ukrainian classical literature may be found on the excellent Ukraine-based web site Diasporiana, into whose Ukrainian-language search box English-language text may be entered, yielding access to out-of-copyright scans of translations of Ivan Franko, Lesia Ukrainka, Olha Kobylianska, Vasyl Stefanyk and dozens of other members of the Ukrainian literary pantheon. As for the poet venerated as Ukraine's national bard, Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), his poetry proliferates on the internet. There is even a site which opens access to large selections of translations of Shevchenko's poems by each of fourteen translators (storinka.org). The survey *Ukrainian Literature: A Wartime Guide for Anglophone Readers* explicitly aims to help potential readers discover what is available in English (Pavlyshyn, 1-2).

[4] See, e.g., Zhadan, "Four Poems," "Needle," "Poems" (*Poetry International*), "Poems" (*Words for War*), "Three Poems" and "Untitled."

As for printed books, online ordering and print-on-demand have made Ukrainian literature (like other translated literatures for which there may not be strong demand in any individual local market) immeasurably more accessible than it was in the past, benefiting, for example, both of the Australian publishing enterprises which specialise in English translations of Ukrainian literature, Bayda Books and Sova Books.[5]

On the whole, then, the recent narrative of Ukrainian literature in English translation is a good news story. There are, however, reasons to temper optimism with caution. First, it is difficult to estimate how much of the translated material is in fact read by its target audiences. Sizes of print editions are not generally public, we do not know how many books are sold, and while it is no doubt possible for website administrators to count the number of downloads or visits to web pages, this information is not easily available. Even if it were, it would almost certainly not indicate the number of texts actually read (see Metz; Perschak). As the poet Oksana Maksymchuk has observed, the fact of publishing a translation (or any book, for that matter) is no guarantee that it will be bought and then read: the anthology of Ukrainian poetry *Words for War*, edited by Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky and published in 2017, had sold eighteen copies prior to 2022. This changed only after the full-scale invasion, when the anthology was featured in the *New York Times*, *The Times* and other influential publications (University of Melbourne, 45:40 minutes).

It is easy to assume that there is a correlation between the number of titles available that articulate a particular value stance (e.g., solidarity with Ukraine), and the impact of this availability on such difficult-to-measure phenomena as public opinion and attitude. But this common-sense, intuitive belief may well be wide off the mark. It is almost a truism that the "impact" of works of literature is methodologically difficult to study (Forehand; Hakemulder; Cooper). What empirical scholarship exists suggests that the same work can elicit very diverse, often unexpected and implausible, reactions from different readers. For that reason, the branch of literary scholarship known as "reception aesthetics" and championed in the 1970s by Hans Robert Jauss resorted to the essentially speculative investigation of what effects upon "the reader" aspects of *texts'* structures were "intended" to yield.

Second, a very substantial part of the newly published translated material consists of poetry – anthologies of individual authors, or collections – among them several excellent ones, including *Words for War*. Of the 153 titles on my list, fully 55, or 36 per cent, are books of poetry or dramatic verse. The prominence of poetry reflects the wartime situation: lyrical poems, and their translations, are mostly shorter and faster to produce than works of other genres. They can have the immediacy that is appropriate to the extreme situations that the war generates – of death, violence, bereavement, dispossession and flight are well placed to communicate the predicament of Ukrainian society and the emotions of the Ukrainian person in the here and now: such emotions as anticipation of death, anger, defiance and survivor guilt.[6]

The journalist, translator and manager of cultural events Sofiia Cheliak has reflected eloquently on the way in which the full-scale invasion has pushed poetry to the forefront of Ukrainian literary creativity. In her afterword to the posthumous anthology of the poetry of Victoria Amelina, who died of injuries suffered in a Russian missile attack on Kramatorsk in eastern Ukraine, Cheliak writes:

[5] At the time of writing, English-language translations of Ukrainian literary texts published by Bayda Books were available on Bayda's own website (fifteen titles), Amazon.com.au (nine titles), and Booktopia (five titles); Sova Books had nine such titles on its website and four on Amazon.com.au.

[6] For example, see (respectively) "he asks, don't help me" by Oksana Lutsyshyna, "God, don't quiet the voice of anger" by Halyna Kruk (97), "My god spends all night forming his battalions" by Marjana Savka and "the heart trapped in guilt-pain" by Marianna Kiyanovska (Kiyanovska, "No Freedom in these Ruins").

> The war has deprived us of literary prose, and on the morning of 24 February 2022 words lost their meaning. Prose descriptions of the loss of a son, of evacuation or the imminence of it sounded pallid and false, especially in the early days of the full-scale invasion. After that we searched for a new prose language – each of us at our own pace – but in the transition between the old language and the new we were speechless. Victoria chose to write poetry so as not to remain silent. (60; my translation)

But in Anglophone countries narrative fiction is the dominant and most widely read literary genre; readers of poetry constitute a relatively small audience.[7] There is some recent Ukrainian fiction in English translation, but novel-length works that have been written in the current, post-full-scale-invasion, phase of the war are yet to appear in translation. One hopes that the recent works of Eugenia Kuznetsova (Kuznietsova), for example, will be translated soon. Her novels *Drabyna* (The Ladder, 2023) and *Vivtsi tsili* (… And Eat It, Too, 2025) are psychologically complex and mirror the diversity of Ukrainian and Ukrainian émigré society when it comes to its views and attitudes. But they also reflect the unanimity of that society in its condemnation of Putin, the Russia that supports and enables him, and Westerners who seek to insulate "liberal" parts of Russian society, or Russian culture, from their share of responsibility for the war.

There are, however, already in print or soon to be published, translations of novels written during the previous phase of the war: after 2014, when Russia occupied Crimea and fighting was relatively quickly confined to the east, but before February 2022. This less intense stage of the war elicited works quite different in world-view and affective engagement from those that would follow. Cases in point include Serhiy Zhadan's *The Orphanage*, published in Ukrainian in 2017 and in English in 2021, and Oksana Lutsyshyna's *Ivan and Phoebe* (2019, 2023) of those that are already available in English, and three works that await English-language publication: Victoria Amelina's *Dom's Dream Kingdom* (2017, promised in HarperCollins in 2027); Haska Shyyan's *Behind Your Back* (2019, announced by the Harvard Library of Ukrainian Literature) and Sophia Andrukhovych's *Amadoka* (2020; translation rights purchased by Simon and Schuster).

These works were critically acclaimed in Ukraine as parts of society's quest for self-understanding and its efforts to come to terms with several difficult pasts, Soviet, Second-World-War and post-Soviet. But theirs is the pathos, not of the present-day struggle for survival, but of analysing causes, seeking to understand the other side, balancing one's critique of the colonial Other with critique of the national Self. These are not, then, works likely to conjure forth post-full-scale-invasion Ukraine, its sense of injustice, its anger and its passionate defiance, for persons unfamiliar with the country. These novels are subtle, thoughtful, and in temperament cool rather than warm.

The Ukrainian author most widely translated into English (no fewer than 13 novels of his total of 19) is Andrey Kurkov, who emphatically calls himself a Ukrainian writer writing in Russian. His *Ukraine Diaries* of the events of 2013-2014 and *Diary of an Invasion* (2022) are valuable testimonies. His novel *Grey Bees* (first published 2018; English translation 2020) takes its place among the pre-full-scale-invasion novels that aspire to offer an "even-handed" perspective on the war. Many of his other novels, combining crime fiction with elements of the gothic, from today's perspective seem dangerously close to depicting Ukraine as a weird, not quite real place, faintly amusing even as it is sinister. That mode of representing Ukraine had

[7] While the number of books published annually in English is so large that it is difficult to be certain what proportion of the book market a particular genre commands, one investigation found that in 2017 fiction constituted 8.2 per cent of all books published and 23 per cent of all books sold (Fredner). As for poetry books, in the United States poetry books account for only about 3 million of the 800 million books sold annually, or about 0.4 per cent (F).

been launched in the 1830s by Mykola Hohol (best known in English as Nikolai Gogol, the transliteration of the Russian form of his name) and remains beloved by Russian propaganda.

	Publishing House	No. of Titles
1.	Glagoslav	28
2.	Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute	21
3.	Lost Horse Press	18
4.	Sova Books	7
5.	Academic Studies Press	6
6.	Arrowsmith Press	6
7.	Bayda Books	6
8.	Kalyna Language Press	6
9.	Yale University Press	6
10.	CIUS Press	5
11.	HarperCollins	5
12.	Deep Vellum	4
13.	Seven Stories Press	4
14.	Spuyten Duyvil	3
15.	Atthis Arts	2
16.	Ibidem	2
17.	Jantar	2
18.	University of Toronto Press	2
19.	Amazon Crossing	1
20.	Carcanet Press	1
21.	Central European University Press	1
22.	Guernica Editions	1
23.	Harvill Secker	1
24.	Kulturalis	1
25.	Liveright (Norton)	1
26.	MacLehose	1
27.	Monoray	1
28.	Mosaic Press	1
29.	Mountain Leopard	1
30.	Nick Hern Books	1
31.	NYRB Poets	1
32.	Penguin	1
33.	Piramida	1
34.	Plamen Press	1
35.	River Paw	1
36.	Simon and Schuster	1
37.	UCL Press	1
38.	Veronica Lane Books	1

Figure 2. Ukrainian literature in English translation, 2014-November 2025: Number of book titles, published and announced, by publishing house

Third, the publishers of Ukrainian literature in English are, in general, small presses (see Figure 2). Of the 153 books on my list, 28 were published or had been announced as forthcoming by the British-Dutch house Glagoslav, which specialises in translations of East European fiction, including the classics. 21 were published by Harvard University Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute. Eighteen appeared with Lost Horse Press, whose

emphasis is on poetry. The next band, with between five and seven books in the period covered, includes the two Australian publishers, both one-person enterprises owned and run by translators: Yuri Tkacz's Bayda Books and Svitlana Yakovenko's Sova Books, in Melbourne and Sydney respectively. Only one of the major presses that appear on Figure 2, HarperCollins, is represented by more than one book, and three of its five items are translations from the Russian of fantasy genre fiction by Maryna Dyachenko and Serhiy Dyachenko. Notably, however, HarperCollins also published Victoria Amelina's *Looking At Women, Looking at War: A War and Justice Diary*, and their fifth, forthcoming, item is Amelina's *Dom's Dream Kingdom*. In November 2025 Harvill Secker, Norton, Penguin, and Simon and Schuster each had one book of Ukrainian literature in English translation in their catalogue.

The small presses typically do not have strong distribution networks or the capacity to publicise their wares. Sometimes their choices of works for translation are more reflective of the works' standing in the Ukrainian literary canon than of their capacity to engage a contemporary Anglophone audience or illuminate Ukraine's present-day predicament, as Yuri Tkacz, who has translated on commission for other publishers than his own Bayda, has remarked to me.

Some of what the larger presses have published is relevant to the task of "explaining" Ukraine, its identity and aspirations, and of persuading audiences of the justice of its cause. An example is Penguin's *Ukraine 22*, edited by Mark Andryczyk, a republication of the collection of poetry, short fiction and essays *The White Chalk of Days* that first came out with Academic Studies Press. Tanja Maljartschuk, seven of whose books have appeared in German translation (hence the German romanisation of her name) debuted in English in 2024 with *Forgottenness*, which came out under the Liveright imprint of W. W. Norton. *Forgottenness* is a structurally ambitious novel that blends the fictionalised biography of Viacheslav Lypynsky, a Ukrainian interwar émigré political thinker, with the *bildungsroman* of a present-day woman narrator. Inherited historical trauma is one of the novel's themes; the work has a general, but indirect, connection to contemporary wartime reality.

Finally, fourth: even if Ukrainian books in translation were to triple or quadruple in number, they would still be overwhelmingly outnumbered by translations from the Russian. In October 2025, when the presentation on which this article is based was delivered, a leading Melbourne bookshop had on its shelves four translations of Tolstoi's *War and Peace*, three of them by major presses: Vintage, Penguin and OUP, as well as many other books by and about Tolstoi (and the Tolstoi materials available for ordering through the bookshop's online catalogue numbered 2943 titles). There was a corresponding plethora of material related to the other Russian classics. By contrast, the bookshop had on its shelves three works of Ukrainian literature in translation: two titles by Kurkov and one by Zhadan. Readers seeking acquaintance in English with works by the pillar of Ukraine's literary tradition, the nineteenth-century poet Taras Shevchenko (whose anticolonial and anti-autocratic poetry is acutely relevant to the current war) would have had to order online.

The welcome increase in the availability of Ukrainian literature in English cannot be expected to dent the historical advantage of Russian literature in the same receptive space. The translation and retranslation of books by Tolstoi and Dostoevsky combine with the enduring presence of Chekhov on Western stages and of Tchaikovsky and his compatriots in the repertoires of Western orchestras to generate an ongoing cultural alibi for Russia even as the Russian state engages in unconscionable aggression against not only Ukraine, but also Ukrainian identity and culture.

I have sounded four notes of caution about expecting too much of Ukrainian literature in English translation as far as transformative cultural impact is concerned. What imperative flows from this – for translators and for publishers of translations?

As I remarked earlier in this article, it is not possible to demonstrate a causal relationship between an increase in the availability of Ukrainian literature in translation and greater global awareness of, and solidarity with, Ukraine. But it is clear that many translators of Ukrainian works into English, and the publishing houses that put resources into bringing Ukrainian literature to public view, are motivated by the belief that such a connection exists. Thus, Nina Murray, a diplomat for the United States as well as a translator of the fin-de-siècle dramatist Lesia Ukrainka and the present-day writers Oksana Zabuzhko, Serhiy Zhadan and Oksana Lutsyshyna, observes that "the translator is conscious of their public mission. Their effort will take a work of literature out of its original time and place and transplant it into a new language, and therefore into a new culture. [… M]any translators who chose to work on a piece from their native culture clearly see themselves as its ambassadors and advocates, not just bearers."

This view of the translator as explicator of Ukraine and the Ukrainian cause to a world audience has acquired the status of a commonplace. The website *Literary Hub*, for example, carries the forthright assertion that

> [f]or decades, Ukraine remained in the shadow of the Russian imperial discourse. Foreign readers had access to only a limited number of translations of Ukrainian literature. Today, fortunately, the number of translations is steadily growing, which means that Ukraine finally has the opportunity to be heard – through books that not only counter Russian propaganda but also tell the story of the country's present life and show that Ukrainian literature existed long before the declaration of independence in 1991. (Klos)

The translation studies scholar Roman Ivashkiv makes the same point in the idiom of postcolonial studies. He examines two anthologies of Ukrainian poetry in translation and attributes to them "unprecedented political significance and relevance," which derive from

> […] their giving voice to the formerly colonized, oppressed, marginalized, and underrepresented – or, to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak, in letting the subaltern speak. The subaltern in this case is colonized Ukraine vis-à-vis colonizer Russia (imperial and Soviet), which for centuries has been imposing its discourse on Ukraine and silencing all things Ukrainian. (56)

Spokespersons of the Ukrainian Institute London under whose auspices the Ukrainian Literature in Translation Prize is conferred go even further, underscoring the role of literary translators not only as mediators of Ukraine's wartime experience to the world, but as advocates of the principled behaviour that is modelled by the works they translate: "The winning translations […] speak powerfully from this moment in Ukraine's history, as the country endures the fourth year of Russia's full-scale war. Steeped in the experience of imperial violence, these are voices that do not bend or break under the threat of suppression; instead, they sing, fight, and love. [They] are radiant with the will to survive and thrive" (UIL).

In the context of Russia's war on Ukraine, translation from the Ukrainian and the publication of literary translations from the Ukrainian are acts of political engagement. As Zenia Tompkins, a translator and the founder of the United States-based Tompkins Agency for Ukrainian Literature in Translation, candidly puts it, "In the field of Ukrainian literature, there's no room or patience right now – for passivity and silence. The authors we translate, many of whom are risking their lives on a daily basis, need and deserve better: they need and deserve translators who openly and loudly condemn Putin, the Russian army, and the

imperialistic undercurrent of Russian culture that has enabled and justified Russia's invasion of Ukraine" (Tsurkan).

Reflecting on the translator's role in periods of extremity such as the present one, Tompkins's friend Kate Tsurkan, an American writer and journalist who lives in Ukraine, has offered an eloquent and encouraging statement that values the translator as one of the cultural actors who make hope and positivity possible even in dire circumstances. It seems a fitting sentiment with which to end this discussion: "The translator is not just a navigator of the author's sense and meaning in *this* situation, but a link to [the] past life; a reminder that, although our world is invariably changed by the horrors that we're living through, there are some things to strive for and look forward to."

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At the Green Bar: The Irish French Sonnets of Ciaran Carson

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Translators, as well as poets, know all too well that a struggle for articulation, a hunger for eloquence, can be a powerful motivating factor in creative writing, especially in circumstances where the imposed language or official language is associated with a history of oppression. Seamus Heaney memorably complimented James Joyce for having shown Irish writers that "English is by now not so much an imperial humiliation as a native weapon", and that emboldened grasp of the English language has been a striking characteristic of the poetry of Heaney and many of his near contemporaries (Parker 97).

The Irish poet and translator Ciaran Carson was a student of Heaney at Queen's University Belfast in the late 1960s, and he returned to Queen's in 2003 as the first director of the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry. His childhood education was unusual, in that he grew up in an Irish (Gaelic)-speaking household in Belfast at a time when very few families in Northern Ireland spoke anything other than English at home. The Irish language had been marginalized in the North after the Partition of Ireland in 1921, and it wasn't until the late 1960s that an Irish language revival started to take place. The other unusual linguistic factor in his upbringing, however, was that his father, William Carson, was a leading proponent of Esperanto, which had been devised in 1887 as an international means of communication – a universal second language with European roots. Carson senior was well known for his linguistic skills, hence the invitation he received to attend the Great Joint Congress of the British and Irish Esperanto Associations, which took place in Dublin at Easter in 1969. From an early age, his son was used to hearing Irish, English and Esperanto, and he grew up with his own prodigious capacity for bringing different languages into creative exchange. It no doubt pleased young Carson greatly to discover that James Joyce knew about Esperanto, boldly announcing it in the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses* (1922) and using it playfully in *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

The titles of Carson's early volumes of poetry, including *The Irish for No* (1987) and *First Language* (1993), immediately signal his interest in the interplay and interchange of languages. In these books and others, such as *Belfast Confetti* (1989), he acquired a reputation as a masterful exponent of the long line, a poet who skillfully crossed the musicality of the English lyric with the endlessly digressive narratives and tall tales of the Irish storyteller or *seanachie*. In the late 1990s, a new lyric intensity pervaded Carson's work and found its most creative expression in a prolific series of sonnets. Significantly, it was the twelve-syllable or alexandrine line of the French sonnet that Carson found most appealing. His book *The Alexandrine Plan* (1998) is a striking collection of translations of late-nineteenth-century French symbolist and decadent poetry with unmistakably Irish nuances and allusions. In each case, Carson provides the original French sonnet and accompanies it with his translation, though often the original prompts a provocative reworking rather than a strict linguistic translation.

The opening sonnet of *The Alexandrine Plan* is Carson's version of Rimbaud's "Au-Cabaret Vert", which Rimbaud is thought to have written towards the end of 1870 after visiting Charleroi in Belgium. This is a poem in which he turns away from the world of industry and social administration and finds pleasure in idleness and in the delights of the ordinary.

Au Cabaret-Vert

cinq heures du soir

Depuis huit jours, j'avais déchiré mes bottines
Aux cailloux des chemins. J'entrais à Charleroi.
- Au Cabaret-Vert : je demandai des tartines
De beurre et du jambon qui fût à moitié froid.

Bienheureux, j'allongeai les jambes sous la table
Verte : je contemplai les sujets très naïfs
De la tapisserie. - Et ce fut adorable,
Quand la fille aux tétons énormes, aux yeux vifs,

- Celle-là, ce n'est pas un baiser qui l'épeure ! -
Rieuse, m'apporta des tartines de beurre,
Du jambon tiède, dans un plat colorié,

Du jambon rose et blanc parfumé d'une gousse
D'ail, - et m'emplit la chope immense, avec sa mousse
Que dorait un rayon de soleil arriéré.

Arthur Rimbaud (12)

Carson seizes opportunistically on the obvious Irish national possibilities in the title of Rimbaud's sonnet, felicitously rendering it as "the green bar" and cheekily turning the narrator from a bohemian French wanderer to a garrulous Irish rover. Here is Carson's version.

The Green Bar

I'd ripped my boots to pieces on the pebbly roads
Since Monday was a week. I walked into Kingstown.
Found myself in the old Green Bar. I ordered loads
Of cool ham, bread and butter. It was nearly sundown.

Pleased as Punch, I stretched my legs beneath the shamrock
Table. I admired the tacky '50s décor.
Then this vacant waitress in a tit-enhancing frock
Came on and wiggled up to me, her eyes galore

With hints of smooch kisses and her gorgeous platter
Of green gherkins, slabs of ham and bread and butter,
Rosy, garlic-scented ham; and then she filled my beer mug

With a bright smile, and turned herself into a ray
Of sunshine, like an unexpected Lady Day.
I guzzled it all into me. *Glug. Glug. Glug. Glug*.

Ciaran Carson (13)

The advantages of the Alexandrine form are immediately apparent in the luxuriously long rambling opening line playing off its plosive consonants against a variety of vowel sounds. Like the original, Carson's sonnet intersperses run-on lines with shorter syntactical units, catching the rhythms of actual speech. Rimbaud's "Charlerois" is conveniently translated as Kingstown, which could be the name of one of several townlands called Kingstown in Ireland, but it is much more likely that Carson is using the old name of the Dublin port, Dunlaoighre, conveniently resituating the sonnet in the Dublin environs. Again, with a brazen Irish attitude, "la table / Verte" is ostentatiously rendered as "the shamrock / Table". In other respects, Carson dutifully acknowledges the technical resources and procedures of the Rimbaud sonnet, including the quatrain-tercet sub-divisions, line breaks and syntax, and even the deployment of rhymes. The discipline of the sonnet form permits some liberties of expression, including the nicely colloquial "Pleased as Punch" for "Bien heureux" and the blatantly anachronistic "tacky '50s décor" for "les sujets très naïfs".

The ironic re-employment of a familiar anglicised French word to assist with his translation is typical of Carson's ingenuity in these sonnets. His relaxed colloquialisms prove very serviceable. The versatile phrase "Came on", strategically placed at the opening of a line, suggests coming on duty or starting a shift, but also acting in a sexually provocative way, and it also retains the performative connotations of cabaret (that is, coming on stage). What Carson is also cleverly doing in "The Green Bar" is to cross the French sonnet with the Irish *aisling*, a dream or vision poem in which the speaker encounters a woman who foretells the freedom of Ireland. Having entered the Green Bar at sundown, the narrator finds himself blessed with the sunshine of "an unexpected Lady Day", and consumes it with an appreciative pleasure. Lady Day was the name traditionally given to the Feast of the Annunciation, but as Carson knows it was also the nickname of the American jazz singer Billie Holiday, who was of mixed African and Irish descent. Carson closes his version of Rimbaud's sonnet with his own distinctive signature: a phonetic, onomatopoeic rendering of the verb to drink.

Although Rimbaud has an immediate appeal for Carson, his versions of poems by Mallarmé and Baudelaire are similarly striking in their bold appropriation of diction and imagery, and in their readiness to find Irish cultural equivalents for French habits and customs. In his translations of Mallarmé, Carson catches the yearning isolation and inwardness of the originals, as well as their foregrounding of vivid symbols that often have to do with the art of writing or with the longing for spiritual release and transcendence. Among these symbolist motifs are the bell and the swan. The bell, for instance, appears in Mallarme's poem "Le Sonneur", rendered by Carson as "The Sonneteer". Here, he depicts the writer as a "lonely campanologist" turning out "muted, brittle tinkles" on the bell of poetry and anticipating a suicidal death on the end of his own rope. Carson brilliantly captures the confessional candour and the morbid self-defeat of nineteenth-century decadent and symbolist poetry, powerfully rendering the shared identity of poet and bell ringer: "I am that man. Alas! Most nights I dangle on / An anxious tangled cable" (57). He also deftly plays with the symbol of the swan, familiar not just in the poems of Mallarmé and Baudelaire but in the poems of the great Irish poet, W. B. Yeats. The sonnet by Mallarmé beginning "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd hui" is neatly retitled "At the Sign of the Swan". Once again, Carson makes clear the relationship between poetic identity and symbol by deftly rhyming "line" with "sign" and by playing on the phonetic similarity of "sign" and "Cygne": "Beautiful ghost, condemned by his own brilliant line, / Engraved within a pond of icy crystallite, / He maintains the useless exile of a Swan, or sign" (51).

Carson's versions of sonnets by Baudelaire are infused with catchy allusions to popular culture, including pop music and film. The title "La Cloche fêlée" is oddly translated as "The Dongless Bell" rather than the usual "broken bell" or "flawed bell" that Roy Campbell and other translators provide. In place of the conventional translation of the speaker's confession,

"My soul is flawed", Carson gives us an Elvis Presley inspired line: "I'm all shook up" (83). Baudelaire's sonnet "Parfum Exotique" is also oddly translated as "Blue Grass", which conveys the marijuana-induced melancholy of Baudelaire's poem and simultaneously evokes the plangent rhythms of American country music. In his translation of Rimbaud's sonnet "Ma Bohème", Carson once again draws on modern American popular culture, rendering the title not as "My Bohemian Life" but as "On the Road", recalling the title of Jack Kerouac's celebrated 1957 novel of the Beat Generation. Here is the original:

Ma Bohème

(Fantaisie)

Je m'en allais, les poings dans mes poches crevées;
Mon paletot aussi devenait idéal;
J'allais sous le ciel, Muse, et j'étais ton féal;
Oh! là là! que d'amours splendides j'ai rêvées !

Mon unique culotte avait un large trou.
– Petit Poucet rêveur, j'égrenais dans ma course
Des rimes. Mon auberge était à la Grande-Ourse;
– Mes étoiles au ciel avaient un doux frou-frou.

Et je les écoutais, assis au bord des routes,
Ces bons soirs de septembre où je sentais des gouttes
De rosée à mon front, comme un vin de vigueur;

Où, rimant au milieu des ombres fantastiques,
Comme des lyres, je tirais les élastiques
De mes souliers blessés, un pied près de mon cœur !

Arthur Rimbaud (22)

Carson dispenses with Rimbaud's subtitle, but nevertheless captures the French poet's distinctive blend of bohemian wandering and imaginative freewheeling in his Beat-inspired version of the sonnet:

On the Road

Thumbs hitched into my holey pockets, off I hiked
In my has-been-through-the-wars ex-Army greatcoat;
Under your blue skies, O muse, you took me on your bike;
I loved the way in which we spun in perfect rote.

My trousers had a hole as big as any arse,
And I became a dwarf who scatters rhymes along
The Milky Way. In the Great Bear, I sang my song,
As huge stars shivered in the rustling universe.

And I listened to their dew of blue September
Evenings fall on me, like Long Ago remembered

In the first sip of a cool green bubble-beaded wine;

I strummed the black elastic of my tattered boot
Held to my heart like youthful violin or lute,
A veritable pop-star of the awful rhyme.

Ciaran Carson (23)

Carson dutifully observes the alliterative opening of Rimbaud's sonnet, substituting the plosives with the strongly aspirated "hitched" and "holey" and "hiked". Very economically, he catches the distinctive blend in Rimbaud's poem of a joyous impoverishment and a freedom from societal norms that allows the artist his imaginative fantasy. There is a subtle alignment in both poems between tattered clothes and poetic talent, as if the torn garments somehow guarantee the authenticity of the poet as bohemian wanderer. The motif of clothes is especially pronounced in the closing image of the tattered boot strummed like a "youthful violin or lute", giving us a sonorous rhyming couplet. Rimbaud's ideal coat is updated in Carson's sonnet and becomes 'my has-been-through-the wars ex-Army greatcoat'. Carson clearly enjoys this heavy piling on of modifiers, combined with humorous wordplay. The coat is a "has-been coat" in the sense of having seen better days, but it also has literally been through the wars. It's a great coat, as well as a greatcoat. There is an evident delight in the line "My trousers had a hole as big as any arse", not just because it contains both "arse" and "hole", but because it manages to retain Rimbaud's "trou" in "trousers" while also hinting at the "cul" or "arse" in "culotte". "Arse" and "universe" come together in an enterprising rhyme.

Here and elsewhere, Carson both attempts close proximity to the source text and enjoys the occasional striking departure from it. It is almost as if he feels that loose translations and creative slippages have to be earned. So, for instance, the address to the muse in line 3 is strategically positioned at mid-point, as in the original, but then Carson takes the liberty of imagining the two of them (poet and muse) on a bike. It is not just that he needs a rhyme or near rhyme for "hiked". It is also that the bike is a familiar emblem in Irish writing, closely connected with itinerant characters, all the way from Flann O'Brien's novel *The Third Policeman* to Samuel Beckett's novel *Molloy* and his play, *Endgame*. The image of poet and muse "in perfect rote" is beautifully done, hinting at rotation, turn taking, and route or direction all at once. This is another example of Carson "Irishing" these French sonnets (if such a term might be allowed).

Like Rimbaud, Carson imagines the poet scattering rhymes across the constellations, and he turns the Great Bear into a pub, nicely recalling the Green Bar of the earlier sonnet. Notice that it's "In the Great Bear", not under the Great Bear, that he sings his song. The colour imagery is peculiar to Carson, and it's familiar elsewhere in his work. The reference to "blue September" looks back to "blue skies" in the opening quatrain, but it also brings to mind the blues music heard in Kerouac's novel and hints more generally at autumnal melancholy. In addition, it also allows a resonant internal rhyme between "dew" and "blue". Rimbaud's invigorating wine becomes in Carson's poem a beautifully sensuous and Keatsian "cool green bubble-beaded wine". Of course, he gleefully seizes any opportunity to get the colour green into these poems.

There is very little critical writing on Carson's translations, but one of the most enlightening essays on the topic is by Adam Watt (co-editor with Brian Nelson of the Oxford Worlds Classics edition of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*). Watt says of Carson's evocation of "Long Ago remembered / In the first sip of a cool green bubble-beaded wine" that this is a "quasi-Proustian recollection of time past" which creates in Carson's poem a "more muted, perhaps even slightly wistful tone" than we find in the Rimbaud sonnet (234). Watt

goes on to compare Carson's translation with a Scottish translation by Patrick McGuinness comically titled "My Glasgowhemia".

It is worth noting that the rhymes in the first two quatrains (that is, the octave) of Rimbaud's sonnet have envelope rhymes, whereas in Carson's sonnet they have alternating rhymes. Rimbaud gives us *abba*, Carson gives us *abab*. This reinforces a very good point made by Adam Watt, which is that, for all its apparent demotic casualness and seeming improvisation, Carson's sonnet is actually highly wrought and technically adroit. Carson ends his sonnet not with the astounding image of the roving poet's foot close to his heart, but with the self-denigrating picture of the poet as "A veritable pop-star of the awful rhyme". The word "rhyme" purposefully rhymes awfully with "wine" in a clever moment of feigned incompetence.

In conclusion, it is instructive to compare Ciaran Carson's translations of French poets with those of the American poet, Robert Lowell, who chose the title *Imitations* (1961) for his versions of European poetry, including work by Rimbaud and Baudelaire. Lowell was criticised at the time for having given too much of an autobiographical emphasis to the poems, thereby abandoning objectivity and fidelity to the original texts. Carson does something rather different. At times, he produces translations that are ostentatiously Irish and overtly of their time – hence the anachronistic references to twentieth-century popular culture – but he always does so in a way that seems earned and justified, or in a style that is suddenly ignited by a word or image in the original. His proficiency in handling the sonnet form, including the alexandrine line, allows him some adventurousness, but he never travels too far. Instead, his creative manoeuvres have a dynamic effect, sending us back to the sonnets of nineteenth-century French decadent and symbolist poets with renewed insight and rekindled admiration.

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Translating Marilyne Bertoncini's "Adam&ve": images, emotions, and questions

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What does one translate when they translate a text? A succession of words? Or rather, the impressions that they produce on the reader? Personally, I am whole-heartedly convinced of the latter. The interpretation, and not the text itself, is paramount, as Umberto Eco argues in *Experiences in Translation*: "Translations do not concern a comparison between two languages but the interpretation of two texts in two different languages." (14)

I feel that this is especially true for poetry. As a reader, what I value in (and remember from) a poem is the web of emotions it impresses on me. The poem is not on the page, it lives somewhere between the book and the mind of the reader, in a third space where emotions are stirred, interrogations are asked and left there to mature. As it stands, I also strongly believe that a poem is a question, one that may not ever be answered and, more importantly, does not require an answer. Letting the poem come to you and move you is, in my opinion, the quintessential experience of poetry. Consequently, as a translator, I see my role as allowing the poem to exist in all its dimensions, so that readers can experience it as closely as possible to the original language.

The convention is that one translates from a foreign language into their mother tongue. The reverse happened here, which I believe helped me explore the impressions and effects from Marilyne Bertoncini's playful use of words and sensory images in "Adam&ve", but also, as we shall see, might have caused some less-than-ideal translations.

One or two bodies

The first hurdle in this translation is indeed the title "Adam&ve", a newly created word or name that is repeated throughout the piece. The ampersand links the two quasi-names of Adam and Eve and also stands for the first syllable of "Eve". This way, with one word only, the readers still hear the two names concatenated. To reproduce this effect in English, I kept the ampersand and had it play the role of the second syllable of "Adam" given the similarity in sounds, thus transforming the title into "Ad&Eve". While not perfect, it allowed English readers to experience a similar incongruity at the reading or hearing of this strange neologism, both recognisable and entirely new.

As foreseen with the title, one key feature of the text is the constant ambiguity between the one or two bodies of Adam and Eve. The poem seems to be written, as it states, "avant les commencements / et les dieux des humains" (before the beginnings / and the humans' gods). In this sense, and yet in a totally different register, the poem has the same feeling to it as William Butler Yeats' "*Before the world was made*". Adam and Eve seem to live in a time and space before they are severed into two, but strangely enough it is by the grouping of their two (already distinct) names that this is conveyed, just like the penultimate line forms their one body from "elle-lui" ("her-him"). To illustrate this tension, the whole poem is irrigated with many instances of plural ("Nés", "pétris", "délivrés", "ces deux corps") and singular ("Une même chair", "une seule bouche", "leur corps", "corps translucide").

A difficulty lies in translating the two instances of the singular "leur corps". In French, if a group of people has one object each, it is grammatically correct to use the singular, particularly if this object is not transferable (like a part of the body); the plural is used to put the focus on the group of objects owned. This entails that the singular "leur corps" could be a real one meaning a unique body, or a grammatical one talking about two bodies (one each). In the first case, it should logically be translated as singular; in the second, as plural. I wanted to

translate it the same on both occasions, so I settled for the plural as it sounded more natural, especially when contrasted with the singular night's ink or alongside the multiple explosion that evokes plurality. Secondly, the very fact that the plural possessive "leur" is used indicates that the owners of that body or bodies are already numerous. Finally, it allowed me to balance out the translation of several plurals ("Nés", "pétris", "délivrés", "issus", "méduses", "cheveux de comètes", "yeux de soleils") by seemingly singular or singular terms ("Born", "kneaded", "released", "born", "jellyfish", "comet hair", "sun eyes"), thus guaranteeing the overall ambiguity remained throughout the piece.

Lost in the space-ocean

The main impression of the poem is one of floating through space, before the human world of Adam and Eve and even before the creation of – one could think Platonic – forms ("où les formes sont à naître"/where forms are to be born). Contrary to Plato's conceptual realm, Marilyne Bertoncini's sensory context is vividly rendered with powerful lyrical images. What is particularly interesting is the combination of the scientific lexicon of physics, with examples such as "matière noire" (dark matter, which would have been a much better translation than "black matter"), "étoiles" (stars), "éther" (ether), "nébuleuses" (nebulae) or "comètes" (comet), and the maritime lexicon: "mer" (sea), "sirènes" (sirens), "nageuses" (swimming), "méduses" (jellyfish). The similarities between two seemingly very different worlds, up in the sky and down in the depths of the earth, is in my opinion what makes the poem work so well: the lack of gravity, the dark colours, and the absence of human beings.

I intended to convey such striking images by staying as close as possible to the text and translating the poem quite literally. I had also discovered a few weeks before submitting my entry how much I loved translations that stayed true to the author's intent. I was reading a newly published bilingual edition of Gary Snyder's *Myths & Texts* (translated as *Poème pour les oiseaux* in French) and found myself scribbling notes alongside the French translations. For Bertoncini's "Adam&ve", I therefore did not concern myself with understanding the choice of words but simply followed it, just as I followed the author's uppercase and lower-case decisions. Doing so allowed me to maintain most of the rhythm of the poem, through longer and shorter verses and stanzas, only making minor adjustments (such as moving the adjective 'multiple' to the verse above) to ensure consistency in both meaning and rhythm.

In particular, one new word to translate was the "espace-océan", that is exactly the combination of the word for space and ocean and adequately describes the fusion of the two in which this poem takes place. But should it be translated as "space-ocean" or "ocean-space", given the word order is usually reversed in English compared to French? "Ocean-space" had one problem: it sounded like it was a space for the ocean, and a quick Google search confirmed my fears – it was the name of a platform for "ocean action". With the goal of keeping the image fresh and new, something that would not have been heard before, I kept the original order of words to create the "space-ocean" in which readers could lose themselves too.

Forming the human world, sense after sense

Marilyne Bertoncini's writing is full of sensory images that I wanted to vividly render in translation. The poem summons nearly all senses, starting with touch in "pétris de la matière noire du Désir" (kneaded from the black matter of Desire). "Pétris" means *kneaded*, as one would with a bread or pizza dough. It could have also been translated as simply "shaped" or "formed" but in this I felt that we were losing the most important part, the hands-on action of kneading the matter like God must have done when he created Adam from clay. Touch (and taste?) is again used with the fleshy "Une même chair / une seule bouche" (One same flesh / one single mouth) and the bodies clotting "où coagulent ces deux corps" (where these two bodies clot). I preferred the rapidity of the verb 'clot' to 'coagulate' in English.

We also have hearing, introduced right after touch with the "chant de sirènes nébuleuses" (song of nebulous sirens) that could be the alluring sirens from Ulysses' Odyssey, both enchanting and incredibly dangerous. Hearing is then taken over by the "voix des étoiles" (stars' voice) that is shivering and the "Grelot de givre" (Frosty bell). The latter gave me some difficulty as a "grelot" is a small high-pitched bell, but the distinction does not exist in English, and "de givre" means literally made from frost – not just iced over. I settled for "Frosty bell" as it seemed to me the easiest way to carry the vision and hearing of a little white bell making frosty sounds.

And of course, the sight of colours progressively comes to life against the dark backdrop of the space-ocean. It starts with the absence of colour of the "matière noire" (dark matter), before moving on to the (implicitly red) blood at Adam and Eve's temples. Then, colour explicitly appears through a diaphanous body. In the verse "la blancheur de leur corps sur l'encre de la nuit" (the whiteness of their bodies against the night ink), translating the preposition "sur" with its usual meaning "on" did not fit. The idea was one of contrast between the black night and their white bodies, so "against" worked better. Bright white or yellow colour keeps slashing the dark background in the last two stanzas where the milky jellyfish "zébr[ent] le bitume indigo du vide universel" (strip[e] the indigo bitumen of the universal void) before their "comet hair" ("cheveux de comètes") and their "sun eyes" ("yeux de soleils") flash ("fulgurent"). It is precisely the flashing that seems to make the world emerge, so rendering these lightning impressions was essential.

"Adam&ve" was a pleasure to translate due to the many interwoven complexities that make it a masterpiece. For instance, the constant opposition between the worlds of Christianity (Eden, Adam and Eve, the Genesis) and of polytheist Ancient Greece (the forms, the ether, the sirens, the humans' gods), as well as the merging of the scientific spatial lexicon with the lyrical maritime one. By staying close to the text and trying to render the images and impressions to the English-speaking reader, I hope I have managed to convey both the joy and interrogations that this poem brought me.

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Adam&ve
By Marilyne Bertoncini

Nés de bien plus loin que l'Eden
pétris de la matière noire du Désir

Adam&ve

Une même chair
une seule bouche

le sang des étoiles bat à leurs tempes
dans l'espace-océan, l'éther mer infinie où
les formes sont à naître
nageuses étoiles au chant de sirènes
nébuleuses

la blancheur de leur corps sur l'encre de la
nuit

avant les commencements
et les dieux des humains

délivrés
retrouvant dans l'espace
l'obscurité céleste
la stellaire explosion
multiple de leur corps
se délite et se forme
la dimension cosmique
niée par la Genèse
enfermant leurs semblances

dans la prison d'Eden

Or la voix des étoiles frissonne
Grelot de givre des étoiles où coagulent ces
deux corps
issus d'une poussière astrale

Corps translucide de nébuleuses dérivant
dans l'espace
méduses bras étendus en longue trainée de
Voie lactée

Ad&Eve
By Marilyne Bertoncini

Translated by Diane Delaurens

Born from much farther than Eden
kneaded from the black matter of Desire

Ad&Eve

One same flesh
one single mouth

the stars' blood beats at their temples
in the space-ocean, the ether infinite sea
where forms are to be born
swimming stars to the song of nebulous
sirens

the whiteness of their bodies against the
night's ink

before the beginnings
and the humans' gods

released
finding again in space
the celestial obscurity
the multiple stellar explosion
of their bodies
crumbles and makes up
the cosmic dimension
denied by the Genesis
confining their semblances

in the prison of Eden

Yet the stars' voice shivers
Frosty bell of the stars where these two
bodies clot
born from an astral dust

Translucent body of nebulae drifting
through space
jellyfish with arms extended in the long trail
of the milky Way

zébrant le bitume indigo du vide universel
leurs cheveux de comètes
et leurs yeux de soleils fulgurent dans la nuit des espaces infinis
d'où le monde naquit

d'elle-lui
Adam&ve

striping the indigo bitumen of the universal void
their comet hair
and their sun eyes flash in the night of infinite spaces
from which the world was born

out of her-him
Ad&Eve

Translating ambiguity in "D'autres que les hommes" by Chantal Danjou

ALICE HEATHWOOD
French to English translator

Chantal Danjou is a prolific French author and literary critic. She has published over thirty works, including prose, poetry and essays. I had the privilege of translating an extract of her upcoming novel "*D'autres que les hommes"* [Other than men] as an entry into the AALITRA translation awards for 2024.

The extract is strange, unsettling and at times dream-like. Reading it, I was immediately struck by its atmosphere, poetic language and particularly by its ambiguity. I aimed to preserve these elements in my translation, not simply because they stood out to me as a reader, but because they contribute to the aesthetics, tone, impact and meaning of the work, and are, thus, vital to its expressive function (Reiss) and therefore overall purpose (Munday).

Ambiguity is a particular challenge in translation. As a communicative act, the purpose of translation is to reveal the meaning of the source text to the target-language reader, and therefore, often, to reduce ambiguity (Baker). Ambiguity is routinely seen as something that must be resolved (Boyarskaya) or even avoided at all costs (Grice). In a different kind of text, an instruction manual for instance, the role of the translator might indeed be to minimise ambiguity, rather than preserve it (Reiss). Here, the ambiguity appears to be intentional and a key characteristic of the text. It performs the function of creating atmosphere, sparking the reader's curiosity, and communicating the character's experience and mind-state. Therefore, my strategy was to maintain the veil of mystery the author places over certain aspects of the story, while still communicating that story to the reader, in an attempt to create a functional equivalence between the experience of the source and target-text readers (Munday).

As mentioned above, the ambiguousness of the text contributes to the atmosphere of mystery and also performs an important narrative function: it plunges the reader into the mindset of the protagonist who is deep in the forest, surrounded by darkness that the author describes as "uncertainty". "(*Dès qu'on s'éloignait d'un mètre de ses murs tout plongeait dans l'incertitude.*" [A few short steps from its walls, all was plunged into uncertainty.]) An unusual lexical choice that highlights the confusion in the protagonist's mind.

The title itself is a prime example of the text's ambiguity. "*D'autres que les hommes"*, which I translated as "Other than men", presents a range of possible meanings. Specifically, are we to understand the "*hommes*" as being male, or is the term used to refer more broadly to humans? In other words, is the distinction between men and women, or between humans and nonhumans: animals, ghosts or even aliens? The men mentioned in the extract do indeed have an otherworldly quality. They speak in an odd manner and vanish, ghostlike: "Ils disparurent. Ils s'effacèrent." [They vanished. Faded.] One seems to disappear not simply into the forest, but in and out of existence: "*Elle eut l'impression qu'il s'éclipsait. Ou s'éteignait.*" [he seemed to slip away. Or snuff out.] This man is even called "*l'homme des frontières, entre forêt et hameau... entre bêtes et humains.*" [the man of the borders, between forest and village … between animal and human.]

Equally, the title could refer to the fact that the majority of characters in the extract are male, aside from our female protagonist, Lonie.

"Mais il n'y avait qu'elle et ces hommes étranges qui venaient avec le soir et la pluie. Elle eut un frisson."

[But there was nothing save herself and these strange men who came with the night and the rain. She shivered.]

The gender dynamic in the text appears to be significant, particularly since the men are depicted as somewhat menacing. That is why I finally chose to translate "hommes" as "men", even though the strangeness of the text suggested to me that the otherworldliness of the characters was also a key element. Furthermore, the author could have chosen to entitle the text: "D'autres que les humains" [other than humans], yet Danjou did not go as far as to talk explicitly of nonhumans, indicating that she wanted to preserve this ambiguity and raise these same questions in the minds of readers as we have been discussing here. Since in English, the word "men" is also sometimes still used to refer to people in general, I was able to carry the ambiguity across into the English text.

Similarly, "D'autres que" could have been rendered as "aside from" or "apart from", however the word "other" seemed more appropriate in this context, as it evokes the concept of "otherness", which is a key part of the mystery, tension and ambiguity of the text.

Another challenge in translating this extract was the scientific vocabulary. Surprisingly for a piece of literature, the text contains some technical biological terms, such as "*stylommatophores*" (stylommatophora – an order of air-breathing snails and slugs) and stylets (the eyestalks of these slugs). There was a temptation to simplify these terms, so that their meaning would be immediately apparent to the, presumably non-expert, English readership. However, the unusual decision to include scientific terms was clearly deliberate on the part of the author, and the intended French readership was likely also made up of general readers, rather than experts. The choice of vocabulary was therefore clearly intended to enhance the mystery of the piece and provide information on the expertise of the characters depicted. Clearly, the author does not use the technical language to facilitate comprehension; on the contrary, the language is used to *disconcert* the reader. Again, even through precision, Danjou remains deliberately ambiguous. This fact is also apparent in the fragmented manner in which the technical information is presented:

"Mais les voilà qui s'interrogeaient : stylommatophores ?
L'un d'eux parla de stylet ; un autre de voir ; « l'œil au bout de deux de leurs tentacules » précisa en criant un troisième qui restait à l'orée du bois."

[Now they were wondering aloud about stylommatophora.
One spoke of stylets; another of sight; "an eye on each tip of one pair of tentacles" added a third, who remained at the edge of the woods]

I therefore chose to translate the technical terms strictly accurately, without using everyday vocabulary or explanation in order to preserve the confusion created by the source text.

Contrary to the idea that translation always elucidates, preserving ambiguity can actually be desirable in a literary text when that ambiguity is part of its aesthetic and expressive function. The purpose of translation is not to explain the source text, but rather to recreate it with the tools of the target language. In this extract, ambiguity is a tool, wielded by Danjou to great literary effect. To reduce the ambiguity of this particular text would be a disservice to the work, given the purpose and function that the ambiguity serves: creating an atmosphere, giving clues to the mindset and knowledge of the characters and creating a particular impression and experience in the mind of the reader. In short, ironically, the ambiguity itself communicates information, which must be carried over into the target text.

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D'autres que les hommes
Chantal Danjou

La profonde et profonde forêt entourait la maison, une si petite maison qui aurait presque eu l'air d'un champignon couleur de limace mûre.

Limace mûre ?

Ils regardèrent autour de la maison et échangèrent quelques clins d'œil, d'un air de dire qu'on n'avait jamais vu ni entendu parler du mûrissement des stylommatophores. Il valait mieux d'ailleurs ignorer que de telles choses pussent se produire. Il n'empêche que son toit de lauzes, bombé, avait pris avec l'humidité une teinte plus foncée, brune sous laquelle un ocre un peu rouge osait percer à la faveur des premiers rayons de soleil après l'averse.

Mais les voilà qui s'interrogeaient : stylommatophores ?

L'un d'eux parla de stylet ; un autre de voir ; « l'œil au bout de deux de leurs tentacules » précisa en criant un troisième qui restait à l'orée du bois. Il fallait être trois pour parvenir à une conclusion. Élever la voix parfois pour se faire entendre. Un mince filet de fumée sortit de la cheminée, sorte d'aboutissement de réflexion.

Ils disparurent.
Ils s'effacèrent.
Le vent.
Les gerbes d'eau qui tombaient des arbres.
La gouttière qui sifflait.
La maison s'enfonça.

La terre toute gonflée. La moindre empreinte se creusait. D'épais bourrelets et bien gras brillaient de chaque côté. Il n'y avait vraiment plus que la maison. Ce quasi noir autour. Dès qu'on s'éloignait d'un mètre de ses murs tout plongeait dans l'incertitude. Et ces limaces sur le toit, sur les chemins, ces rubans de limaces. Toute cette longueur

Other than men
Chantal Danjou

Translated by Alice Heathwood

The deep, deep forest surrounded the house. A house so small it almost looked like a mushroom, the colour of a ripe slug.

A ripe slug?

They looked around the house and winked at each other, seeming to say that ripening stylommatophora were never seen nor heard of, and that it would be better in any case not to know that such things could occur. The fact remained that the bulging, stone-shingled roof had darkened in the wet to a brown hue, under which a reddish ochre peeped out in the first rays of sunlight after the rain.

Now they were wondering aloud about stylommatophora.

One spoke of stylets; another of sight; "an eye on each tip of one pair of tentacles" added a third, who remained at the edge of the woods. It took all three of them to find an answer. At times a voice was raised so as to be heard. A thin stream of smoke escaped from the chimney, a kind of conclusion after deliberation.

They vanished.
Faded.
Wind.
Water showering down from the trees.
Whistling from the gutter.
The house slumped.

The earth all bloated. The slightest footprint sunk. Bulges, thick and fat, glistening at the sides. Nothing left but the house. The near dark outside. A few short steps from its walls all was plunged into uncertainty. And those slugs, on the roof, on the paths, those ribbons of slugs. Long, improbable stretches of slugs. What did they smell like? A little sweet no doubt. The man

invraisemblable de limaces. Quelle odeur avaient-elles ? Un peu sucrée sans doute. L'homme qui était resté à la lisière de la forêt réapparut. Il acquiesça : « Oui, un peu sucrée. ». Il se tint immobile un moment. Seul et roide. Un peu penché sur la droite. Aussi sombre que les troncs qui s'alignaient à côté de lui.

who had remained at the edge of the forest reappeared. He nodded: "Yes, a little sweet." He stood still a moment. Alone and stiff. Leaning a little to the right. As dark as the tree trunks lined up beside him.

Lonie pencha légèrement la tête vers la gauche. Elle eut l'impression qu'il s'éclipsait. Ou s'éteignait. Elle hésita. Une silhouette à peine détachée de celles des arbres portant au front la loupiote rouge d'une lampe frontale. C'était ça. Effrayant. Mais puisqu'il s'était volatilisé… Lui, oui. Pas ce sucré qui lui sembla envahir la pièce. Elle regarda à nouveau à l'extérieur. À quoi bon ? La nuit tombait brusquement. Le soir était peu marqué. Tout se jouait dans la pièce à présent. Les rafales et le ruissellement incessant tambourinaient si fort sur le toit que le salon paraissait rempli de bâtons de pluie toujours renversés. Une odeur d'humidité avec son irrésistible note sucrée imprégnait les murs, la fenêtre à petits carreaux avec son rideau à damier blanc et bleu, le canapé.

Lonie tilted her head slightly to the left and he seemed to slip away. Or snuff out. She hesitated. A silhouette barely distinguishable from those of the trees, the red light of a headlamp shining from its forehead. That was it. Frightening. But then, since it had evaporated… He had. Not that sweet that seemed to flood the room. She looked outside again. What for? Night was falling suddenly. Evening barely came. Now the room was the world. The incessant downpour and gusts battered the roof so hard that the living room seemed filled with ever-turning rainsticks. The smell of damp with its irresistible hint of sweetness pervaded the walls, the small-paned window with its blue and white checkered curtain, the sofa.

Du bois.

Wood.

Il lui aurait fallu trois ou quatre bûches de plus.

She should have gotten three or four more logs.

L'idée de ressortir… « Ressortir » – répéta en écho l'homme des frontières, entre forêt et hameau, bien que les autres maisons soient vides, entre bêtes et humains. Mais il n'y avait qu'elle et ces hommes étranges qui venaient avec le soir et la pluie. Elle eut un frisson.

The thought of going back outside… "back outside" echoed the man of the borders; between forest and village (although the other houses were empty), between animal and human. But there was nothing save herself and these strange men who came with the night and the rain. She shivered.

Translation of Chantal Danjou's *D'autres que les hommes*

ANNETTE MITCHELL
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Chantal Danjou is an author, literary critic and member of the Editorial committee of Editions Encres Vives. Born in Algeria, having lived for years in Paris, she now lives and works in the Var region of France. She currently teaches in teachers training schools; her role is in creating memoirs and offering courses on contemporary poetry, and devising projects on reading and poetic experiences. She has raised the profile of contemporary poetry through her work at La Roue Traversière, the association she co-founded in 1989 and worked at until 2021 (Danjou Biographie, 2025). Her works comprise poetry, essays and prose. The translation of this latest unpublished work reflects her poetic style.

As there is little literature on Danjou's prose work, I searched for background information and read an excerpt from 'L'Ombre et le ciel' (Danjou, 2021) as well as an article she wrote 'Méditerranée, vers un noir paysager. Jalons d'un itinéraire personnel' (Danjou, 2014) and another article she wrote with Dominique Hecq, "Hush, A Fugue" (2017). In addition, there was an interview from Florence Saint-Roch in which Danjou (n.d.) described how she finds the poetry in the mundanity of life and regards poetry and prose interchangeable in her work.

The poetic prose of the extract was a challenge to translate, and I aimed to capture the enigmatic nature of her poetic prose. She creates visual images and mood which I aimed to replicate in my translation. Her narrative is in the form of visual metaphors so that my challenges involved recreating the metaphors and retaining the mood of the ST (source text). For example, she writes in the third person as a witness to a frightening scene where the female protagonist is alone except for the presence of strange men around her house.

I found the visual aspects particularly difficult to translate and aimed for an equivalence strategy which had the goal of respecting the ST while creating a similar effect of that on the Source Audience on the Target Audience as described by Christiane Nord (quoted in Pym, 2023), as communicative equivalence.

For example, in relation to the metaphors she uses, Danjou herself sees the 'noir' as a site where there is potential for metamorphosis and resistance (Danjou, 2014). In the translation passage the scenario occurs at night and there are male silhouettes and outlines which threaten the female protagonist. She describes the 'noir' of the night as uncertainty. This uneasy scenario is emphasised by the last line where the protagonist felt a shiver when confronted with all the strangeness of the scene and the behaviour of the men.

The strange and repellent aspects of the night are highlighted by the description of the roof of the house:

> "son toit de lauzes, bombé, avec l'humidité une teinte plus foncée, brune sous laquelle un ocre un peu rouge osait percer à la faveur des premiers rayons de soleil après l'averse"

I translated this as being like the colour of a 'brown stylommatophora' through which "peaked a 'red ochre' grasping the first rays of the sun after the shower."

Another image which also proved a challenge, was that of:

> "un mince filet de fumée sortit de la cheminée, sorte d'aboutissement de réflexion"

which I translated as:

> "whisp of smoke exiting the chimney like the culmination of deliberation."

To me it suggested a moment of deliberation as well as a reflection of the men's voices.

My greatest challenge was that of a metaphor of the wind and rain hammering the roof.

> "Les rafales et le ruissellement incessant tambourinaient si fort que le salon paraissait rempli de bâtons de pluie toujours renversés"

which I translated as:

> "the gusts and the incessant rustling hammered the roof so much that the lounge room seemed full of reversed rods of rain."

as I understood it as a musical metaphor because the rain is hammering the roof as if it were hammering a 'tambourine'.

Overall, I found the main challenges in translating this text were maintaining the visual metaphors, the music of the prose and the poetic mood of the text.

To this end, I found that an approach of communicative equivalence, while respecting the ST proved to be the best way to translate the complex visual, metaphorical, and poetic text.

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D'autres que les hommes
Chantal Danjou

La profonde et profonde forêt entourait la maison, une si petite maison qui aurait presque eu l'air d'un champignon couleur de limace mûre.

Limace mûre ?

Ils regardèrent autour de la maison et échangèrent quelques clins d'œil, d'un air de dire qu'on n'avait jamais vu ni entendu parler du mûrissement des stylommatophores. Il valait mieux d'ailleurs ignorer que de telles choses pussent se produire. Il n'empêche que son toit de lauzes, bombé, avait pris avec l'humidité une teinte plus foncée, brune sous laquelle un ocre un peu rouge osait percer à la faveur des premiers rayons de soleil après l'averse.

Mais les voilà qui s'interrogeaient : stylommatophores ?

L'un d'eux parla de stylet ; un autre de voir ; « l'œil au bout de deux de leurs tentacules » précisa en criant un troisième qui restait à l'orée du bois. Il fallait être trois pour parvenir à une conclusion. Élever la voix parfois pour se faire entendre. Un mince filet de fumée sortit de la cheminée, sorte d'aboutissement de réflexion.

Ils disparurent.

Ils s'effacèrent.

Le vent.

Les gerbes d'eau qui tombaient des arbres.

La gouttière qui sifflait.

La maison s'enfonça.

La terre toute gonflée. La moindre empreinte se creusait. D'épais bourrelets et bien gras brillaient de chaque côté. Il n'y avait vraiment plus que la maison. Ce

Other than men
Chantal Danjou

Translated by Annette Mitchell

The deep dark forest encircled the house, so small that it almost seemed to be a mushroom, the colour of a ripe slug.

A ripe slug?

They looked around the house and winked at each other, as if to say that they had never seen or heard about slugs ripening. It is better not to know that such things can happen. That didn't stop its domed slate roof, in the humidity, becoming a deeper brown out of which peaked a slightly red ochre grasping the first rays of the sun after the shower.

But then they asked themselves:
Stylommatophora?
One of them spoke of styluses: another watched. At the edge of the woodland, the third cried "the eyes at the end of their tentacles". It took three to reach a conclusion. Occasionally raising their voices to be heard. A fine thread of smoke exited the chimney like the culmination of reflection.

They disappeared.
They left no trace.
The wind.
The water sprayed from the trees.
The gutter whistled.
The house dug in.

The land was so swollen that the smallest footprint left a mark. Thick, fatty bulges glistened on either side. There was really nothing but the house. Surrounded by the

quasi noir autour. Dès qu'on s'éloignait d'un mètre de ses murs tout plongeait dans l'incertitude. Et ces limaces sur le toit, sur les chemins, ces rubans de limaces. Toute cette longueur invraisemblable de limaces. Quelle odeur avaient-elles ? Un peu sucrée sans doute. L'homme qui était resté à la lisière de la forêt réapparut. Il acquiesça : « Oui, un peu sucrée. ». Il se tint immobile un moment. Seul et roide. Un peu penché sur la droite. Aussi sombre que les troncs qui s'alignaient à côté de lui.

Lonie pencha légèrement la tête vers la gauche. Elle eut l'impression qu'il s'éclipsait. Ou s'éteignait. Elle hésita. Une silhouette à peine détachée de celles des arbres portant au front la loupiote rouge d'une lampe frontale. C'était ça. Effrayant. Mais puisqu'il s'était volatilisé… Lui, oui. Pas ce sucré qui lui sembla envahir la pièce. Elle regarda à nouveau à l'extérieur. À quoi bon ? La nuit tombait brusquement. Le soir était peu marqué. Tout se jouait dans la pièce à présent. Les rafales et le ruissellement incessant tambourinaient si fort sur le toit que le salon paraissait rempli de bâtons de pluie toujours renversés. Une odeur d'humidité avec son irrésistible note sucrée imprégnait les murs, la fenêtre à petits carreaux avec son rideau à damier blanc et bleu, le canapé.

Du bois.
Il lui aurait fallu trois ou quatre bûches de plus.
L'idée de ressortir… « Ressortir » – répéta en écho l'homme des frontières, entre forêt et hameau, bien que les autres maisons soient vides, entre bêtes et humains. Mais il n'y avait qu'elle et ces hommes étranges qui venaient avec le soir et la pluie. Elle eut un frisson.

near darkness. When you stepped a metre away from its walls everything was plunged into uncertainty. And these slugs on the roof, on the paths, these ribbons of slugs. All that improbable line of slugs. What did they smell like? No doubt, slightly sweet. The man resting at the edge of the forest reappeared. He agreed: "Yes, slightly sweet". He stood still momentarily. Alone and rigid. Slightly tilted to the right. As sombre as the tree trunks lined up beside him.

Lonie tilted her head slightly to the left. She thought that he was slipping away. Or was extinguished. She hesitated. A silhouette barely detached from the trees, wearing the red headlamp on its forehead. That was it. Frightening. But then he vanished. Him, yes. Not the sweet scent which seemed to invade the room. She looked outside again. What good was it? The night fell abruptly. The evening was only slightly marked. Everything was taking place in the room at that moment. The gusts and the incessant rustling hammered the roof so much that the lounge room seemed full of inverted batons of rain. An odour of humidity with its irresistible sweet note impregnated the walls, the small-paned window with its white and blue chequered curtain, the sofa.

Wood.
The fire needed three or more logs.
The idea of going outside … "Go outside" echoed the frontiersman, between forest and hamlet, although the other houses were empty, between beasts and humans. But she was alone with these strange men who brought the night and the rain. She felt a shiver.

Polish poet Jan Lechoń's uniquely expressive poem "Czerwone wino" (Red Wine)

MARY BESEMERES
Australian National University

Do we need another poem about autumn? I think this one deserves to be better known.

"Czerwone wino" by twentieth-century Polish poet Jan Lechoń (1899–1956) is a "Polish alexandrine": each line has thirteen syllables, with two main stresses, on the sixth and twelfth syllables, with a pause (caesura) after the seventh syllable. My translation is in accentual verse,[1] for two reasons. One is that regular metre, particularly the iambic hexameter traditionally used to translate alexandrines from other European languages into English, is apt to make a modern poem sound antiquated in English. According to "British Literature Wiki", "The orthodoxy of iambic pentameter and four line stanzas saw its last great users in the nineteenth century with Tennyson".[2] As a recent Polish reader puts it, "Czerwone Wino" is a poem which "hasn't aged" in Polish[3]; "Red wine" seeks to be of a similar vintage. The second reason for relinquishing metre is that in the original, *images* are a key element, defining nine of the twelve lines; my aim was to find as convincing equivalents for these as possible, without having to field additional lexical constraints. Entirely free verse, however, would depart too much from the original's steady alexandrine rhythm. I have tried to capture something of the original's conversational cadence, held in metrical check, by keeping to a rhythm of four stresses per line, with a faint pause mid-line to echo the Polish caesura, e.g. "Their skin is so green, so mauve at its curve" for "*Tak ich skórka zielona, a brzegiem liliowa*".

Likewise, I have not attempted rhyme in my translation. Rhyme would introduce another barrier for most readers approaching a poem from the already (relative to the antipodes) obscure historical quarter of WWII-era Polish émigré writing. As has often been noted, English is not as conducive to unforced-sounding rhymes as are Slavic languages like Polish or Russian with their inflected grammar readily providing echoing morphemes. In relation to Russian, translator Bill Bowler comments: "While retaining the stanza breaks to evoke the original, I decided to translate the poem into free verse, a very robust and flexible form in American versification. This allowed me to stick close to the meaning, line by line." As he puts it:

> Translating poetry represents a set of compromises. The pull between form and content poses a big challenge. You can try to recreate the rhyme and meter of the original – both dominant elements in Russian poetry – but it will force you to compromise semantic accuracy, word choice and order, lexical levels, etc. [4]

On the other hand, not reproducing Lechoń's *abba* rhyme scheme of the first two stanzas, as in "*słońce/trzciny/godziny/spadające*", does count as a loss, given that it helps shape the sound and therefore rhythm of the poem in Polish. The closest that my version comes to *abba* rhyme is in the second stanza, where for "*liliowa*" I chose "mauve" over "lilac" for the internal half-rhyme it created with "curve", half-echoed by "words" at the end of the next line.

[1] See Dana Gioia, "Accentual verse", for an attractively clear definition.
[2] Edna St. Vincent Millay is arguably a counter-example here.
[3] In an online review of a recent selection of Lechoń 's poems, the reader singles out "Czerwone wino" and one other poem as "living poetry", that "still catches you by the throat" (@almos)
[4] See also Conor Kelly, "Due to the nature of Russian grammatical endings, many words rhyme with each other and allow poets wide avenues for poetic expression"; Derfder, "When I in Czech or Slovak […] I have much more possibilities when building rhymes"

Turning from form to semantics, the hardest line to render in English is the last line in that second stanza, in some ways the heart of the poem: "*Ach! jak tu odpowiedzieć: czy jestem szczęśliwy*?" In an illuminating essay on being Polish in America, poet, translator and critic Stanisław Barańczak (1992, 12) contrasted the meanings of the Polish word "*szczęśliwy*" and the English "happy":

> Take the word 'happy,' perhaps one of the most frequently used words in Basic American. […] The Polish word for 'happy' (and I believe this also holds for other Slavic languages) has a much more restricted meaning; it is generally reserved for rare states of profound bliss, or total satisfaction with serious things such as love, family, the meaning of life […] Accordingly, it is not used as often as 'happy' is in American common parlance. The question one hears at […] parties / 'Is everybody happy?' / if translated literally into Polish, would seem to come from a metaphysical treatise or a political utopia rather than from social chitchat.

Barańczak's arresting contrast between "rare states of profound bliss" and the banal party-host question "Is everybody happy?" suggests how ill-equipped the English "happy" is to carry the weight of feeling in Lechoń's line, "*Ach! jak tu odpowiedzieć: czy jestem szczęśliwy*?" Yet none of the various alternatives I considered – "content", "contented", "glad", "satisfied" – was an improvement. "Truly happy", is a closer match to "*szczęśliwy*" than mere "happy", but is in the wrong register for a lyric poem, smacking of self-help manuals. In the end I opted for "Ah, how to answer, then: am I happy?", cutting the exclamation point after "*Ach*" (perfect in modern Polish, melodramatic in English), adding a
comma and "then" before the colon to slow the rhythm and suggest a self-searching pause.

Polish literary scholar Paulina Słoma offers a lucid reading of "*Czerwone wino*" which emphasizes its painterly quality, displaying a poet at work "painting" images: "*Choć maluje go jedynie przy pomocy słów, czyni to bardzo plastycznie*" (Although he paints it [the landscape] with words alone, he does so very graphically). While this reading is perceptive and persuasive, it does not mention the central line ending "*czy jestem szczęśliwy*?" Yet the gap between the poem's glowing images and the speaker's undeclared mood is at the core of its overall meaning. "*I wszystko tu coś znaczy tylko brak nam słowa*" ("And it all has some meaning, we just lack the words") provides a cue for the suddenly subjective response "*Ach! jak tu odpowiedzieć: czy jestem szczęśliwy*?" by turning from what is being described to the idea that each image has "meaning", even if cannot be expressed. The vivid images of autumn sun, shivering reeds, plums changing colour, work as an enigmatic "objective correlative" (in T.S. Eliot's famous formulation) to the unstated feeling. The poem immerses the reader in this feeling, while giving nothing away about what is actually going on in the poet's life. The unsaid is also evoked by the mysterious depths of the ocean plumbed by the imaginary diver in the last stanza.

There is an overall impression of autumnal ripeness, verging on over-ripeness; beauty without hope ("*jezioro z ołowiu*"/ "leaden lake"), a sense of unnatural stillness, even claustrophobia, and underlying these, I'd argue, emotional, existential pain. Yet there is also an evenness, a degree of control, that gives way when the poet unexpectedly asks, "am I happy?" then returns in the final stanza, where he shows himself wringing essences (if not happiness exactly) from available sights and tastes. If all he is doing is spending "dreamy" hours ("*senne*" is literally sleepy, but "*sen*" can mean dream or sleep) watching the sun setting, stars falling, plums ripening, why is he *not* "*szczęśliwy*"? There are some clues in what is known of Lechoń's life at the time he wrote "*Czerwone wino*", as well as before and after.

Jan Lechoń (real name Leszek Serafinowicz) lived with serious depression, through decades of (trans)national upheaval and trauma. His first breakdown came at age 22 in 1921,

after the stellar success of his first major volume *Karmazynowy Poemat* (Crimson Epic), a work redolent of a lifelong preoccupation with Polish Romanticism and classicism: the best-known line is, "*A wiosną - niechaj wiosnę, nie Polskę zobaczę*" [In spring may I see *spring*, not Poland].[5] This personal crisis occurred in the wake of WWI and the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1921, which established the Second Polish Republic, a Poland independent for the first time since its late 18th century Russian, Prussian and Austrian Partitions. At the time "*Czerwone wino*" was published, in 1942, in the volume *Lutnia po Bekwarku* (Bekwark's Lute), Lechoń was living precariously in New York, having escaped from Nazi-occupied Paris in 1941. The poem may have been written in New York, in Paris, where he lived from 1930–1940, or even in pre-war Poland, which he visited from France. In New York, from the first, Lechoń struggled to stay afloat financially and mentally. He edited the Polish émigré literary magazine *Wiadomości polskie* but had an uneasy relationship with the émigré community. In pre-war Warsaw (unlike in wider interwar Polish society which was strongly religious and conservative), in the social circles gathered around the celebrated "Skamander" group of poets of which Lechoń was a founding member, his homosexuality had been tacitly accepted. Among émigré Poles in America, however, it was frequently stigmatized. A fellow émigré in New York reported Lechoń's liaison with an American man to the FBI, which suspected East European creatives of being communists – ironically, far from the truth in the case of Lechoń, who was an impassioned anti-communist nationalist (see Stephan). This led to delays with the progress of his application for US citizenship; he feared being deported to now Soviet Poland.

A source of lasting anguish to Lechoń was the sense that his country had been lost to him – first under Nazi occupation, then Soviet occupation and effective annexation. There was a painful irony in the fact that his homosexuality was anathema to those who most closely shared his political outlook. He was unable to write, "oppressed by a sense of émigré obsolescence and poetic sterility" (Aldrich & Wotherspoon 2002, 261). In 1956 he ended his life by leaping from the twelfth floor of Hudson hotel.

These details provide context for reading his poetry, and the patriotic, exilic element is particularly significant; for a Polish poet at this time, loss of country meant the loss of a readership in his language, his medium. Yet from the opening lines of "*Czerwone wino*" there is an invitation to readers to slip into the state of mind the poem conjures, to recognize it (or something like it) from our own experience. As for many other readers of the Polish, for me, the pull of this voice remains compelling. I hope something of it can be heard in my translation.[6]

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[5] Characteristically, this line's anti-patriotic sentiment belies the work's passionate concern with Poland's fate, historic and poetic.

[6] With thanks to Chris Miller, Sarah Rice and Kevin Windle for constructive critique and encouragement.

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Czerwone wino
Jan Lechoń

Bardzo wcześnie jest jesień. Coraz wcześniej słońce
Za jezioro z ołowiu w drżące spada trzciny.
Dzień jest po to, by sennie płynęły godziny,
A wieczór, by oglądać gwiazdy spadające.

Renoir chyba w sadzie pomalował śliwy,
Tak ich skórka zielona, a brzegiem liliowa,
I wszystko tu coś znaczy, tylko brak nam słowa.
Ach! jak tu odpowiedzieć: czy jestem szczęśliwy?

Jak nurek schodzi w mroki tajemniczych głębin,
Gdzie się przepych koralu bogato rozpina,
Tak ja wypijam wzrokiem czerwoność jarzębin,
Lub próbuję wargami czerwonego wina.

Red Wine
Jan Lechoń

Translated by Mary Besmeres

Autumn is very early. Earlier each day the sun
Slides behind a leaden lake into shivering reeds.
The day is for letting the hours go dreamily by,
The evening, for watching the falling stars.

Renoir must have painted the plums in the orchard,
Their skin is so green, so mauve at its curve,
And it all has some meaning, we just lack the words.
Ah, how to answer, then: am I happy?

As a diver descends into the dusk of secret depths,
Where the splendour of coral richly unfurls,
So I drink in deeply the red of the rowan,
Put a glass to my lips to savour red wine.

"Hymn to Liberty" by Dionysios Solomos
An English Translation of Stanzas 1-16

PANAYOTIS TSAMBOS
Translator and independent scholar of Greek Literature

Introduction

This commentary accompanies my translation to English of the epic Greek poem "Hymn to Liberty" by Dionysios Solomos. First published in 1825, it is a poem of critical importance to Greek identity and is ingrained in the historical, cultural and political aspects of Greece. Its opening stanzas became Greece's national anthem. Following the bicentennial of the poem's first publication, it is timely to have a new translation that focusses on accessibility to modern generations. That is, a translation that prioritizes contemporary English idioms to promote engagement, particularly by younger generations of the Greek diaspora who encounter these verses primarily as a ceremonial anthem rather than living poetry.

To aid my endeavour I consulted Kimon Friar's magnificent essay on translation (Friar, 649–678) as it is especially useful for Modern Greek poetry. It was with trepidation I considered his cautions, about "*whether poetry can be well translated by one who is not himself a poet*" (Friar, 667) or to not be "*a translator, impelled by ambition beyond his reach*" (Friar, 656). While I worked on my translation, I didn't want to be influenced by other translations. However, after I finished it, I decided I should investigate other translations, no matter how briefly. Most I found were of the first few stanzas only, and it is just the first two which are used as the Greek national anthem for official events or ceremonies. The complete poem is actually 158 stanzas. This translation is of the first sixteen stanzas, so nowhere near complete either. I hope however that in conjunction with prior works it gives the reader some insight into the thoughts of the poet and the Greek population of those times.

A secondary objective here is to discuss a few topics that I used to structure my thoughts while translating this poem. With the benefit of the post-translation research, I have been able to use some well-known translations as examples within these topics. Initially I did not consider these topics (A to D, described below) as a translation process for poetry because of a crucial step I needed in producing the translated poem. This being that I moulded each stanza "going in circles" by testing different possibilities until some rhythmic pattern emerged.

It has since been pointed out that this approach may still be considered a part of a process. Its circularity is a methodology arising from the creative act of translation, an endeavour that ponders every phrase. Such an intermediary step may not be required by bilingual poets who can conjure both meaning and poetic form simultaneously, however I found the step highly necessary. Friar posits that someone who is not a poet cannot translate poetry well. Yet this raises the question: might not the translator absorb some of the same skills - linguistic mastery, aesthetic judgment, rhythmic sensitivity – that characterize poetic creation itself?

Topic A: Adapt or adhere?

Charles Brinsley Sheridan was in 1825 the first to offer an English translation (Tiktopoulou, 86) of the complete poem. His work highlights the first question to consider in reproducing a poem in another language. That is, should it be an adaptation or as much as possible a literal rendering in the other language? Sheridan chose adaptation, which helps considerably for such a long poem because it can avoid direct translation of difficult stanzas. His translation harks back to the classicism of those times and contains numerous archaisms. I chose to adhere as

much as I could to literal accuracy. I wanted the reader to absorb it as a historical account, in poem form, of the Greek populace's experiences around the 1821 War of Independence.

Topic B: Translate in full or in part?

Rudyard Kipling, in his version of 1918 (Kipling), also chose the adaptation approach. However, on the question of whether to translate the whole poem or just selected parts of it, his translation is a translation in part. Obviously, this approach can make it easier to create translations. In this, Kipling had the simpler task by restricting himself to producing seven stanzas, and not the 158 in full. However, he created a translation held in very high esteem indeed. This may be judged by the fact his version is used by the Greek Government on its English web pages (HELLENIC REPUBLIC-Greece in the World).

Kipling's version highlights the second decision that must be made by the translator. That is, just how much of a poem needs to be translated? In this case, for some uses, an argument could be made for the first two stanzas as it is they that are used officially. Next, possibly the fifteenth because of its rousing nature; at least Kipling thought so as he includes it as stanza number six of his seven. Kipling's poem also highlights a sub-variant of translation in part, whereby the stanzas translated are not contiguous.

Due to the time required for a full translation, given the difficulty of English rhyme for the poem's language and in particular its idioms, I stopped at the sixteenth stanza. This is because that is where stanza 2 repeats. In fact, it reappears as stanzas seventy-four and eighty-seven also. I felt that by employing this device, Solomos returns to the emotional, central idea behind his poem, and it seems a fitting way to end this translation.

I also felt that readers can still get an understanding of Solomos's language and poetic style, as well as Liberty's travails with my translation. Also, as they are contiguous stanzas, the possibility of appending to the translation with the least impact is retained.

Topic C: Preserve rhyme and visual shape?

It is with this topic where, as translator, I had a plethora of compromises to consider.
Many difficulties may be side-stepped by using free verse or "plain prose" (Trypanis, 501). His translation consists of the first four stanzas, of which the first two lines are shown below:

> I recognize you by the fierce edge of your sword; I recognize you by the look
> that measures the earth.
> Liberty, who sprang out of the sacred bones of the Greeks brave as in the past, I
> greet you, I greet you.
>
> Constantine A. Trypanis

However, my objective was different. I desired a translation that used more traditional rhythmic elements.
Solomos's poem is visually represented in quatrains (stanzas of four lines). Sheridan and Kipling both employ the quatrain in their translations, preserving the quatrain structure of the original poem.
Choice of visual representation is often influenced by poetic rhyme so a quatrain can be more difficult to use in translations, as opposed to the simpler AA rhyme frequently found in couplets. Using a minimum of Greek, the following pattern is easy to see in every stanza of his poem:

- the final vowel of the 1st and 3rd lines is the same and is never accented.
- the final vowel of the 2nd and 4th lines is the same and is always accented (i.e. stressed).

Noting the above one may guess the rhyme, and indeed the Solomos quatrains do have an ABAB rhyme pattern, where the A lines rhyme together as do the B lines with each other. To test the effects of rhyme on visual shape, Sheridan's and Kipling's first stanza can be used as examples. See the table below:

Original	Couplet form
Yes! I know thee by the lightning *Of thy tyrant-slaying glaive,* *By thine awful glances bright'ning,* *As thou gazest on the brave.*	*Yes! I know thee by the lightning of thy tyrant-slaying glaive,* *By thine awful glances bright'ning as thou gazest on the brave.*
	Charles Brinsley Sheridan

Original	Couplet form
We knew thee of old, *O divinely restored,* *By the lights of thine eyes* *And the light of thy Sword.*	*We knew thee of old, o divinely restored,* *By the lights of thine eyes and the light of thy Sword.*
	Rudyard Kipling

While not suggesting the couplet forms above are improvements, one can see that Kipling's quatrain is quite amenable to couplet form as it has just two lines that rhyme with each other. Sheridan's is more accessible as a quatrain because of its ABAB rhyme. It should also be noted that quatrains do not mandate the ABAB form.

Another aspect affecting both rhyme and shape is the syllable count of the lines. Solomos quatrains can be viewed as two pairs of lines, the first line of each pair being 8 syllables, and the second 7 syllables, in length. This structure applies to a large proportion of the 158 stanzas. My translation uses quatrains and an ABCB form of rhyme.

Topic D: What of the audience?

This question is really a restatement of 'what type of language should I have used?' To answer the above, one should consider that a considerable portion of the population was illiterate due to hundreds of years of subjugation. Writing in the vernacular (i.e. demotic) and using idioms of the time made absolute sense but had to contend with the advancement by influential advocates of Katharevousa (i.e. cleansed/pure) Greek as the official language. Despite this obstacle, the poem's leading stanzas were in 1864 integrated into the national anthem of Greece. Solomos's passion for demotic was also fortunate given its adoption as the official language in more recent times.

In the current era many Greek children learn something of events around the 1821 War of Independence and this poem, from the time they are old enough to sit on their grandmother's knees and most certainly after starting school.

In this translation, I wished for a language style whose wording may be simply explained, line by line, to children of the Greek diaspora. At the same time, I wanted it to be accessible by adults with limited Greek language acquisition including those of non-Greek background with an interest in Greek culture.

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ΥΜΝΟΣ ΕΙΣ ΤΗΝ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑΝ
Διονύσιος Σολωμός

Σὲ γνωρίζω ἀπὸ τὴν κόψη
τοῦ σπαθιοῦ τὴν τρομερή,
σὲ γνωρίζω ἀπὸ τὴν ὄψη,
ποῦ μὲ βία μετράει τὴ γῆ.

Ἀπ᾽ τὰ κόκαλα βγαλμένη
τῶν Ἑλλήνων τὰ ἱερά,
καὶ σὰν πρῶτα ἀνδρειωμένη,
χαῖρε, ὦ χαῖρε, Ἐλευθεριά!

Ἐκεῖ μέσα ἐκατοικοῦσες
πικραμένη, ἐντροπαλή,
κι ἕνα στόμα ἀκαρτεροῦσες,
«ἔλα πάλι», νὰ σοῦ πῇ.

Ἄργειε νά ῾λθη ἐκείνη ἡ μέρα
κι ἦταν ὅλα σιωπηλά,
γιατὶ τά ῾σκιαζε ἡ φοβέρα
καὶ τὰ πλάκωνε ἡ σκλαβιά.

Δυστυχής! Παρηγορία
μόνη σου ἔμεινε νὰ λὲς
περασμένα μεγαλεῖα
καὶ διηγώντας τα νὰ κλαῖς.

Καὶ ἀκαρτέρει, καὶ ἀκαρτέρει
φιλελεύθερη λαλιά,
ἕνα ἐκτύπαε τ᾽ ἄλλο χέρι
ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπελπισιά,

κι ἔλεες «πότε, ἄ! πότε βγάνω
τὸ κεφάλι ἀπὸ τς ἐρμιές;»
Καὶ ἀποκρίνοντο ἀπὸ πάνω
κλάψες, ἅλυσες, φωνές.

Τότε ἐσήκωνες τὸ βλέμμα
μὲς στὰ κλάιματα θολό,
καὶ εἰς τὸ ροῦχο σου ἔσταζ᾽ αἷμα
πλῆθος αἷμα ἑλληνικό.

HYMN TO LIBERTY
Dionysios Solomos

Translated by Panayotis Tsambos

I can see you in the sharpness,
in the peril of the steel,
I can see you in the gaze,
surveying land and sea with zeal.

Born of bones of countless fallen,
Hellenes' bones of sanctity,
and resurgent once again,
Greetings, hail o Liberty!

There within them, you resided
very bitter, very small,
and for just one voice you waited,
that would be your clarion call.

That day did arrive belated,
pall of silence over all,
as fear's shadow dark and heavy,
kept the populace in thrall.

You were saddened and alone,
solitude for consolation,
left to speak of glories gone
and to weep during narration.

In abeyance without end,
the voice for freedom waited,
striking one hand in the other,
despairing what was fated,

and you called out, "When, oh when,
will my mind be rid these pains?"
and replying from above then,
tearful cries, and sounds of chains.

Then gazing upwards tearily
your eyes a clouded flood,
scarlet drops fell on your clothes,
a Hellene sea of blood.

Μὲ τὰ ροῦχα αἱματωμένα
ξέρω ὅτι ἔβγαινες κρυφὰ
νὰ γυρεύῃς εἰς τὰ ξένα
ἄλλα χέρια δυνατά.

Μοναχὴ τὸ δρόμο ἐπῆρες,
ἐξανάλθες μοναχή,
δὲν εἶν᾽ εὔκολες οἱ θύρες,
ἐὰν ἡ χρεία τὲς κουρταλῇ.

‘Ἄλλος σου ἔκλαψε εἰς τὰ στήθια
ἀλλ᾽ ἀνάσασιν καμιὰ
ἄλλος σοῦ ἔταξε βοήθεια
καὶ σὲ γέλασε φρικτά.

Ἄλλοι, ὀϊμέ! στὴ συμφορά σου,
ὅπου ἐχαίροντο πολύ,
«σύρε νά ᾽βρῃς τὰ παιδιά σου,
σύρε», ἐλέγαν οἱ σκληροί.

Φεύγει ὀπίσω τὸ ποδάρι
καὶ ὁλογλήγορο πατεῖ
ἢ τὴν πέτρα ἢ τὸ χορτάρι
ποὺ τὴ δόξα σου ἐνθυμεῖ.

Ταπεινότατή σου γέρνει
ἡ τρισάθλια κεφαλή,
σὰν πτωχοῦ ποὺ θυροδέρνει
κι εἶναι βάρος του ἡ ζωή.

Ναί· ἀλλὰ τώρα ἀντιπαλεύει
κάθε τέκνο σου μὲ ὁρμή,
ποὺ ἀκατάπαυστα γυρεύει
ἢ τὴ νίκη ἢ τὴ θανή!

Ἀπ᾽ τὰ κόκαλα βγαλμένη
τῶν Ἑλλήνων τὰ ἱερά,
καὶ σὰν πρῶτα ἀνδρειωμένη
χαῖρε, ὦ χαῖρε, Ἐλευθεριά!

You set off in bloodied vestures,
I know, in the dark of night,
seeking out in countries foreign,
other strong hands for the fight.

On your own you took the road,
returning failed in deed,
doors don’t open willingly
if someone knocks in need.

Some shed tears upon your breast,
relief alas none came,
others promising you help
betrayed you just the same.

In your misery and distress
some were so glad by your woe,
the cruellest said “Begone!”,
“Back to your children go!”

On foot you stride back fast,
your heels lift up behind,
on herbage and on rock
your glory they remind.

Humbly bowing so dejected,
head in misery downcast,
like the pauper begging alms,
his life burdened to the last.

But yes! Now they fight back,
with drive your children rise,
unceasingly they seek
their victory or demise!

Born of bones of countless fallen,
Hellenes’ bones of sanctity,
and resurgent once again,
Greetings, hail o Liberty!

Karel Čapek: Three Stories

KEVIN WINDLE
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Translator's Introduction[1]

More than any other writer, Karel Čapek (1890-1938) must be credited with bringing Czech literature onto the world stage. His novel *The War with the Newts* is unique in its blend of science fiction, satire, philosophy and humour. His other novels, *Meteor, Hordubal, An Ordinary Life, Krakatit, The Absolute at Large* and his early play *R.U.R*. cemented his place in world literature of the twentieth century. Most of his major works have long been known in translation into English and other world languages. However, his numerous short stories have attracted less attention outside his home country.

The three stories translated here are taken from the collection *Tales from One Pocket* (1929), which was soon followed by *Tales from the Other Pocket*. All three take the familiar trope of the detective story and lend it a twist of a kind characteristic of Čapek. In "A Record", Sergeant Hejda's investigation is driven less by the usual imperative – apprehending the perpetrator – than by his excitement at the prospect of seizing the world shot-putting record from the USA. In "Attempted Murder" the onus in narrowing the field of suspects falls squarely upon the victim, who must interrogate his conscience and his memory to identify a possible motive. In "The Poet" a trainee detective unexpectedly finds his enquiries aided by poetry and the paranormal. These stories amply illustrate Čapek's gift for economical characterization through dialogue, humorous narrative and interior monologue. "Attempted Murder" ventures into matters of psychology and the subconscious, with an unfailing light touch.

In preparing these versions, the translator has sought above all to make Čapek's skilled characterization and humour work in English. It is well known that many forms of humour prove resistant to translation (See e.g. Maher; Barańczak 197), and may require that the translator depart some distance from the original wording to achieve an approximately equivalent effect. Since these stories rely heavily on either dialogue or interior monologue, there are also commonalities with translation for the stage. The product needs to be not only fluently readable, but also, in Fabienne Hörmanseder's term, *sprechbar* (Hörmanseder 97–99), avoiding what Ronald Hingley termed "unthinking 'translationese' […], a distinctive, somehow doughy style of its own" (Chekhov III, x; Windle 158), a form of prose emphatically deplored by the Russian writer and translator Kornei Chukovsky (Windle and Pym 14–15; Levý 1963, 94).

In the dialogue, in particular, it is important to reproduce the colloquial register of the original and carry over the speakers' tone of voice. "A Record" relies for its effect largely on the demotic Czech spoken by the protagonists. That story and "The Poet" are almost entirely in dialogue form, and "Attempted Murder" centres on the hero's unspoken thoughts and remembered conversations. The distinctive voices need to be reflected in the translation, along with the narrator's gentle irony.

In his classic theoretical work on literary translation, the Czech scholar Jiří Levý set out to construct what he termed an "illusionist" theory of translation (Levý 1969, 31–32; Levyi 1974, 48), a functional approach in which the "illusion" is maintained that the product is an original. Close adherence to the vocabulary and syntactic structures of the original will often

[1] The author wishes to thank Dr Marian Simpson and the journal's anonymous reviewers for their perceptive comments on an earlier draft of the translation.

have the opposite effect.[2] The "illusionist" principle, clearly enunciated in different terms by Chukovsky (passim, all editions), underpins the present translation.

Levý, who examined many versions of Čapek in other languages, wrote of the lexical impoverishment which is likely to occur in translation: "Emotionally coloured lexical resources sometimes lose their stylistic value and are rendered by neutral and therefore colourless vocabulary" (Levý 1963, 94). This he demonstrated by a controlled experiment in back-translation, using works by Čapek, from German, English, French and Russian, involving groups of Czech translators, concluding, "Specific and clear wording is what is lost above all in translations of writers who strive to capture the finer nuances of reality – writers like Čapek." (Levyi 1974, 154–157). Here Levý echoes Chukovsky's observations concerning the insipid and anaemic pallor found in many translations, where the original is colourful and expressive, owing to the limitations of the translator's vocabulary, resulting in what Chukovsky termed *gladkopis´* (in Lauren Leighton's translation: "blandscript") (Chukovskii 1968, 96ff.; Chukovsky 1984, 81ff; Windle and Pym 14-15).

The above strictures come unbidden to the translator's mind at moments in "Attempted Murder" when we witness Councillor Tomsa's mounting unease as his conscience prompts unwelcome memories. Varying degrees of shame, melancholy and embarrassment are captured in a precisely chosen series of adverbs and idiomatic expressions, not all of which can be easily rendered in English: *stísněně, sklíčeně, zarmouceně, zaraženě, pln nevolnosti, rozpačitý, stálo tíže ne duši, zalévalo trýznivé horko, nespokojeně, trapně, tesklivě, bezradně*. While English has approximate equivalents for many of these, the finer gradations are not always amenable to exact translation, and care is needed in the selection if Tomsa's state of mind – central to the story – is to be conveyed adequately.

"A Record" presents lexical difficulties of a different order, but no less challenging: a range of insulting epithets is exchanged by František Pudil and Václav Lysický, while Sergeant Hejda and the magistrate address others to the alleged stone-thrower. They include *trouba, lump, mamlas, mizerný prašivka, vůl, osel, huncút, kujón, trulant, holomek, podvodník* and *zatracený švindler*. The flavour of the original terms is difficult to equal in English, and at least one of them, *huncút* (from German *Hundsfott*) may not be familiar to all twenty-first-century readers of the original.

The translations below attempt to follow the prescriptions of Levý, Chukovsky, Hingley and Hörmanseder in providing, in A. F. Tytler's terms, a "complete transcript" of Čapek's stories in natural English prose (Tytler 16). It is hoped that the versions will, in the words of the writer and translator Alexei Konstantinovich Tolstoi, "touch the same nerves as the original" (Tolstoi IV, 214).

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[2] Levý's book underwent far-reaching revision and expansion for translation into other languages. Editions of Chukovsky's book also differ greatly. For this reason it is necessary in places to refer to more than one version.

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Rekord
Karel Čapek

„Pane okresní," hlásil četník Hejda okresnímu soudci Tučkovi, „tak tu mám jedno těžké ublížení na těle. Himl, to je horko!"

„Jen si, člověče, udělejte pohodlí," radil mu pan sudí.

Pan Hejda postavil pušku do kouta, hodil přilbu na zem, odepjal řemen a rozepjal si kabát. „Uf," řekl. „Zatracený holomek! Pane soudce, takový případ jsem ještě neměl. Tak se podívejte." Po těch slovech zvedl něco těžkého, zavázaného v modrém kapesníku, co prve nechal ležet u dveří, rozvázal uzlíky a vybalil kámen veliký jako lidská hlava. „Jen se na to podívejte," opakoval důtklivě.

„Co má na tom být?" ptal se pán soudce rýpaje do toho kamene tužkou. „To je buližník, ne?"

„Je, a pořádný kus," potvrzoval pan Hejda. „Tak hlásím, pane soudce: Lysický Václav, cihlářský dělník, devatenáct let, bytem v cihelně, máte to? Praštil nebo uhodil přiloženým kamenem, váha pět kilogramů devět set čtyřicet devět gramů, Pudila Františka, statkáře, Dolní Újezd číslo 14, máte to?, do levého ramene, čímž týž utrpěl zlomení kloubu, frakturu ramenní a klíční kosti, krvácející ránu v ramenním svalu, přetržení šlachy a svalového pouzdra, máte to?"

„Mám," řekl pan soudce. „A co má na tom být tak zvláštního?"

„To budete mrkat, pane soudce," prohlásil pan Hejda důrazně. „Já vám to povím po pořádku. Teda jsou tomu tři dny, co si pro mne poslal ten Pudil. Vy ho znáte, pane okresní."

„Znám," pravil soudce. „Měli jsme ho tu jednou skrz lichvu a jednou — hm —"

A Record
Karel Čapek

Translated by Kevin Windle

"Your Honour," said Police Sergeant Hejda to District Magistrate Tuček. "Here we have a case of grievous bodily harm. Gosh, how hot it is!"

"Just make yourself comfortable, Sergeant," said the magistrate.

Sergeant Hejda stood his rifle in a corner, tossed his helmet on the floor, loosened his belt and unbuttoned his tunic. "Oof," he said. "That damned lout! I've never had a case like it, Your Honour. Take a look at this." With that he picked up a heavy object wrapped in a large blue handkerchief, which he had left by the door, undid the corners and tipped out a stone the size of a human head. "Just take a look at that," he said with emphasis.

"What about it?" enquired the magistrate, prodding the stone with his pencil. "It's a cobblestone, isn't it?"

"Yes, and a big one, at that," said Hejda. "I beg to report, Your Honour: Václav Lysický, a brickyard worker, aged nineteen, residing at the brickworks … Got that? … threw the stone in question, weighing 5 kilograms, 949 grams at František Pudil, farmer, of 14 Dolní Újezd … Got that? … hitting him on the left shoulder, causing a fracture of the shoulder and clavicle, with haemorrhaging, and tearing some muscles, tendons and sheath tissue. Got that?"

"Yes," replied His Honour. "What's so special about it?"

"This'll make you sit up, Your Honour," said Hejda firmly. "Let me tell you the story from the beginning. Well, three days ago this Pudil sent for me. Do you know him, Your Honour?'

"Yes, he's been up before the bench once for usury and once for …"

„To bylo za příčinou ferbla. Teda ten Pudil to je. Víte, on má třešňový sad až k řece; ona se tam Sázava kroutí, a proto je tam širší než jinde. Teda ten Pudil si pro mne ráno poslal, že se mu něco stalo. Já ho najdu v posteli, jak heká a nadává. Tak prý šel včera večer na sad podívat se, na vajksle, a tam vám nachytal na stromě nějakého kluka, jak si cpal do kapes třešně. Víte, on je ten Pudil trochu rabiát; tak on si odepjal řemen, stáhl kluka za nohu ze stromu a řeže do něho řemenem. A vtom na něj někdo z druhého břehu volá: Pudile, nechte toho kluka! On ten Pudil trochu špatně vidí, já myslím, že to je od toho pití; zmerčil jenom, že na druhém břehu někdo stojí a kouká na něj. Proto jen pro jistotu řekl: Co ti je po tom, lumpe, a řezal do kluka tím víc. Pudile, zařval ten člověk na druhém břehu, pusťte toho kluka, jo? Pudil si myslel, co ty mně můžeš udělat, a proto jen křičel: Vlez mně někam, ty troubo! Jen to řek, a už ležel na zemi se strašnou bolestí v levém rameni; a ten člověk na druhém břehu povídal: Já ti dám, ty mamlase statecká! Poslouchejte, oni toho Pudila museli odnést, ani vstát nemohl; a vedle něho ležel tenhle kámen. Ještě v noci jeli pro doktora; doktor chtěl Pudila odvézt do špitálu, protože má všechny kosti na maděru; prý mu ta levačka zůstane chromá. Jenže ten Pudil teď o žních do špitálu nechce. Teda ráno si pro mne poslal, že toho prašivku mizerného, toho vola, co mu to udělal, musím aretýrovat. No dobrá.

“For illicit gaming. That’s the man. He owns a cherry orchard by the river, right on the bend, where it’s wider. So this Pudil sends for me this morning and says something’s happened. He’s laid up in bed, groaning and cursing. Says he went into the orchard in the evening to check on his fruit, and there he sees this boy up a tree stuffing cherries into his pockets. Now our Pudil has a bit of a short fuse, so he undoes his belt, pulls the boy down by the leg and lays into him with his belt. And then somebody calls out from the opposite bank: ‘Leave that boy alone, Pudil!’ Well, our Pudil’s a bit short-sighted – probably because he drinks too much. All he can see is somebody standing on the river bank looking at him. So he just says, ‘Mind your own business, you bugger!’ and wallops the lad all the harder. ‘Pudil,’ shouts the voice from the other side, ‘Leave him alone, will you?’ Pudil thinks to himself, ‘What can he do to me?’ and shouts back, ‘Go to blazes, you bonehead!’ He’d no sooner said that than he’s lying on the ground with a terrible pain in his left shoulder. And from the other bank he hears: ‘Take that, you clodhopping louse!’ And Pudil can’t even get up; they had to carry him away. And there’s this stone lying beside him. That night they sent for a doctor; he wanted to send him to hospital because of all those shattered bones, and his left arm’ll be permanently damaged. But our Pudil won’t go because it’s cherry-picking time. He sends for me in the morning and asks me to catch the miserable wretch who done it. Right.

Poslouchejte, když mně ukázali ten kámen, zůstal jsem koukat; on je to buližník s nějakým kyzem, takže je těžší, než vypadá. Potěžkejte; já jsem jej na omak odhadl na šest kilo — schází jenom jednapadesát gramů. Panečku, s takovým kamenem se musí umět házet. Pak jsem se šel podívat na ten sad a na řeku. Co byla zválená tráva, tam se svalil ten Pudil; z toho místa byly ještě dva metry k vodě; a řeka, pane, řeka tam je na první pohled dobrých čtrnáct metrů široká, protože se tam kroutí. Pane soudce, já jsem začal křičet a skákat a povídám, přineste mně honem osmnáct metrů špagátu! Potom jsem zarazil kolík na to místo, kde se svalil ten Pudil, přivázal jsem k němu ten provázek, svléknu se a plavu s druhým koncem provázku v hubě na druhý břeh. A co byste řek, pane okresní : ten špagát stačil akorát k druhému břehu; a to ještě pak přijde kus hráze a teprve nahoře je cestička. Já jsem to třikrát přeměřil: od toho kolíku na tu cestičku, to je navlas devatenáct metrů a dvacet sedm centimetrů.“

„Člověče Hejdo,“ řekl soudce, „tohle snad není možné; devatenáct metrů, to je nějaká dálka; poslouchejte, nestál on ten člověk ve vodě, jako uprostřed řeky?“

„To mě taky napadlo!“ pravil pan Hejda. „Pane okresní, od jednoho břehu k druhému je hloubka, přes dva metry, protože tam je takový zákrut. A po tom kamení byl ještě dolík v hrázi; víte, ten druhý břeh tak trochu vydláždili, aby ho tam nebrala voda. Ten člověk vytrhnul ten kámen z hráze a mohl jej hodit jenom z cestičky, protože ve vodě by nestačil a na hrázi by sklouzl. To tedy znamená, že hodil devatenáct celých dvacet sedm setin metru. Víte, co to je?“

“But when they showed me that stone, I couldn’t believe my eyes. A cobblestone with some kind of mineral in it, so it’s heavier than it looks. Feel the weight of it; my guess was six kilos and I was only fifty-one grams out. To throw a stone that heavy you have to know what you’re doing. Then I went to take a look at the orchard and the river. Where Pudil fell the grass was all crushed down, and that was two metres from the water, and the Sázava at that bend looks to be a good fourteen metres wide. I was so astonished, Your Honour, I yelled out for an eighteen-metre rope, right away. Then I drove in a stake at the spot where Pudil fell down, tied the rope to it, stripped off and swam across the river with the other end in my teeth. And what do you know, Your Honour: the rope was just long enough. And then you need to add on a bit for the embankment before you get to the pathway. I measured it three times: from the stake to the path is exactly nineteen metres and twenty-seven centimetres.”

“My dear Hejda, that’s hardly possible,” protested the magistrate. “Nineteen metres – that’s quite a distance! Could that man have been standing in the water, in the middle of the river?”

“I thought of that too,” said Hejda. “The water’s over two metres deep, Your Honour, from one side to the other, because of the bend. And there was a hole left where that stone had been taken out. They’ve shored up the bank with stones so the water won’t wear it away. So our man took that stone out and he could only have thrown it from the pathway because he couldn’t have stood in the water and he’d have slipped on the steep bank. And that means he threw it all of nineteen metres and twenty-seven centimetres. Do you realize?”

„Třeba měl prak," mínil soudce nejistě.

Pan Hejda na něho vyčítavě pohleděl. „Pane okresní, vy jste nikdy neházel z praku, že jo. Tak to zkuste vystřelit z praku dvanáctiliberní kámen; to byste musel mít katapult. Pane, já jsem se s tím kamenem dřel dva dny; zkoušel jsem udělat nějakou smyčku a roztočit jej, víte, jako při vrhu kladivem; já vám říkám, to vám vyklouzne z každé smyčky. Pane, to byl čistý vrh koulí. A víte," vyhrkl rozčileně, „víte vy, co to je? To je světový rekord. Tak."

„Ale dejte pokoj," užasl pan soudce.

„Světový rekord," opakoval četník Hejda slavnostně. „Ona závodní koule je těžší, váží sedm kilo; a letošní rekord v závodní kouli je šestnáct metrů bez nějakého centimetru. Devatenáct let, pane, byl rekord patnáct a půl metru; až letos jeden Amerikám jakpak on se jmenuje, nějak jako Kuck nebo Hirschfeld, hodil skoro šestnáct. Tak to by při šestikilové kouli mohlo dělat osmnáct nebo devatenáct metrů. A my tady máme o dvacet sedm setinek víc! Pane okresní, ten chlap by dohodil závodní koulí dobrých šestnáct a čtvrt, a bez tréninku! Ježíšikriste, šestnáct a čtvrt metru! Pane soudce, já jsem starý vrhač; na Sibiři, to vždycky kluci volali: Hejdo, hoď ho tam — totiž ruční granát, víte? A ve Vladivostoku jsem házel s americkými mariňáky; já jsem dohodil závodní koulí čtrnáct, ale jejich kaplan udělal o čtyři body víc. Hergot, my jsme se něco na Sibiři naházeli! Ale tenhle kámen, pane, jsem hodil jenom patnáct a půl metru; víc jsem ze sebe nedostal. Devatenáct metrů! hrom do toho, řekl jsem si, toho chlapa musím dostat; ten nám udělá rekord. Představte si, vyfouknout Americe rekord!"

"Perhaps he had a catapult," suggested the magistrate uncertainly.

Hejda threw him a reproachful look. "You've never have fired a catapult in your life, have you, Your Honour? Just try and shoot a six-kilo stone from a catapult! It'd have to be a siege engine. I've tried everything with that stone, for two days; I tried making a sling and swinging it, you know, like they do in throwing the hammer. I can tell you, it fell out of any sling. This was a shot-putter, sir, and do you know what?" he exclaimed excitedly. "It's a world record, no less!"

"Come off it!" said the astonished magistrate.

"A world record!" repeated Hejda triumphantly. "The competition shot is heavier – seven kilos, and this year's shot-putting record is sixteen metres, less a centimetre or so. For nineteen years the record was fifteen and half metres, but this year some American – Kuck or Hirschfeld or something – threw almost sixteen. So with a six-kilo shot he might have managed eighteen or nineteen metres. But here we have twenty-seven centimetres more than that! That lad, Your Honour, could throw a competition shot a good sixteen and a quarter with no training! Heavens above! Sixteen and a quarter metres! I'm an old hand at shot-putting, Your Honour! In the war, in Siberia, the boys would always call me in and say, 'Hejda, chuck one over there!' meaning a hand grenade.[3] And one time in Vladivostok I competed against some U.S. marines: I threw the competition shot fourteen metres, but their chaplain beat me by four centimetres. Yes, we got plenty of practice in Siberia! But with this stone here, Your Honour, the best I could do was fifteen and a half metres. Nineteen metres! Damn it, I said. We have to find that lad; he'll get us the world record. Imagine snatching it from the Americans!"

[3] In Siberia: Hejda is a veteran of the Czechoslovak Legion, which fought against the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War (1918-1921).

„A co s tím Pudilem?“ namítl soudce.

„Čert vem Pudila,“ křikl pan Hejda. „Pane soudce, já jsem zahájil pátrání po neznámém pachateli světového rekordu; to je národní zájem, no ne? Tak nejdřív jsem mu zaručil beztrestnost za toho Pudila.“

„Nono,“ protestoval soudce.

„Počkejte; zaručil jsem mu beztrestnost, když opravdu dohodí šestikilovým kamenem přes Sázavu. Okolním starostům jsem vyložil, jaký to je slavný výkon a že by se o něm psalo v celém světě; a řekl jsem, že by ten chlap na tom vydělal hromadu tisíc. Ježíšmarjá, pane soudce, od té chvíle všichni mládenci z celého okolí nechali žní a hnali se tam na tu hráz, aby házeli kamením na druhou stranu. Ta hráz už je úplně rozebraná; teď roztloukají kdejaký mezník a bourají kamenné zdi, aby měli čím házet. A kluci, pakáž jedna, házejí kamením po celé vesnici; tam vám už je zabitých slepic — A já stojím na hrázi a dohlížím; to se rozumí, nikdo nedohodí dál než asi doprostřed řeky — pane, to koryto bude myslím tím kamením už napůl zanesené. Tedy včera k večeru ke mně přivedli mládence, a to prý je ten, co tím kamenem potloukl toho Pudila. Však ho, huncúta jednoho, uvidíte, čeká venku. Poslouchej, Lysický, povídám mu, tak tys hodil tímhle kamenem po Pudilovi? Jo, on povídá, on mně Pudil nadával, a já jsem se dožral, a on tu jiný kámen zrovna nebyl. Tak tady máš jiný takový kámen, jářku, a teď dohoď na Pudilův břeh; ale jestli nedohodíš, ty kujóne, tak ti proženu perka!

“And what about Pudil?” the magistrate objected.

“To hell with Pudil!” Hejda shouted. “I’ve launched a search for the unknown winner of the world record, Your Honour. It’s in the national interest, isn’t it? And I started by guaranteeing immunity in the Pudil case ....”

“You did what?” protested the magistrate.

“Hold on. Immunity on condition that he really does throw a six-kilo shot across the Sázava. I told all the local councillors what a wonderful achievement it is and that the whole world will be writing about it. And I told ’em that boy will make a pile of money. I swear, Your Honour, all the lads in the district quit the harvesting and rushed in to throw stones across the river. There’s nothing left of the embankment, so now they’re smashing some boundary stone and demolishing stone walls to have something to throw. And the kids are throwing stones all over the village, the scamps! There’s dead hens everywhere! And I’m standing on the embankment watching: of course nobody can throw further than the middle of the river. I reckon the river bed’s going to be half full of stones, Your Honour. Then yesterday evening they bring in this youth and say he’s the one who hit our Pudil with this stone. You’ll see him right away, the grub; he’s waiting outside. I says to him, ‘Now look here, Lysický. Was it you who threw that stone at Pudil?’ ‘Yeah,’ he says. ‘Pudil was swearing at me and I got mad and there wasn’t any other stones around …’ So I says, ‘Right. Here you have another stone just like it. Throw it over to the other side, and if you can’t, you dummy, you’ll catch it from me!’

Tak on vzal ten kámen — pracky měl jako lopaty, postavil se na hráz a mířil; koukám, techniku neměl žádnou, styl žádný, nepracoval nohama ani trupem, a plums, hodil kámen do vody asi čtrnáct metrů; víte, je to dost, ale… Dobrá, tak já mu ukazuju: Ty trulante, to se musíš postavit takhle, pravým ramenem dozadu, a když hodíš, tak současně přitom musíš vyrazit tím ramenem, rozumíš? Jo, on na to, zkřivil se jako svatý Jan Nepomucký, a plums, hodil kámen na deset metrů.

Víte, to mě dožralo. Ty lumpe, křičím, ty žes trefil toho Pudila? Ty lžeš! Pane vachmajstr, povídá on, pámbu ví, že jsem ho trefil; ať se tam Pudil postaví, však já na něj zas dohodím, na toho psa zlýho. Pane, já jsem teda běžel za tím Pudilem a prosím, pane Pudile, koukejte se, tady jde o světový rekord; prosím vás, pojďte zas nadávat na ten váš břeh, on ten cihlář po vás hodí ještě jednou. — A to byste nevěřil, pane soudce: ten Pudil že ne, a že nepůjde ani zanic. Vidíte, tihle lidé nemají žádné vyšší zájmy.

Tak jdu zas na toho Vaška, toho cihláře. Ty podvodníku, křičím na něj, to není pravda, žes Pudila pobil; ten Pudil říká, že to byl jiný. To je lež, povídá Lysický, to jsem udělal já. Tak ukaž, povídám, dohodíš-li tak daleko! Ten Vašek se jen drbe a směje: Pane vachmajstr, povídá, takhle naprázdno, to já neumím; ale do toho Pudila trefím dycky, na toho mám dožer. Vašku, říkám mu po dobrém, dohodíš-li, pustím tě; když nedohodíš, tak půjdeš sedět pro těžké ublížení na těle, žes toho Pudila zchromil; ty holomku, za to dostaneš půl roku. Tak to já si odsedím v zimě, řekl ten Vašek; a já jsem ho teda ve jménu zákona zatknul.

"So he picks up this stone – he's got paws like two shovels – stands on the bank and takes aim. I can see he has no idea of technique, no style, doesn't use his legs or his trunk, but still manages to throw it about fourteen metres, into the water. That's not at all bad, you know, but still … Right, so I show him: 'Look, you oaf, you have to stand like this: right shoulder back, and when you throw, at the same time, you have to push that shoulder all the way forward. Get it?' 'Yeah,' he says, and screws up his face like Christ on the cross and throws … ten metres.

"That made me really mad. 'You stupid bugger!' I shouts. 'And you say you hit Pudil? You're lying!' And he says, 'I swear to God, Mr Sergeant sir, I did hit him! And if he goes back and stands there I'll hit him again, the dog!' So I run off to get our Pudil. I says to him, 'Please Mr Pudil sir, there's a world record at stake here. Could you come back to your side of the river and start swearing and carrying on again so that brickyard worker can have another go?' And would you believe it, Your Honour? Our Pudil says no, not for anything! Some people just have no higher ideals.

"So I goes back to Vašek, our brickyard worker. 'You're a fraud,' I shout. 'It's not true you hit Pudil; he says it was someone else.' 'That's a lie,' says Lysický. 'It was me.' 'So prove it,' I says. 'Show me you can throw that far.' He just scratches himself and laughs. 'Mr Sergeant,' he says, 'I can't do it for no reason, but I can hit that Pudil any time! I've got it in for him.' I try being nice: 'Vašek, if you can throw that far, I'll let you go free. If you can't, you'll go down for grievous bodily harm, for maiming Pudil. For that you'll get six months, you lout!' 'All right, if I can serve it in winter,' says Vašek. So I arrested him in the name of the law.

Teď čeká na chodbě, pane okresní; kdybyste tak z něho dostal, hodil-li opravdu ten kámen nebo jestli jen renomíruje! Já myslím, že se lekne a odvolá; ale pak mu, lumpovi, nasolit aspoň měsíc pro klamání úřadů nebo pro podvod; přece ve športu se nesmí lhát, na to by měl být pořádný trest, pane. Já vám ho přivedu."

„Tedy vy jste ten Václav Lysický," řekl okresní soudce pohlížeje přísně na bledovlasého delikventa. „Vy se přiznáváte, že jste v úmyslu ublížit mu hodil tenhle kámen na Františka Pudila a že jste mu přivodil těžké zranění. Je to pravda?"

„Prosím, pane soudce," začal provinilec, „to bylo tak: on ten Pudil tam mlátil nějakého kluka, a já jsem na něj volal přes tu řeku, aby toho nechal, a on mně začal nadávat —"

„Hodil jste ten kámen nebo ne?" spustil soudce.

„Prosím hodil," řekl provinilec zkroušeně; „ale on mně nadával, a tak já jsem popud ten kámen —"

„Hrom do vás," rozkřikl se soudce. „Proč lžete, člověče? Nevíte, že na to je veliký trest, když chcete obulíkovat úřady? My víme dobře, že jste ten kámen nehodil!"

„Hodil prosím," koktal mladý cihlář, „ale on mně Pudil řekl, abych mu vlezl někam —"

Soudce se podíval tázavě na četníka Hejdu, jenž bezradně pokrčil rameny. „Svlékněte se, člověče," obořil se soudce na zdrceného viníka. „No tak honem — a gatě taky! Bude to?"

Nyní stál mladý obr, jak ho pánbůh stvořil, a třásl se; nejspíš se bál, že bude mučen a že to už patří k věci.

„Koukejte, Hejdo, na ten deltoides," pravil soudce Tuček. „A ten dvojhlavý sval — co tomu říkáte?"

"Now he's waiting outside, Your Honour. Maybe you can get the truth out of him: did he really throw that stone or is he just talking big? I think he'll get scared and retract, and then he should get at least a month for trying to deceive State officials. After all, you can't lie in sport; that has to be severely punished, Your Honour. I'll bring him in."

"So you're Václav Lysický, are you?" said the magistrate, looking sternly at the fair-haired delinquent. "Do you admit deliberately throwing this stone at František Pudil and causing him serious injury? Is it true?"

"It's like this, Your Honour," said the accused. "Pudil was beating some boy and I called out to him across the river to tell him to stop, but he started swearing at me …"

"Did you throw this stone or not?"

"Yes, I did," said the accused, sounding contrite. "But he was swearing at me so I grabbed this stone …"

"Blast you!" exclaimed Tuček. "Why tell lies, man? Don't you realize there are stiff penalties for trying to deceive persons in authority? We know very well that you didn't throw this stone."

"But I did! Honest!" stammered the lad. "But Pudil was telling me to go to blazes …"

The magistrate cast a questioning glance at Sergeant Hejda, who merely gave a helpless shrug. "Get your clothes off, man!" thundered Tuček at the terrified offender. "And be quick about it. Pants and all!"

A moment later the young giant was standing before them mother-naked and quaking, plainly in fear of being tortured and taking that to be the normal procedure.

"Look at those deltoids, Hejda," said Tuček. "And those biceps. What do you think?"

„No, ten by ušel," mínil pan Hejda znalecky. „Ale břišní svaly nejsou dost vypracované. Pane okresní, na vrh koulí je potřeba břišních svalů, víte, jak se otáčí trup. Kdybych vám ukázal své břišní svaly!"

„Člověče," bručel soudce, „vždyť to je břicho, koukejte ty hrboly; hergot, to je hrudník," řekl píchaje prstem do zlatého chmýří Vaškových prsou. „Ale nohy jsou slabé; tihle venkovani mají vůbec špatné nohy."
„Protože je neohýbají," pravil pan Hejda kriticky. „Tohle přec nejsou žádné nohy; pane, vrhač musí mít nějaké nohy!"
„Obraťte se," vyjel pan soudce na mladého cihláře. „A co ta záda?"
„Tady od ramen to je dobré," mínil pan Hejda, „ale dole, to není nic, ten chlap nemá v trupu žádný švunk. Já myslím, pane okresní, že to nehodil."

„Tak se oblecte," utrhl se soudce na cihláře. „Poslouchejte, člověče, poslední slovo: hodil jste ten kámen nebo ne?"
„Hodil," mumlal Václav Lysický s berani tvrdohlavostí.

„Vy osle," vyhrkl soudce, „hodil-li jste ten kámen, tak to je těžké ublížení na těle a s tím půjdete ke krajskému soudu a dostanete několik měsíců; rozumíte? Nechte už toho naparování a přiznejte se, že jste si to s tím kamenem vymyslel; já vám dám jenom tři dny pro klamání úřadů a můžete jít. Tak co, uhodil jste tím kamenem toho Pudila nebo ne?"

„Uhodil," pravil Václav Lysický zarytě. „On mně přes tu řeku nadával —"

„Odveďte ho," zařval okresní soudce. „Zatracený švindléř!"

"Not bad," said Hejda with the air of an expert. "But the abdominals aren't too well developed. For shot-putting you need those abdominals, Your Honour, when you swing your body round. You ought to see *my* abdominals!"
"That's some stomach," muttered the magistrate. "See those bulges? And what a rib-cage!" He poked a finger into the golden fuzz on Lysický's chest. "But those legs are weak; these country lads never have good legs."
"Because they don't train," said Hejda critically. "Hopeless legs. A shot-putter needs to have decent legs."
"Turn round!" barked the magistrate. "What do you think of that back?"
"All right from here up," said Hejda. "But lower down, nothing to speak of. The fellow won't have the swing in his trunk. I don't think he could have done it, Your Honour."
"Get dressed," snapped the magistrate at the brickyard worker. "And listen to me: for the last time – did you throw that stone or didn't you?"
"Yes I did," replied Václav Lysický, with mulish stubbornness.
"You dumb-bell!" shouted the magistrate. "If you threw it, that's grievous bodily harm and you'll be up before the county court and you'll go down for several months. Understand? Quit playing the fool and admit you dreamed up your story. Then I'll give you just three days for trying to mislead persons in authority. Then you can go. So, did you throw that stone at Pudil or didn't you?"
"I did," Václav Lysický was adamant. "He was swearing at me across the river …"
"Take him away!" roared the district magistrate. "Blasted fraud!"

Za chvilku vstrčil ještě jednou hlavu do dveří četník Hejda. „Pane okresní,“ řekl mstivě, „takhle mu dát ještě poškození cizího majetku; víte, on vytáhl kámen z té hráze, a teď je ta hráz celá rozebraná.“

A moment later Sergeant Hejda put his head round the door again. “Your Honour,” he said spitefully, “you could throw in a charge of damage to property as well. He pulled that stone out of the embankment, and now there’s nothing left of it.”

Vražedný útok

Pan rada Tomsa si toho večera zrovna lebedil se sluchátky na uších a s libým úsměvem poslouchal, jak mu rádio pěkně hraje Dvořákovy tance — to přece je muzika, říkal si spokojeně — když to najednou venku dvakrát zatřesklo a z okna nad jeho hlavou se s řinkotem sypalo sklo; pan Tomsa totiž seděl v přízemním pokoji.

Tu tedy udělal, co by asi udělal každý z nás: nejdřív okamžik čekal, co bude dál, pak si sundal sluchátka a skoro přísně zkoumal, co to bylo, a teprve potom se lekl; neboť viděl, že mu někdo na dvou místech prostřelil okno, u kterého seděl; tamhle naproti ve dveřích je odštípnutá tříska a pod ní vězí kulka. První impuls byl, aby vyběhl na ulici a holýma rukama popadl toho darebáka za límec; ale když už je člověk v letech a požívá jisté důstojnosti, promešká obyčejně ten první impuls a rozhodne se pro druhý; proto pan Tomsa běžel k telefonu a zavolal si policejní komisařství: „Haló, pošlete mi sem honem někoho; právě byl na mne spáchán vražedný útok."

„Kde to je?" řekl ospalý a lhostejný hlas.

„U mne," rozčiloval se pan Tomsa, jako by za to policie mohla. „To je skandál, takhle zničehonic střílet na klidného občana, který sedí doma! Pane, ta věc se musí co nejpřísněji vyšetřit! To by tak hrálo, aby…"

„Dobrá," přerušil ho ospalý hlas. „Já vám tam někoho pošlu."

Pan rada zuřil netrpělivostí; zdálo se mu, že to trvá věčnost, než se ten někdo přihrabe; ale ve skutečnosti už za dvacet minut byl u něho takový rozvážný policejní inspektor a se zájmem prohlížel prostřelené okno.

Attempted Murder

That evening town councillor Tomsa was sitting with headphones on and a blissful smile on his face, enjoying Dvořák's dances being played beautifully for him on the radio. "Now that's what I call music," he thought to himself with satisfaction, when suddenly he heard two shots outside and glass came tinkling down from the window above his head. He was sitting in a ground-floor room.

He did what any of us might do: he waited a moment to see what would happen next, threw aside his headphones, carefully considered the situation, realized that somebody had fired twice through the window by which he was sitting, and only then took fright. A splinter had come away from the door opposite that window and a bullet had lodged there. His first impulse was to run into the street and grab the scoundrel by the scruff of his neck with his bare hands, but when one is getting on in years and has a certain dignity to preserve one generally lets that first impulse pass and settles for the second: Mr Tomsa ran to the telephone and called the police station. "Hallo. Send someone over right away! Somebody's just tried to murder me."

"And where are you calling from?" said a sleepy and unconcerned voice.

"My place," said Mr Tomsa, losing his composure, as if the police were to blame. "It's an outrage that somebody can shoot at a peaceful law-abiding citizen sitting in his own home, for no reason at all! The matter has to be thoroughly investigated! I can do without …"

"All right," the sleepy voice interrupted him. "I'll send someone over."

Mr Tomsa was in a frenzy of impatience; it seemed to him that an eternity passed before "someone" made an appearance, but in fact after only twenty minutes a no-nonsense police inspector had arrived and examined the broken window with interest.

„To vám sem někdo střelil, pane," řekl věcně.

„To vím sám," vybuchl pan Tomsa. „Vždyť jsem tady seděl u okna!"

„Kalibr sedm milimetrů," pravil inspektor vydlabávaje nožem kulku ze dveří. „Vypadá to jako ze starého armádního revolveru. Koukejte se, ten chlap musel stát na plotě; kdyby stál na chodníku, vězela by ta kulka vejš. To znamená, že na vás mířil, pane."

„To je zvláštní," mínil pan Tomsa hořce, „já bych byl málem myslel, že chtěl trefit jenom ty dveře."

„A kdo to udělal?" ptal se inspektor nedávaje se vyrušovat.

„Promiňte," řekl pan rada, „že vám nemohu dát jeho adresu; já jsem toho pána neviděl a zapomněl jsem ho pozvat dovnitř."

„To je těžké," pravil inspektor pokojně. „A na koho máte podezření?"

Panu Tomsovi docházela trpělivost. „Jaképak podezření?" spustil podrážděně. „Člověče, vždyť já jsem toho lumpa neviděl; a i kdyby tam byl laskavě počkal, až bych mu poslal oknem hubičku, tak bych ho v té tmě nepoznal. Pane, kdybych věděl, kdo to byl, tak bych vás sem neobtěžoval, nemyslíte?"

„No jo," odpovídal inspektor chlácholivě. „Ale snad si na někoho vzpomenete, kdo by měl třeba zisk z vaší smrti nebo kdo by se vám chtěl za něco pomstít… Koukejte se, to nebyl loupežný pokus; takový lupič nestřílí, dokud nemusí. Ale třeba má někdo na vás takový vztek. To nám, pane, musíte říci vy, a my to vyšetříme."

"So somebody shot at you here, sir," he said with a businesslike air.

"I know that already," Mr Tomsa exploded. "I was sitting here by the window!"

"A seven-millimetre round," said the inspector as he gouged a bullet out of the door with a penknife. "Looks like one from an old service revolver. Take a look. The fellow must have been standing on the fence; if he'd been on the pavement the bullet would have hit higher up. That means he was aiming at you, sir."

"How odd," said Mr Tomsa acidly. "I thought he was aiming at that door."

"But who was it?" enquired the inspector without batting an eyelid.

"I'm so sorry I can't give you his address," replied the councillor. "I didn't see the gentleman and I forgot to invite him in."

"It's a hard one," said the inspector calmly. "Who do you suspect?"

Mr Tomsa's patience snapped. "Suspect?" he erupted angrily. "Look here! I didn't see the bugger, but even if he'd been kind enough to wait for me to blow him a kiss through the window I still wouldn't have recognized him in the dark. If I knew who it was I wouldn't be bothering you, would I?"

"Well, no," replied the inspector peaceably. "But perhaps you might remember somebody who could stand to gain from your death, or want to get even for something. Think about it; this was no attempted burglary. A burglar doesn't shoot unless he has to. Maybe someone has it in for you. That's for you to tell us, sir. And then we can follow it up."

Pan Tomsa se zarazil: z téhle stránky na věc dosud nemyslel. „To nemám ani ponětí," řekl váhavě, jediným pohledem přehlížeje svůj tichý život úředníka a starého mládence. „Kdopak by mohl mít na mne takový vztek?" divil se. „Na mou duši, já nevím, že bych měl jediného nepřítele! To je úplně vyloučeno," mínil kroutě hlavou. „Já přece s ni kým nic nemám; pane, já žiju sám pro sebe, nikam nechodím, do ničeho se nepletu… Začby se mně kdo mohl mstít?"

Inspektor pokrčil rameny: „To já nevím, pane; ale snad si do zítřka vzpomenete. Nebudete se tady teď bát?"

„Nebudu," řekl pan Tomsa zamyšleně. To je podivné, říkal si stísněně, když už zůstal sám, proč, ano proč by na mne někdo střílel? Vždyť já jsem skoro samotář; odbudu si svou práci v úřadě a jdu domů — vždyť já vlastně nemám s nikým co dělat! Proč tedy mne chtějí odstřelit? divil se s rostoucí hořkostí nad tím nevděkem; pomalu mu začalo být líto sama sebe. Člověk dře jako kůň, říkal si, i akta si bere domů, nic neutrácí, nic neužije, žije jako šnek ve své ulitě, a prásk, přijde ho někdo zabouchnout. Bože, jaká je to v lidech divná zloba, žasl pan rada sklíčeně. Co jsem komu udělal? Proč mne někdo tak hrozně, tak šíleně nenávidí?

To snad je nějaká mýlka, uklidňoval sám sebe, sedě na posteli s jednou zutou botou v ruce. To se rozumí, jistě to je omyl v osobě! Ten člověk mne prostě považoval za někoho jiného, na koho měl spadeno! To je pravda, řekl si s úlevou, přece proč, proč by někdo tak nenáviděl mne?

Mr Tomsa was taken aback: he hadn't considered the matter in that light. "I haven't the faintest idea," he said hesitantly, casting his mind over his quiet life as an office-worker and confirmed bachelor. "Who on earth could feel so much resentment for me?" he wondered in astonishment. "For the life of me, I can't think of any enemies. Not one! It's absolutely out of the question," he added with a shake of his head. "I hardly see anyone. I keep to myself, don't go anywhere and don't get mixed up in anything … Why would anybody have anything against me?"

The inspector shrugged. "I don't know, sir. But perhaps you'll think of something by tomorrow. You won't be afraid to stay here now, I hope."

"Not at all," replied Mr Tomsa thoughtfully. Then when he was left alone he said dolefully to himself: "How strange! Why would anybody shoot at me? I'm almost a recluse; I do my job in the office and come home, and really don't have anything to do with anyone. So why should anybody want to shoot me?" he thought, as surprise turned to mounting bitterness at the ingratitude of others, and he gradually started feeling sorry for himself. "You work like an ox, take papers home, spend no money, have no pleasures, live like a snail in its shell, and suddenly someone comes to shoot you. Dear God! How spiteful people can be!" he thought dejectedly. "What can I have done to anyone? Why should anybody feel so terribly resentful of me?"

"It must be some mistake," he consoled himself as he sat on his bed with one shoe on and the other in his hand. "Of course, he got the wrong man! He simply took me for somebody else, somebody he had a bone to pick with! That's it!" he said with relief. "Because why would anyone hate me so much?"

Bota vypadla z ruky pana rady. Nu, ano, vzpomněl si najednou trochu rozpačitě, tuhle jsem provedl takovou hloupou věc, ale to mně jen tak vyklouzlo; mluvil jsem s přítelem Roubalem a tu mně tak vylítla z huby taková nešikovná narážka na jeho paní. Celý svět přece ví, že ho ta ženská podvádí kde s kým, i on o tom ví, ale nechce to dát na sobě znát. A já, mezek, já o tom tak pitomě plácnu… Pan rada si vzpomněl, jak ten Roubal jenom tak polknul a zarýval si nehty do dlaní. Bože, řekl si s hrůzou, jak ten člověk tím byl poraněn! Vždyť on tu ženskou miluje jako blázen! To se ví, já jsem to pak hleděl zamluvit, ale jak se ten člověk kousal do rtů! Ten má jistě proč mě nenávidět, mínil pan rada zarmouceně. Já vím, že on po mně nestřelil, to je vyloučeno; ale ani bych se nemohl divit…

Pan Tomsa se zaraženě zadíval do země. Nebo tuhle ten krejčí, vzpomněl si pln nevolnosti. Patnáct let jsem si u něho dával šít, a pak mně řekli, že má těžké souchotě. To se rozumí, člověk se přece jen bojí nosit šaty, do kterých mu kašlal takový souchotinář; tak jsem u něho přestal šít… A tuhle přišel prosit, že nemá do čeho píchnout, že mu stůně žena a že by potřeboval dát děti ven; abych prý ho zase poctil svou důvěrou — Kristepane, jak byl ten člověk bledý a jak se tak chorobně potil! Pane Kolínský, řekl jsem mu, koukejte se, to nejde, já potřebuju lepšího krejčího; já jsem s vámi nebyl spokojen. — Já se vynasnažím, pane, koktal ten člověk potě se strachem a rozpaky, a div se do pláče nedal. A já, vzpomínal si pan rada, já jsem ho ovšem poslal pryč s takovým tím „Uvidíme“, které tihle chudáci tak dobře znají. Ten člověk by mě mohl nenávidět, zhrozil se pan rada, vždyť je to strašné, jít někoho prosit přímo o život a být tak lhostejně odbyt! Ale co jsem s ním měl dělat? Já vím, že on to nemohl udělat, ale…

The shoe fell from his hand. “Oh yes,” he suddenly recalled a little uncomfortably. “Yes, I said something silly. It just slipped out. I was talking to my friend Roubal and dropped that clumsy hint about his wife. Everybody knows she cheats on him all the time with anyone who comes along, and he knows it but won’t let on. And like a fool I went and put my foot in it.” Mr Tomsa recalled how Roubal had just swallowed hard and dug his nails into his palms. “Lord God!” he thought with horror, “How I hurt his feelings! He loves that woman to distraction! Of course I tried to smooth things over, but I saw how he was biting his lip. He certainly has reason to hate me,” he reflected gloomily. “I know he didn’t shoot at me; that’s out of the question, but I wouldn’t be surprised …”

Mr Tomsa looked in perplexity at the floor. “And what about that tailor?” he recalled with a sinking feeling. “For fifteen years I took my sewing to him, and then I heard he had a serious case of TB. Well of course, one fears to wear clothes a consumptive has coughed on, so I stopped using his services … And now he comes pleading, saying he’s getting no sewing jobs, that his wife is ill and he’ll have to send his children away, and could I please trust him with some mending again … Heavens above! What a pale, sickly lather of sweat he was in! ‘Look here, Mr Kolinský,’ I said. ‘This won’t do. I need a better tailor; I wasn’t satisfied with your work.’ ‘I’ll try harder, sir,’ he stammered, sweating in fear and despair and on the point of bursting into tears. And I sent him away with a ‘We’ll see’ of the kind those poor beggars know so well. That man could hate me,” thought the councillor with horror. “After all, how dreadful to go and see somebody and have to beg for your life, and be seen off so uncaringly! But what was I to do with him? I know he couldn’t have done it, but …”

Panu radovi bylo stále tíže na duši. To bylo také tak trapné, vzpomínal si, jak jsem tuhle vynadal našemu úřednímu sluhovi. Nemohl jsem nalézt jeden akt; a tak jsem si zavolal toho starého a křičel jsem na něho jako na kluka, a před lidmi!, co prý to je za pořádek, vy idiote, takový svinčík máte ve všem, měl bych vás vyhodit — A pak jsem ten akt našel ve vlastní zásuvce! A ten dědek ani nemukl, jenom se třásl a mrkal očima… Pana radu zalévalo trýznivé horko. Člověk se přece neomlouvá podřízenému, řekl si nespokojeně, i když mu trochu ublíží. Ale jak tihle podřízení musejí nenávidět své pány! Počkejme, já dám tomu dědkovi nějaké staré šaty; ale vlastně i to je pro něho ponižující —

Pan rada už nevydržel ležet; i ta deka ho dusila. Seděl na posteli objímaje si kolena a díval se do tmy. Nebo ten případ s tím mladým Morávkem u nás v úřadě, napadlo ho trapně. To přece je vzdělaný člověk a píše básně. A když mně tuhle vyřídil špatně ten spis, řekl jsem mu: Předělejte to, pane kolego, a chtěl jsem mu ten spis hodit na stůl; ale ono mu to padlo pod nohy, a on se pro to sehnul, celý rudý, s rudýma ušima — Já bych si dal pár facek, bručel pan rada. Vždyť já mám toho hocha docela rád, a takhle ho ponížit, třeba mimoděk —

Mr Tomsa was feeling ever more heavy-hearted. “It was just as bad as when I scolded our office caretaker recently. I couldn’t find a document, so I called the old man in and berated him as if he was some schoolboy, while others were present. ‘What do you think you’re doing, you idiot, making such a mess of everything? I ought to throw you out!’ And then I found the document in my own drawer! And the old fellow didn’t utter a word, he just stood there trembling and blinking his eyes …” A fever of discomfiture swept over Mr Tomsa. “You can’t apologise to a subordinate,” he said to himself uneasily, “even if you’ve hurt his feelings a bit. But how those people must detest their masters! Just a minute. I’ll give the fellow some old clothes, but then again that might be humiliating for him.”

The councillor couldn’t bear lying in bed any longer; even the blanket felt stifling. He sat up on the bed clutching his knees and looking into the darkness. An incident involving young Morávek in the office came painfully to mind, an educated man who wrote poetry. “But recently when he prepared that document of mine so badly I said to him, ‘Do it again!’ and meant to throw it down on his desk but it fell on the floor by his feet and he bent down to pick it up, blushing to the tips of his ears. I could have boxed my own ears,” muttered Mr Tomsa. “I’m really quite fond of that lad, so why embarrass him like that, although I didn’t mean to?”

Panu radovi vytanul na mysli zas jiný obličej: bledý a odulý obličej kolegy Wankla. Chudák Wankl, řekl si, ten chtěl být přednostou úřadu místo mne; bylo by to o pár stovek ročně víc, a on má šest dětí… Prý by chtěl dát svou nejstarší dceru učit zpívat, ale nemá na to; a já jsem ho přeskočil, protože to je takový těžkopádný vrták a dříč — ženu má zlou, tak hrozně vychrtlou a zlou od toho věčného šetření; v poledne polyká suchou housku. Pan rada se tesklivě zamyslil. Chudák Wankl, tomu také musí být všelijak, když vidí, že já, bez rodiny, mám víc než on; ale copak já za to mohu? Mně je vždycky skoro úzko, když se ten chlap na mne tak těžce a vyčítavě dívá…

Pan rada si mnul čelo, na němž mu vyrážel pot tísně. Ano, řekl si, tuhle mne ošidil sklepník o pár korun; a já jsem si zavolal majitele, a ten toho sklepníka namístě vyhodil. Vy zloději, syčel na něj, já už se postarám, aby vás nikdo v Praze nevzal do lokálu! A ten člověk neřekl ani slovo a šel… měl takové vysedlé lopatky pod tím fráčkem.

Pan rada už nevydržel v posteli; sedl si ke svému rádiu a navlékl si sluchátka; ale rádio bylo němé, byla němá noc, němé hodiny noci; a pan rada si opřel hlavu do dlaní a vzpomínal na lidi, které kdy potkal, na ty divné a mladé lidi, se kterými si nijak nerozuměl a na které nikdy nemyslel.

Ráno se zastavil na komisařství; byl trochu bledý a rozpačitý: „Tak co," ptal se ho policejní inspektor, „vzpomněl jste si na někoho, kdo vás třeba nenávidí?"

Pan rada potřásl hlavou. „Já nevím," řekl nejistě. „Totiž těch, kteří by mne mohli nenávidět, je tolik, že…" A mávl bezradně rukou. „Poslouchejte, člověk ani neví, kolika lidem ublížil. To víte, u toho okna už sedět nebudu. Já jsem vás přišel poprosit, abyste tu věc nechali plavat."

Yet another figure arose before the councillor's eyes – the pale and bloated face of his colleague Wankl. "The poor fellow wanted to be branch manager instead of me; his annual pay would have gone up by a couple of hundred, and he has six children … Said he wanted to get his eldest daughter trained as a singer but couldn't afford it, and I beat him to the punch, because he's such a dim-witted drudge. His wife's an evil-tempered harpy, mean and scrawny because of all their efforts to save; all he has for lunch is one dry roll with nothing in it." Mr Tomsa went on brooding dolefully. "Poor Wankl can't have been too happy to see me getting more than him, with no family to support. But what could I do about that? I always feel so awkward when he gives me that baleful accusing look …"

The councillor wiped his brow, on which beads of miserable perspiration were pricking out. "Yes," he said to himself. "The other day that waiter short-changed me by a couple of crowns; I called the owner, who sacked him on the spot. 'You're a thief!' he hissed. 'I'll see to it that no restaurant in Prague ever hires you!' And the waiter left without a word … You could see his shoulder-blades going up and down under his tailcoat."

Unable to stay in bed any longer, Mr Tomsa went to the radio and put on his headphones, but the radio was mute in the mute night-time hours. The councillor rested his head in his hands and remembered people he had met, those strange young people he couldn't understand, for whom he'd never spared a thought.

In the morning he called at the police station, looking somewhat pale and downcast. "Well then," enquired the inspector. "Have you thought of anyone who might hate you?"

Mr Tomsa shook his head. "I don't know," he said uncertainly. "I mean, there are so many that …" He gave a helpless flap of his hand. "You know, you never can tell how many people you might have offended. Look, I won't sit by that window any more. I've come to ask you to forget the whole thing."

Básník

Byla to běžná policejní událost: ve čtyři hodiny ráno přejelo auto v Žitné ulici opilou stařenu a v největší rychlosti ujelo. A teď měl mladý policejní koncipient dr. Mejzlík vyšetřit, které auto to bylo. Takový mladý koncipient to bere vážně.

"Hm," řekl dr. Mejzlík strážníkovi číslo 141, "tak vy jste viděl ze vzdálenosti tří set kroků rychle jedoucí auto a na zemi lidské tělo. Co jste nejdřív udělal?"

"Nejdřív jsem běžel k té přejeté," hlásil strážník, "abych jí poskytl první pomoc."

"Nejdřív jste měl zjistit ten vůz," bručel dr. Mejzlík, "a teprve pak se starat o bábu. Ale možná," dodával, drbaje se tužkou ve vlasech, "že bych já to udělal zrovna tak. Tedy číslo vozu jste neviděl; a co se jinak toho vozu týče - ?"

"Myslím," řekl váhavě strážník číslo 141, "že byl nějaký tmavý. Možná, že byl modrý nebo červený. To nebylo dobře vidět pro kouř z výfuku."

"Ach ježíšikriste," naříkal dr. Mejzlík, "jakpak mám potom zjistit, který to byl vůz? Copak mám běhat po všech šoférech a ptát se jich: Pěkně prosím, nepřejeli jste starou bábu? No tak, člověče, co s tím mám dělat?"

Strážník pokrčil rameny v subordinované bezradnosti. "Prosím," řekl, "mně se přihlásil jeden svědek, ale neví taky nic. Prosím, on čeká vedle."

"Tak ho přiveďte," řekl dr. Mejzlík znechuceně a marně hleděl něco vykoukat z hubeného protokolu. "Prosím, jméno a bydliště," řekl mechanicky; ani se na svědka nepodíval.

"Králík Jan, studující strojního inženýrství," pronesl svědek pevně.

The Poet

It was a routine police investigation: at four in the morning a car knocked down an old woman, the worse for drink, in Žitná Street and drove off at top speed. And now, Dr Mejzlík, a young trainee detective, had to identify the car. Young trainee detectives take such matters very seriously.

“Well then,” said Dr Mejzlík to Constable No. 141, “From a distance of 300 metres you observed a speeding car and a body lying in the road. What was the first thing you did?”

“I ran over to the woman to render first aid,” said the constable.

“You should have checked on the car first,” muttered Mejzlík, “and then rendered first aid. But never mind,” he added, scratching his head with his pencil, “I might have done the same. So you didn’t get the registration number. What else can you say about it?”

“I think it was a sort of dark colour,” said No. 141 uncertainly. “It could have been blue, or red. I couldn’t see very well with all the smoke from the exhaust.”

“Good heavens, man!” Mejzlík protested. “How am I supposed to find the owner? Am I meant to chase after every single driver and ask, ‘Excuse me. May I enquire if you happened to run over an old lady?’ What am I to do? Tell me.”

The constable shrugged the shrug of the helpless rank and file. Then he said, “I did record one witness, but he doesn’t know anything either. He’s waiting over there.”

“Bring him here, then,” said Mejzlík wearily, as he searched the meagre notes in vain for anything useful. “Your name and address?” he asked mechanically, without so much as looking at the witness.

“Jan Králík, student of mechanical engineering,” replied the witness confidently.

"Tak vy jste, pane, byl při tom, když dnes ráno ve čtyři hodiny přejelo neznámé auto Boženu Macháčkovou."

"Ano, a já musím říci, že šofér je vinen. Prosím, pane komisaři, ulice byla úplně volná; kdyby byl šofér na křižovatce zpomalil -"
"Jak jste stál daleko?" přerušil ho dr. Mejzlík.
"Na deset kroků. Já jsem doprovázel svého přítele z - z kavárny, a když jsme byli v Žitné ulici -"
"Kdo je váš přítel?" přerušil ho znovu dr. Mejzlík. "Toho tady nemám."

"Jaroslav Nerad, básník," řekl svědek s jistou hrdostí. "Ale ten by vám asi nic neřekl."
"Proč ne?" bručel dr. Mejzlík, chytající se stébla.
"Protože on... je takový básník. Když se stalo to neštěstí, dal se do pláče a utíkal domů jako malé dítě. Tedy když jsme byli v Žitné ulici, přihnalo se odzadu šílenou rychlostí auto -"
"Které mělo číslo?"
"To nevím, prosím. Toho jsem si nevšiml. Já jsem pozoroval tu šílenou jízdu, a zrovna jsem si řekl, že -"
"A jaký to byl vůz?" přerušil ho dr. Mejzlík.
"Čtyřtaktní výbušný motor," pravil znalecky svědek. "Ve značkách aut já se ovšem nevyznám."
"A jakou měl barvu? Kdo v něm seděl? Byl otevřený, nebo zavřený?"
"To nevím," děl svědek zaražen. "Myslím, že to byl nějaký černý vůz; ale blíž jsem si toho nevšiml, protože když se stalo to neštěstí, řekl jsem Neradovi: Koukej, ti lotři přejedou člověka a ani se nezastaví!"

"So, Mr Králík, you were present at four o'clock this morning when an unidentified vehicle ran down Božena Macháčková."
"Yes, and I must add that the driver was at fault, officer: the street was completely deserted. If the driver had slowed down a bit at the crossroads …"
"How far away were you?" Mejzlík interrupted him.
"Ten paces. I was with my friend and we'd left a … café and when we got to Žitná Street …"
"Who's that friend of yours?" Mejzlík interrupted again. "I don't see him in the notes."
"Jaroslav Nerad, the poet," said the witness with more than a hint of pride. "But I don't think he'll be able to tell you much."
"Why not?" muttered Mejzlík, clutching at a straw.
"Because … he's a poet at heart. When it happened he burst into tears and ran off home like a little child. So, while we were in Žitná Street, this car came racing madly up behind us …"
"Registration number?"
"Sorry, I don't know. I didn't notice. I just noticed how fast it was going and I just thought …"
"What sort of car was it?" Mejzlík interrupted.
"Four-stroke internal combustion engine," replied the witness with the air of an expert. "But I'm no good at telling makes of car."
"What colour was it? Who was in it? Did it have an open top, or not?"
"I don't know," replied the witness, abashed. "I think it might have been black, but I didn't get a good look, because when it happened I said to Nerad, 'Look at that! Those scoundrels run someone down and don't even stop!' "

"Hm," mínil dr. Mejzlík nespokojeně, "to je sice docela místná a správná morální reakce, ale já bych byl raději, kdybyste si všiml čísla vozu. To je úžasné, pane, jak lidé nedovedou pozorovat. Vy ovšem víte, že šofér je vinen, vy ovšem správně soudíte, že ti lidé jsou lotři, ale na číslo se nekouknete. Soudit dovede každý; ale pořádně, věcně si všimnout věcí - Děkuju vám, pane Králíku; nebudu vás zdržovat."

Za hodinu zazvonil strážník číslo 141 u bytné básníka Jaroslava Nerada. Ano, pan básník je doma, ale spí. Básník vykulil ze dveří malá užaslá očka na strážníka; nemohl se jaksi upamatovat, co vlastně provedl. Nakonec přece jenom pochopil, proč má jít na policii. "Musí to být?" ptal se nedůvěřivě. "Já se totiž na nic už nepamatuju; já byl v noci trochu -"

"- nalitej," děl strážník chápavě. "Pane, já jsem poznal mnoho básníků. Tak se, pane, ustrojte; mám na vás počkat?"

Načež se básník a strážník dostali do řeči o nočních lokálech, o životě vůbec, o zvláštních úkazech na nebi a mnohých jiných předmětech; jen politika byla oběma cizí. Takto v přátelském a poučném hovoru se dostal básník na policii.

"Vy jste pan Nerad Jaroslav, básník," řekl mu dr. Mejzlík. "Pane svědku, vy jste byl při tom, když neznámé auto přejelo Boženu Macháčkovou."

"Ano," vydechl básník.

"Mohl byste mně říci, jaké to bylo auto? Zda bylo otevřené nebo zavřené, jaké barvy, kdo v něm seděl, jaké mělo číslo?"

Básník usilovně přemýšlel. "To nevím," řekl, "já jsem si toho nevšiml."

"Nevzpomínáte si na žádnou podrobnost?" naléhal Mejzlík.

"Hm," said Mejzlík disconsolately. "I'm sure that was a fully proper and appropriate reaction, but I'd be happier if you'd taken note of the registration number. It's astonishing how unobservant people are. You of course realized that the driver was at fault, and of course you rightly say that those people are scoundrels, but you didn't look at the number. Anyone can offer an opinion, but as for taking clear note of objective facts … Thank you, Mr Králík. I won't take any more of your time."

An hour later Constable No. 141 knocked at the door of Jaroslav Nerad's landlady. "Yes, the poet is at home, but he's asleep." The poet stared out at the constable with little frightened eyes, unable to think what he might have done, but finally realized why he had to go to the police station. "Do I really have to?" he asked mistrustfully. "I don't remember anything; Last night I was a bit under the …"

"Influence," said the constable understandingly. "I've met plenty of poets, sir. So you get dressed, while I wait."

The poet and the constable then discussed matters of nightspots, life in general, strange astronomical phenomena and many other things. Only politics was of no interest. Thus, in amiable and edifying conversation, they reached the police station.

"So you are Mr Jaroslav Nerad, the poet," said Mejzlík. "As a witness, sir, you were present when an unidentified vehicle knocked Božena Macháčková down."

"Yes," sighed the poet.

"Could you tell me what sort of car it was? Open top? What colour? Who was in it? Registration number?"

The poet thought hard. "I don't know," he said. "I didn't notice."

"You don't remember any details at all?" Mejzlík pressed him.

"Kdepak," děl básník upřímně. "Víte, já nedávám vůbec na podrobnosti pozor."
"Tak prosím vás," spustil dr. Mejzlík ironicky, "co jste tedy vůbec pozoroval?"
"Tu celou náladu," pravil básník neurčitě. "Víte, tu opuštěnou ulici... takovou dlouhou... za úsvitu... a jak tam ta ženská zůstala ležet -" Najednou vyskočil. "Vždyť já jsem o tom něco napsal, když jsem přišel domů!" Hrabal se ve všech kapsách a vytahal množství obálek, účtů a jiných takových hadrů. "Ne, tohle to není," brumlal, "tohle taky ne - Počkejme, snad je to tohle," mínil pohřížen v pozorování rubu jakési obálky.
"Ukažte mi to," řekl dr. Mejzlík shovívavě.
"To nic není," bránil se básník. "Ale jestli chcete, já vám to přečtu." Načež vykuliv nadšeně oči a zpěvavě protahuje dlouhé slabiky recitoval:

"marš tmavých domů ráz
dva zastavit stát
úsvit na mandolínu hrá
proč dívko proč se
červenáš
pojedem vozem 120 HP na
konec světa
nebo do Singapore
zastavte zastavte vůz letí
naše veliká láska v prachu
leží
dívka zlomený květ
labutí šíje ňadra buben a
činely
proč tolik pláču"

"A to je celé," prohlásil Jaroslav Nerad.
"Prosím vás," řekl dr. Mejzlík, "co to má znamenat?"
"No přece, to je to neštěstí s tím autem," podivil se básník. "Copak tomu není rozumět?"

"Why would I?" said the poet artlessly. "I never pay attention to details."
"Then be so kind as to tell me what you did notice," Mejzlík allowed himself a note of irony.
"The general feel," replied the poet uncertainly. "The deserted street … a long street … the dawn light … and that woman lying there …" Suddenly he leapt to his feet. "I wrote something about it when I got home!" He scrabbled in all his pockets and pulled out a handful of sweet wrappings, bills and assorted scraps. "No, that's not it," he muttered. "No, not that either … Hang on, this might be it," he said, studying the reverse side of some wrapper.
"Show me," said Mejzlík condescendingly.
"It's nothing," the poet stalled. "But if you like I'll read it to you." With eyes bulging from the strain, he then proceeded to declaim in a sing-song voice, drawing out the long syllables:

darkened houses marching
left right halt
daybreak plucks its
mandolin
why art thou blushing fair
maid
let's drive 120 h.p. to the
very end of the earth
or to Singapore
halt halt the car is flying
our great love lies in the
dust
fair maid a broken flower
a swan's neck breasts
drum and cymbals
why my copious tears

"That's all," said Jaroslav Nerad.
"Sorry, but what does all that mean?" asked Mejzlík.
"Why, it's about that car accident," answered the poet in amazement. "Isn't it clear?"

"Myslím, že ne," mínil dr. Mejzlík kriticky. "Já v tom jaksi nemohu poznat, že dne 15. července ve čtyři hodiny ráno v Žitné ulici přejelo auto číslo to a to šedesátiletou opilou žebračku Boženu Macháčkovou; raněná byla odvezena do Všeobecné nemocnice a zápasí se smrtí. O těchhle faktech se vaše báseň, pane, pokud jsem pozoroval, nezmiňuje. Tak."

"To je jen syrová skutečnost, pane," děl básník mna si nos. "Ale báseň je vnitřní skutečnost. Báseň, to jsou volné, surreální představy, které skutečnost vyvolá v podvědomí básníka, víte? Takové ty zrakové a sluchové asociace. A těm se má čtenář poddat," prohlásil Jaroslav Nerad káravě. "Pak tomu rozumí."

"Prosím vás," vybuchl dr. Mejzlík. "Nebo počkejte, půjčte mi ten váš opus. Děkuju. Tak tu máme, hm: 'Marš tmavých domů ráz dva zastavit stát.' Tedy mně, prosím, vyložte -"

"To je přece Žitná ulice," pravil básník klidně. "Takové dvě řady domů, víte?"

"A proč to není třeba Národní třída?" ptal se dr. Mejzlík skepticky.

"Protože ta není tak rovná," zněla přesvědčující odpověď.

"Tak dál. 'Úsvit na mandolínu hrá' - No, dejme tomu. 'Proč dívko proč se červenáš' - Prosím vás, kde se tu bere ta dívka?"

"Červánky," řekl básník lakonicky.

"Aha, promiňte. 'Pojedem vozem 120 HP na konec světa' -Nu?"

"To asi přijel ten vůz," vysvětloval básník.

"A měl 120 HP?"

"To já nevím; to znamená, že jel rychle. Jako by chtěl letět až na konec světa."

"Ah tak. 'Nebo do Singapore' - Proboha vás prosím, proč zrovna do Singapore?"

"I don't think so," said Mejzlík tartly. "Somehow it doesn't seem to tell me that in Žitná Street at 4.00 a.m. on 15th July a car – registration number so and so – ran over a drink-sodden beggar-woman named Božena Macháčková, aged sixty, who was taken to the general hospital where she's fighting for life. As far as I can see, sir, your poem makes no mention of those facts."

"That's only the superficial reality," answered the poet, rubbing his nose. "The poem is the inner truth. You see, poetry is free, underlying ideas brought out in the poet's subconscious by the superficial reality. It's all about visual and aural associations. The reader has to be open to them," declared Jaroslav Nerad reproachfully. "Then he'll understand."

"My apologies!" snapped Mejzlík. "Hold on, let me have a look at your epic. Thank you. Here we have, er … : 'Darkened houses marching left right halt.' Would you care to explain that to me?"

"Why, that's Žitná Street," replied the poet calmly. "Two rows of houses, you see?"

"Why not the National Parade, say?" enquired Mejzlík sceptically.

"Because it's not so straight," came the convincing reply.

"And then we see: 'Daybreak plucks its mandolin.' Well, all right. 'Why art thou blushing fair maid?' What's this fair maid doing here?"

"The light of dawn," said the poet laconically.

"Oh, I see. 'Let's drive 120 h.p. to the very end of the earth.' What about that?"

"It must be the moment that car drove up," explained the poet.

"And it had a 120 horse-power engine?"

"I don't know; it means it was going fast. As if it wanted to fly to the end of the world."

"I see. 'Or to Singapore'. Why in heaven's name should it go to Singapore?"

Básník pokrčil rameny. "To už nevím. Třeba proto, že tam jsou Malajci."
"A jaký má vztah to auto k Malajcům? He?"
Básník sebou stísněně vrtěl. "Možná, že ten vůz byl hnědý, nemyslíte?" řekl zahloubaně. "Něco hnědého tam jistě bylo. Proč by tam jinak byl Singapore?"
"Tak vidíte," řekl dr. Mejzlík, "ten vůz už byl červený, modrý a černý. Co si z toho mám vybrat?"
"Vyberte si hnědý," radil básník. "To je příjemná barva."
"'Naše veliká láska v prachu leží dívka zlomený květ'" četl dál dr. Mejzlík. "Ten zlomený květ, to je ta opilá žebračka?"
"Přece nebudu psát o opilé žebračce," pravil básník dotčen. "Byla to prostě žena, rozumíte?"
"Aha. A co je tohle: 'labutí šíje ňadra buben a činely.' To jsou volné asociace?"
"Ukažte," řekl básník zaražen a naklonil se nad papír. "'Labutí šíje ňadra buben a činely' - co to má být?"
"Na to se právě ptám," bručel dr. Mejzlík poněkud urážlivě.
"Počkejte," přemýšlel básník, "něco tam muselo být, co mně připomnělo - Poslouchejte, nepřipadá vám někdy dvojka jako labutí šíje? Koukejte se," a napsal tužkou 2.
"Aha," řekl dr. Mejzlík pozorně. "A co ta ňadra?"
"To je přece 3, dva obloučky, ne?" divil se básník.
"Ještě tam máte buben a činely," vyhrkl policejní úředník napjatě.

The poet shrugged. “That I don’t know. Maybe because Malays live there.”

“And what’s the car got to do with Malays, eh?”

The poet fidgeted awkwardly. “Could it have been a brown car?” he wondered. “I’m sure there was something brown about it. Why else would Singapore come in?”

“So,” said Mejzlík, “the car was red, blue and black. Which colour should I choose?”

“Choose brown,” the poet advised. “It’s a nice colour.”

“ ‘Our great love lies in the dust fair maid a broken flower’,” read Mejzlík. “Is the broken flower that drunken beggar-woman?”

“I’m not going to write about some drunken beggar-woman!” retorted the poet indignantly. “It’s just a woman; don’t you see?”

“Aha. And what about this bit? ‘Swan’s neck breasts drum and cymbals’? Is that free association?”

“Show me,” replied the poet, puzzled. He bent over the piece of paper. “ ‘Swan’s neck breasts drum and cymbals’. What can that be?”

“That’s what I’m asking you,” muttered Mejzlík pointedly.

“Hang on,” the poet considered the question. “Something must have triggered a memory … Look, doesn’t the number 2 sometimes remind you of a swan’s neck? See here.” And he wrote a 2 in pencil.

“Aha,” said Mejzlík, paying close attention. “And what about those breasts?”

“That’s a 3, of course! Those twin orbs! Don’t you see?” the poet exclaimed, surprised.

“And then you have this drum and cymbals,” exclaimed the detective, agog.

"Buben a činely," přemýšlel básník Nerad, "buben a činely... to by snad mohla být pětka, ne? Helejte," řekl a napsal číslici 5. "To bříško je jako buben, a nahoře činely -"
"Počkejte," řekl dr. Mejzlík a napsal si na papírek 235. "Jste si tím jist, že to auto mělo číslo 235?"
"Já jsem si vůbec žádného čísla nevšiml," prohlásil Jaroslav Nerad rozhodně. "Ale něco takového tam muselo být - kdepak by se to tu vzalo?" divil se, hloubaje nad básnickou. "Ale víte, to místo je to nejlepší z celé básně."

Za dva dny navštívil dr. Mejzlík básníka; básník tentokrát nespal, nýbrž měl tam nějakou dívku a marně sháněl prázdnou židli, aby ji policejnímu úředníkovi nabídl.
"Já už zase běžím," řekl dr. Mejzlík. "Já vám jen jdu říci, že to byl opravdu vůz číslo 235."
"Jaký vůz?" užasl básník.
"Labutí šíje ňadra buben a činely," vysypal jedním dechem dr. Mejzlík. "A Singapore taky." “Some other time,” said the detective hurriedly, “when another case comes up.”

"Aha, už vím," děl poeta. "Tak vidíte, to máte tu vnitřní skutečnost. Chcete, abych vám přečetl pár jiných básní? Teď už jim budete rozumět."

"Až jindy," řekl honem policejní úředník. "Až zase budu mít nějaký případ."

“Drum and cymbals,” repeated Nerad thoughtfully. “Drum and cymbals … might be a 5, mightn’t it? Look!” He wrote a number 5. “That paunch is like a drum, and above it you have those cymbals.”

“Just a minute,” said Mejzlík, jotting down the number 235 on a scrap of paper. “Was the car number 235?”

“I didn’t notice any number,” said Jaroslav Nerad firmly. “But there must be something to it, or how could it have got there?” he said, pondering the verse. “But, you know, that’s the best bit in the whole poem!”

Two days later Mejzlík called on the poet again. This time he was awake but some girl was with him; he looked around in vain for a chair to offer the policeman.

“I won’t stay,” said Mejzlík. “I just dropped in to say that the car number really was 235.”

“What car?” The poet looked puzzled.

“Swan’s neck breasts drum and cymbals,” came the immediate reply. “And Singapore as well.”

“Oh yes. Now I remember,” said the poet. “That’s the inner truth of it. If you like, I’ll read you a couple more poems. Now you’ll be able to understand them.”

“Some other time,” said the detective hurriedly, “when another case comes up.”

A Translator's diary
Translate or not translate Tim Winton's *Island Home* into French

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My interior dialogue *à la* Nathalie Sarraute:[1]

- *You are going to do it?*
- *Yes, I think so.*
- *Translate a whole book without having neither the copyrights nor a publisher?*
- *I tried, I contacted the author's agent, to no avail. Many of Tim Winton's novels have already appeared in French, most of them translated by Nadine Gassie, and published in reputable publishing houses; The Shepherd's Hut for instance was published by number one literary publishing house Gallimard.*[2]
- *Translators told you it's a bad idea!*
- *Maybe when the book is fully translated something will happen. Like, forty years ago, when my translation of K.S. Pritchard's Coonardoo got published in the end.*
- *It might just stay buried in your computer hard disk.*
- *I'll start anyway…*

Setting aside the translation's future, fifty pages in, Tim Winton's *Island Home* proves to be quite a challenge to translate into French.
I read it twice, offered it to Australians living abroad or French living in Australia, as this essay is about understanding our relationships with the land. I quoted from it. I rhapsodized about it. Yet, reading and interpreting it with an eye to translate is quite a different experience.

I now feel the full effect of Winton, the wordsmith: *Island Home'*s stylistic complexity, wide range of vocabulary, the abundance of dialogues and descriptions, the visceral feeling for the land, the intellectual motifs, the urgency of the committed environmentalist. It is after all a memoir and a political manifesto, a 'love letter' and 'an aesthetic response to the glory and mystery of nature', according to some critics. It requires all my acquired knowledge of Australia – and of Western Australia at that – having lived here more than forty years. It requires a deep understanding of my task.

I am confident that I understand the text well enough, catching its allusions, its subtext, its density. Yet finding the right resources in the target language and culture is like trying to hold water through your fingers. It's there, and yet it slips through.

My approach is to reproduce the effects on a (potentially future) readership: it has to sound natural and fluent, without totally expunging its foreignness. It has to move, impress and ultimately challenge the way the French see Australia, that is, as a beautiful and endangered land. Geography is the main theme of the book: 'Geography trumps it all. Its logic underpins everything', Winton writes (17) [*La géographie l'emporte sur tout. Sa logique sous-tend tout*.] as opposed to 'most Asian and European countries [which] can be defined in human terms.' (16) [*la plupart des pays d'Asie ou d'Europe peuvent se définir en termes humains*]. For a European translator, this means that their target language is not so well equipped, not as rich as Winton's lexicon when it comes to talking about geography.

[1] I am reminded of Nathalie Sarraute's *Enfance*, written as a dialogue between a *self* hostile to the autobiographical project, and a *self* determined to overcome all the autography's pitfalls.
[2] Translated by Jean Esch as *La cavale de Jaxie Clackton.*

Starting with the title: *Island Home* doesn't render easily in French. It borrows from Neil Murray's song, *My Island Home* and is highly evocative to Australian readers, faintly echoing Sally Morgan's *My Place*. Although should a publisher ever be interested, they will probably impose their own choice, I still want to propose an adequate rendering. Home can be : *Chez moi, Chez soi, A la maison,* and *Island Home*, *Mon/Une île-maison.* The possessive sounds not only childish, but wrong for Winton's intention to blend the personal and the political. *Habiter une île? Mémoires d'un îlien ? L'île natale* ? I am getting carried away. At the moment, I incline towards a sober: *L'Ile-continent : essais*. It echoes the first sentence of the second chapter: 'I grew up on the world's largest island' [*J'ai grandi sur la plus grande île du monde*].

Continuing with *home*. On page 5, Winton replies to his four-year-old son's question about photos pinned to the wall: – 'Is it real?' – 'It's home [Winton says]. Remember? That's Australia.'. No problems here: '*C'est chez nous. Tu te souviens ? C'est l'Australie*.' Also relatively unproblematic is the last sentence of this first chapter: 'When we get home,' the boy declared, we're getting a dog. In a ute.' [*Quand on rentrera, déclara l'enfant, on prendra un chien. Dans un pick-up*.]

'Island' re-appears in a few instances, as in this chapter title: 'The island seen and felt' (9) '*L'île vue et ressentie'*. Here I stumble, not on vocabulary, but a syntax which doesn't seem appropriate for a title. I prefer : '*Voir et ressentir une île'*. But I am still unconvinced since '*une île'* doesn't render the source text definite article. I sense that the indefinite article corresponds better to the author's generalising intention, to transform the personal into a collective experience. After all, use of definite and indefinite articles varies between the two languages.

More geography: 'land', 'landscape', 'place', 'country': the French language supplies a whole semantic field here: *terre, territoire, terrain, endroit, lieu, pays*…

Despite a peopled history of sixty thousand years, Australia remains a place with more land than people, more geography than architecture. (5)	Bien qu'elle ait une histoire de peuplement de soixante mille ans, l'Australie demeure un lieu avec plus de terre que de gens, plus de géographie que d'architecture.

I had originally thought of a long explicitation for 'a peopled history of sixty thousand years': '*habitée pendant soixante mille ans tout au long de son histoire'* but a (misplaced?) sense of economy made me change it.

Yet the trickiest geography-related word is 'country' without an article, an unknown quantity in French history or culture:

[Aboriginal] culture originated in and deferred to country. Two centuries after this way of living was disrupted forever Australia is still a place where there is more landscape than culture. (16) In my own lifetime Australians have come to use the word 'country' as Aborigines use it, to describe what my great-great-grandparents would surely have called territory. A familial, relational term has supplanted one more objectifying and acquisitive. (28)	[…] la culture aborigène avait son origine dans la terre, était renvoyée à la terre. Deux cents ans plus tard, ce mode de vie était bouleversé à jamais. L'Australie reste un lieu où il y a plus de territoire [paysage ?] que de culture. Par exemple, ne serait-ce qu'au cours de ma vie, les Australiens en sont venus à utiliser le mot '*country'* comme le font les Aborigènes, pour décrire ce que mes arrières-arrières-grands-parents auraient sans doute appelé 'territoire'. Un terme familier, relationnel en a supplanté un, fait d'objectification et d'acquisition.

'Country' could perhaps be translated as '*pays'* in its original Latin sense of '*pagi'*, an administrative area, a district; later on, it came to be used to mean 'my native village' and even 'a person from my native village', *un pays*. Maybe I could use this, as long as I italicize it: but if I am prepared to attract attention to this word, I might as well keep '*country'* in my translation and add a footnote or refer to page 28. As Winton is well aware, '*territoire'* has to be avoided, even though it has in recent years been revitalised by French novelist, Michel Houellebecq.[3] A geographer defines 'territory' thus : '*Le territoire est un espace délimité, approprié par un individu ou une communauté, sur lequel s'exerce un pouvoir*.'[4] ['a territory is a confined place, appropriated by an individual or a community exercising power over it.']. Appropriation and power would run counter to the Indigenous symbolic notion of 'country' as Winton understands it.

The last 'geography cum history' element that presented a translation challenge is a chapter title (again!). 'Settlers at the edge' recounts the transformation of Karrinyup from bushland to suburbia, an area cleared in the 60s, a few kilometres from downtown Perth, where Winton spent most of his younger years. '*Colons en périphérie'*, '*Pionniers en bordure'* are nonsensical in French. The issue is both lexical and syntactic: 'at the edge' of what? 'Settler' (*colons, pionniers)* will evoke in a French reader American (or maybe French) imperialism or a sense of adventure. '*Envahisseurs marginalisés*' [marginalised invaders] seems excessively political. The expression here is ironic to describe 'Aussie battlers' lured by ideals of modernisation which turns to be destruction of the land.

I'll conclude with a sentence whose meaning was completely clear to me, but which runs the risk of becoming rather torturous in my target language. It is dense with pictures and sounds, rendering a scene that no French reader could visualise, unless they have been in this type of house and living this type of free and protected childhood:

Lying under the night sky I feel a curious sense of return and restoration, not unlike the way I felt as a kid coming in the back door to the sudsy smell of the laundry and the parental mutter of the tub filling down the hall. (22)	Sous le ciel nocturne, j'ai la curieuse impression d'être chez moi, de m'être ressourcé, un peu comme ce que, gamin, je ressentais en rentrant par derrière pour tomber sur l'odeur savonneuse du linge et le murmure des parents au bout du couloir.

- *You will need to revisit this.*
- *Yep, don't worry. This will be my mantra. 'Revise, revise, and revise again'.*

[3] Michel Houellebecq, *La Carte et le territoire* (Paris, Flammarion : 2010), trans. *The Map and the Territory*. by Gavin Bowd (New York: Knopf : 2012).

[4] https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/glossaire/territoires-territorialisation-territorialite, accessed 8 September 2025.

A Conversation with Sinologist Charles Laughlin on his Translations of Chinese Literature

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This is a conversation with sinologist Charles Llaughlin on his translations of Chinese literature where he expresses his perspectives based on translation practice, shedding light on overseas translations of Chinese literature.

Charles A. Laughlin is the Ellen Bayard Weedon Chair Professor of East Asian Studies at the University of Virginia. Laughlin received his B.A. in Chinese Language and Literature from the University of Minnesota in 1988, and his Ph.D. in Chinese Literature at Columbia University in 1996. His publications include *Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetics of Historical Experience*, (Duke, 2002). *Contested Modernities in Chinese Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity* (Hawai'i, 2008). Laughlin's translations have appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation* and Zhang Er and Chen Dong, eds., *Another Kind of Nation: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Poetry,* and Ma Lan's 2023 bilingual collection, *How We Kill a Glove.* He also co-edited and contributed to the introduction and translations in *By the River: Seven Contemporary Chinese Novella*s (Oklahoma University Press, 2016).

Meng Hua (MH): Charles, thanks for accepting the interview. Let's begin with when and why you started studying Chinese?

Charles Laughlin (CL): It is much easier to answer when (September 1983), than to answer why. I had wanted to learn Chinese for some years before I went to college, because I had been interested in Tai Chi and early Chinese philosophy, and while reading about them (in English, of course), I encountered Chinese characters and became fascinated with the writing system. I also began to wonder whether the English translations I was reading of the Tao Te Ching and Zhuang Zi were missing something, so the prospect of reading Chinese philosophical texts in the original language inspired me. There were many other factors involved, but I think that's the primary reason.

MH: Chinese literature does not seem to encounter accessibility in the United States. Is that true from your translating and publishing experience? What is the current situation of Chinese literature in the United States?

CL: Access and popularity are two different things. A great deal of Chinese literature has been translated into English already, and the pace has accelerated a great deal since I was young, but it hasn't had much impact on mainstream readers for a variety of reasons. The main thing is that these translations have traditionally been published by academic (university) publishers to use as teaching material at universities, so those versions don't usually make it to commercial bookstores. Secondly, more and more literary works (especially novels) are being published by commercial publishers and are available at bookstores, but they are often mixed together with all the other novels of the world, and so a reader would have to know which authors they are interested in reading in advance in order to find them. There is no "Chinese literature" section in bookstores. Third, there is little discussion of Chinese literature in the mainstream

media, although this is changing somewhat due to the associative nature of the internet and social media—you can be drawn into a subject you don't know about because of what someone you follow says, or a link that may appear. The reason there hasn't been a great deal of interest generated in Chinese literature until recently may be that Americans are not that interested in literature in general, and also they seem less interested in reading things translated from foreign languages, as opposed to being written in English in the first place. Thus, many of the most popular books about China are not literature, and they are written in English originally, by either Chinese or American authors. There is a major exception to all of this, however, in Liu Cixin's *Three Body Problem.* The entire trilogy is enormously popular in America, and I am fairly certain that Liu is the most well-known Chinese author among Americans.

MH: Your undergraduate degree is in literature, your master's degree is in philosophy and literature, and your doctoral degree is in philosophy. In your opinion, what is the relationship between philosophy and literature? Will the change in direction in philosophy bring about a shift in literary creation, reading, criticism and even translation?

CL: Your question is based on a misunderstanding. The English name of the doctoral degree for any subject is "Doctor of Philosophy"; "Ph.D." Is an abbreviation for that. The Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) represents the coursework done after the Master of Arts (M.A.) in the pursuit of a Ph.D. I have not placed particular emphasis on the study of philosophy during graduate school, although I did take more courses in Philosophy in college than I was required to. As to the relationship between philosophy and literature, that is something I do like to talk about. I believe that literature is an all-purpose discipline; literary works contain philosophy, economics, politics, history, and potentially every area of human endeavor. I think that is what attracted me to it as an approach to learning about China, and it is one way I explain its value to my students. I don't really have an answer for the last question, as I don't know of any change in direction of philosophy. Philosophy is a highly specialised field in America and probably most people don't even know what its direction is presently.

MH: In the study of Chinese contemporary literature, you have paid great attention to Chinese reportage and biographical literature. Does that mean American readers prefer to read such documentary literary texts about China?

CL: I don't choose my subjects of study based on what I think American readers would be interested in. For what it's worth, I choose what to research based on my own intellectual response to the research that has already been done by others. Sometimes it's because I'm inspired by the work of one or two scholars. More often it is because I feel like something interesting I have noticed has been neglected by other scholars in the field. Another reason is that in teaching, or giving conference presentations or lectures, I learn that people are interested in some particular area I have touched upon, and so I explore that area further. That is how I got into studying the informal essay (*xiaopin wen*) from the early 20th century; it came from the enthusiasm some of my PhD students showed while I was teaching the subject. It's also how I arrived at my current research projects on desire and emotion in revolutionary literature and images of aging in Chinese film. You mention biographical literature, but that has not been my focus; I only presented one short paper on biographical literature at a conference in connection with my project on the informal essay.

MH: As a translator, what are the reference standards for you to choose translated works? Will you refer to evaluation systems in Chinese cultural contexts such as Lu Xun Literature

Prize and Mao Dun Literature Prize? The first novella titled *The Beloved Tree* is written by Lu Xun Literature Prize winner Jiang Yun.

CL: I have done little translation since the novella collection *By the River,* and I did not choose the works included in it; they were chosen by Professor Liu Hongtao at Beijing Normal University. Professor Liu and Jonathan Stalling at the University of Oklahoma (where it was published) invited me to assemble a group of translators to translate the works. I like the novella form and I am not widely read in contemporary literature, so I welcomed the opportunity to do the most translating I have ever done for one project (I translated three of the seven works). I had not heard of Jiang Yun, Li Tie, or Xu Zechen (the three authors I translated) before the project, though I had heard of Wang Anyi, Han Shaogong, Chi Zijian, and Fang Fang of course, whose works were translated by colleagues I recruited. I like all the works in the book, but I also think they are probably not easy for most Americans to relate to, and the book has not done well as far as I know. Some of my friends teach out of it for their classes though.

More generally, all the translations I have published so far were assigned to me by others, and I have not yet translated something I chose myself (except for passages in my scholarly work). I would like to translate Mao Dun's *Eclipse* trilogy (*Vacillation* has already been published in English by David Hull, but Disillusionment and Pursuit are still not translated), and novels by Fei Ming like *The Life of Mr. Nobody* and *After Mr. Nobody Took the Airplane,* because I think they're important literary works and probably good reading for lovers of literature. They would also be a good contribution to teaching material in Chinese literature.

MH: One further question about the collaboration, did you refer to your wife's advice in translating the work because she is a Chinese writer?

CL: Yes, of course, I often need to ask her questions about the meanings and usage of Chinese words, her advice about what to read, and even what to translate. Like me, she is a fan of Fei Ming, so we agree I should translate him, but I have three other books to write before I turn back to translation. Ma Lan is not only a writer, but she is also a writer I translate. I have translated more poems by her than any other poet, and we published the bilingual volume, *How We Kill a Glove*, last year with Argos Press, in 2023.

MH: How long did it take you to finish the translation of three novellas in that book?

CL: That's a good question; I don't really remember. I believe it was several months, maybe a year or more. It depends on whether you include revisions based on the feedback from the copy editor, which also took a long time (2–3 months).

MH: As a professor-translator, what is your view on the issue of whether fidelity to the original should be given the top priority in the translated text? And how do you do in the translation of novellas?

CL: I think people who do a lot of translating (I also teach a class on literary translation) don't find it useful to think about "fidelity" as most people might think. Precise accuracy to the semantic meaning of every word often results in bad English writing style; this has been a problem with academic translations of literary works for many decades. Oddly, some of the earliest translations from a century or more ago are just as good or better than newer ones. The most important improvement in the translation of Chinese literature has been the emergence of

younger translators like Eleanor Goodman, Lucas Klein, Eric Abrahamsen, Canaan Morse, Ken Liu, Joel Martinsen, and Jeremy Tiang, who themselves have literary training and talent and publish their own original works of literature. To translators like this, fidelity to the original work is necessary but not sufficient to the success of the translation. The translations they do of Chinese literature are works of English literature in their own right, and they will surely stand the test of time better than most of the old-school academic translations. Julia Lovell, who has translated all of Lu Xun's fiction, is technically an academic translator, but she also happens to be a talented writer, so her Penguin Books edition of Lu Xun will remain the standard of quality for a long time.

I do want to say something more about fidelity, though. Although I think pursuing precision and accuracy from word to word is foolish, that doesn't mean I think translation should be a completely free rewrite of the original. In my own translation practice, I like to look at the grammatical structure of the sentences and the style of the writer and try to find ways to use English to approximate the same feeling the Chinese gives me as a reader. Sometimes I say: the original author is already a translator: they have some vague thoughts and feelings, and their original act of putting them into words is a translation (from non-words into words). Thus, I am not translating the text left by the author, but instead I try to find ways to capture those original thoughts and feelings, and translate them into English, together with the author, rather than after them.

MH: Do you have a specific audience in mind when you are translating?

CL: I translate into American English (Julia Lovell translated Lu Xun into British English). Apart from that, I assume my reader will be someone who already appreciates literature. Apart from that, I let the text guide me, and I'm not going to change the tone or sophistication of the text to try to accommodate a certain kind of reader. The goal is to find the author's voice in authentic and idiomatic American English.

MH: What challenges do you encounter when translating a Chinese novella?

CL: I had some trouble with certain local foods, as I had never heard of them or tasted them before. Also, articles of clothing. Xu Zechen's story "Voice Change" has a character in it who is a schoolteacher in a small town. The narrator says he wears a "*li mao"* which, according to the regular dictionary definition is a "top hat," a very formal hat that European and American men used to wear with a tuxedo, and is generally not worn anymore. I asked the author about this and, using pictures, eventually figured out that what he was talking about was what we call a "fedora," the typical wide-brimmed hat that Western men wore with suits throughout most of the 20th century, which is much more common and fits the historical context better.

Another problem I have to be careful of is dropping out phrases or sentences, especially if they are important, as the editors will not usually discover it. But these problems are not peculiar to the novella. Novellas are sometimes very long so, like full-length novels, they are daunting to the inexperienced translator. On another level, an issue with novellas is that it is hard to get publishers to publish them, as opposed to novels – a single novella is too short for an individual book, so they have to be published together with other novellas. This is one of the reasons we all felt publishing *By the River* was important.

MH: You once said you do not like either footnotes or endnotes. In Xu Zechen's "Voice Change" and Li Tie's "Safety Bulletin", you did not provide any notes. However, in Jiang Yun's *The Beloved Tree*, you added 11 endnote and what for?

CL: I only provide notes when I think the reader has no way of knowing what the text means, and I have no way to smoothly embed an explanation in the text. In *The Beloved Tree*, there were many historical and cultural references that American readers would not understand, and I used notes to explain them. This was not the case in "Voice Change." I would never try to completely avoid notes altogether, but the fewer there are, the more pleasant the reading experience is.

MH: What strategies did you adopt to deal with cultural loaded expressions, for example 刘备跨下的"的卢"(Liu Bei's jinxed horse)、 心较比干多一窍（Her mind more agile than Bi Gan）、饿死不食周粟（starve than to "accept grain from Zhou"），and etc.? Do you make sacrifices to reach a certain level of fluency?

CL: Every phrase deserves special treatment. I don't have a policy that I apply generally. I sometimes like to put set expressions in quotation marks or italics to signal to the reader that they are not ordinary language. If a literal translation is unintelligible to an average American reader, I will consider adding a note. However, if I'm choosing a text to translate, I usually will not choose a text that I feel requires a large number of notes. From a publishing and reading point of view, having to refer to notes when you are reading a literary work is disruptive to the reader's enjoyment.

MH: In translations of various kinds of wine in *The Beloved Tree*, by what ways did you get the knowledge of "Hua'er Jiu (花儿酒)" "Zouma Hua (走马花)" "Man kou Hua (满扣花)" "Loushang Lou (楼上楼)"? Did you have deep conversations with original writers?

CL: Not a deep conversation. I believe I exchanged some emails with Jiang Yun to check my impression of the terms she is using here, but she includes physical descriptions of the differences in the text itself, so my only challenge was what words to choose to translate the terms. As long as the reader can picture the difference between the different wines, it doesn't really matter what I call them.

MH: It seems that you prefer to use pingyin style to cope with units of measurement, like 11 丈（eleven zhang），noun phases with Chinese characteristics, like 炕（kang）、汾阴（Fenyin sui）and why?

CL: It's important to remind readers that translation is not a direct or mechanical process, so when certain terms provide challenges because of conceptual gaps across cultures, I sometimes use the pinyin romanization to draw attention to this distance, and use various means to explain such terms. In the case of units of measurement, as the editor of the book I can explain the equivalents of traditional Chinese units of measurement at the beginning of the book, and then use the romanized unit names in the text (converting them into metric or English units would often lead to odd, fractional numbers). Otherwise, I would use notes. If I prefer the Chinese terms, it's in the interest of not distorting the meaning. As for *kang,* there is no English equivalent, so if I don't romanize it, it would be very complicated to describe. There are

actually a number of English translations of Chinese fictional works that refer to the *kang,* so readers familiar with it from other works need no explanation.

MH: In the process of poetry translation, how do you enable the verses to sound perfectly natural in English both in the rhyme and the form while transmitting the meaning and context correctly, like"晓来谁染霜林醉，总是离人泪(What dyed the frosted forest red at dawn? In the leaving man's tears / the trees drown)"?

CL: First of all, even experts at poetic translation generally avoid trying to rhyme, as it's much more difficult to find rhymes in English than in Chinese, so it deeply disrupts other aspects of prosody in the translation. In modern Chinese poetry, rhyme has also often been discarded anyway.

People have different strategies with premodern poetry to suggest the rhythm, and I approve of using such methods considering the strict structural requirements of those forms. I remember I had a course in college on traditional Chinese poetry that was taught completely in English with translated works, but we learned aspects of traditional Chinese prosody had assignments to write English poems in the style of Tang regulated verse or modeled on other poetic genres we had read, and had assignments in which we had to write English poems in imitation of traditional Chinese poems.

MH: You once said that the translation of foreign literature cannot be considered in the promotion in American universities, so many competent professors and scholars have no time to care about the translation work. Do you think can we consider finding a group of qualified translators among Chinese literature students? There are a certain number of graduate students in Chinese translation programs in the United States, but why are there so few engaged in literary translation after graduation?

CL: Given what I have said about the younger, more talented translators, I am not too worried about this problem. It is true that a published literary translation is not considered as important as a scholarly monograph is for the purpose of promotion, but it would be an exaggeration to say that it "cannot be considered" in promotion. If a scholar has published popular or influential translations, their colleagues and institutions certainly would not ignore that. But I would hope that with many non-academics coming into the translation market, and more different kinds of places to publish translations (online journals and websites, for example, in addition to printed books and literary journals), the translation of Chinese literature does not have to rely so much on the efforts of academic scholars who do not necessarily have literary talent (and shouldn't be expected to).

There are extremely few "translation programs" in the United States, and they are not mainly focused on literary translation, but business and legal translation. However, there are important Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) in creative writing programs and short-term residencies for all kinds of translators, including professional translators and academics. These programs not only provide guidance from experienced literary translators and the opportunity to devote time to exploring the theory and practice of literary translation, but also facilitate connections to literary publications, prize competitions, and the community of literary translators and even authors of the source language.

MH: In your opinion, What makes for a qualified literary translator and what are sound relationship among the translation and publication of Chinese literature, the public reading of Chinese literature, and the teaching and research of Chinese literature in universities?

CL: I'll start with the last part: I think the teaching and research of Chinese literature in universities is in a good situation, and has potential to evolve further if given enough space in the academy. The Chinese literature classroom in the U.S. is still the place where the most Americans are exposed to Chinese literary works, and it's a good place because this can be accomplished under the guidance of a knowledgeable professor.

I think academic scholars are decreasingly likely to play a role in who is considered a qualified literary translator. As the translation of Chinese literature, this will increasingly be determined by publication success and literary awards, which are now including more prizes for translated literature. Looking at it this way, it will increasingly be determined by the literary quality of the English translation. The more successful translations of Chinese literature are in the literary market, the more they will be read, and the higher their stature will be in world literature. Academic professors respond to success in the literary market, so for example, most of us are teaching Liu Cixin and other science fiction writers now, so literary success will increasingly affect what is taught in Chinese literature courses.

MH: Do you think the low status of translation leads to the low social status of translators and undesirable translation income, which will further affect the enthusiasm of translators? What is the social status and income of American translators of Chinese literature in the social class?

CL: I wouldn't say translators have low status. Literary translation is generally not considered a profession in the U.S. Its practitioners are usually people who have other professions – some are literary authors, some are college professors, some have professions that are unrelated to literature. Readers are scarcely aware of their existence – their names often do not appear on the cover of books they translate.

Like other forms of translation, to a large extent, literary translation is compensated by the word, at higher rates than other forms of written translation. Well-known translators may be given contracts that compensate at considerably higher than market rates, especially when translating important works and authors. That being said, I think it is unlikely that anyone aspires to make a living entirely on literary translation. Literary translators I know, however, are dedicated to what they do, and will often translate works as a labor of love even without expectation of compensation.

MH: How do you negotiate with publishers? Do they care about closeness to the original language more or to the target language more?

CL: I think you are referring to editors. There are at least three kinds of editor involved with the publication of literary books, two of which are employed by publishers: acquisition editors and copy editors. The other kind are people who propose book projects including multiple works by (sometimes) multiple authors. Such editors may themselves be literary translators or academic professors like myself in the case of *By the River.* Normally the third kind will negotiate with publishers' acquisition editors to secure a book contract (often this will be done through a literary agent). If the contract is signed, the acquisition editor passes the translator or

academic editor along to copy editors (there may be other project managers or editors along the way). The role played by the copy editor is in my experience very important. Although they often do not read Chinese, they mark up every page of the translation manuscript with suggested changes (for better English style) and often challenging questions when the editor is not able to fully understand the translation. Just as I cherish the opportunity to work with collaborators in translation, like the American poet Martine Bellen in translating Ma Lan's poetry, I find these questions and this input to be extremely helpful and important in my own translation practice. I don't know whether award-winning literary translators working through agents have similar experiences, but I imagine they might be different.

MH: Do you have any suggestions to improve the translation and reception of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world?

CL: The more Chinese literature enters into the U.S. literary scene (publishing and prizes), the more influential it will become among American readers. This is something that relies on the continued efforts of translators as well as professional and amateur critics' podcasts, blogs, and contributions to major literary appreciation social media platforms like Goodreads. It will also help to have editors of world literature textbooks for high school and college to include more Chinese works, helping better familiarize general readers with Chinese literature. Adaptation of Chinese literary works into film and television, which we have already seen in the case of works by Eileen Chang and Liu Cixin, also exposes the broad public to the worlds created by modern Chinese writers.

MH: What plans do you have for future translation projects?

CL: As I mentioned before, I continue to translate Ma Lan's poetry, and would like to translate certain Republican Period works like Mao Dun's *Eclipse* trilogy of novellas and Fei Ming's novels.

MH: What advice do you give to your students who are interested in Chinese language and culture?

CL: I encourage them to think about and communicate what they like about Chinese literature and what special things it offers to American readers. This may not always be the same as what Chinese readers value about their favorite or most revered writers and works, but it is essential to clarifying what Chinese literature has to offer American readers, which will help expand and give direction to the American reception of Chinese literature.

MH: Professor Charles, thank you for sharing your experience on Chinese literature translation and your perceptions of literary translation. We are looking forward to more of your works.

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Translator's Style and Its Development: An Interview with Allan Barr

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Introduction

Yajie Li analyzed Allan Barr's evolving translation style using a parallel corpus and seven stylistic markers, including sentence structure, word usage, and speech presentation, to identify distinctive features across his translations of Yu Hua's works. After conducting a detailed textual analysis, Li presented her findings to Allan Barr to seek his insights into her conclusions and stylistic considerations, aiming to deepen her research into the factors influencing Barr's evolving translation style. The interview, conducted via the ZOOM platform on October 23 2023, covered Barr's translation journey, including his experience translating four of Yu Hua's literary works. Barr shared his perspectives on translation style, outlined the intended audience for his translations, and discussed the reception of Chinese-translated works in the book market. He also elaborated on his strategies for balancing fidelity to the source text with readability in the target language.

Yajie Li (YL): Focusing on your translation style and its development, I applied corpus-based research with a self-established corpus composed of Yu Hua's four literary works and your translations. Your first translation in my study is *Boy in the Twilight: Stories of the Hidden China*, the second one is *Cries in the Drizzle*, the third one is *The Seventh Day*, and the last one is *The April 3rd Incident: Stories*. You live and receive your education in Great Britain. It differs from many translators of Chinese contemporary works, such as Andrew Jones and Howard Goldblatt, who mainly studied and lived in America. Do you think your different educational background might distinguish your translation style and ideology from theirs?

Allan Barr (AB): It is possible, although I don't know how exactly my British upbringing has influenced my translation style and ideology. It is true that my secondary education and university education were in Britain, but I didn't start translating until after 2000. I'd already been living in America for 20 years and been in contact with American academic culture. So, I don't think there's such a distinct contrast between my approach and American translators' approach as it would be the case if I spent all my life in Britain. Although my formative years were in Britain, I wasn't a translator in those days. I'd be surprised if I could trace differences in my style to my British background exactly.

YL: Although you didn't start your translation career when you were in Britain, is it possible your life in Britain and your awareness of the differences between British and American culture influenced your choices in translation?

AB: I think my choice of words would reflect my British background to some degree. I might favor some words that are more commonly used in Britain. So, I sometimes run into issues with copy editors who are American and working in America. They will point out that a word I use is British usage instead of American usage. I grew up in Britain, but now I have lived in America for so long. Sometimes, I'm not entirely clear in my own mind whether a word I'm using is in American or British style. That's a complicated matter. But it can mean

that although my books are published in America, as I grew up in Britain, I'm conscious that British readers might read the work. I would probably try to avoid using a very American idiom that sounds odd to a British reader because a distinctively American idiom might introduce an element of American culture when the book is written by a Chinese author. Therefore, it might mean that my language is a bit more neutral. It's not such an Americanized tone as one might find with some American translators.

YL: You have accepted at least four interviews (Barr & Yang, 2019; Wang & Barr, 2021a; Wang & Barr, 2021b; Zhao & Barr, 2020) and given lectures in many Chinese universities about your translation and academic research. Do you think the questions from the interviewers and audience help you make a reflection on your translation and translation style and then reshape your translation style or change your linguistic and translation-strategy choices?

AB: I don't think the interviews or questions from listeners would make me change my style or my choices. But sometimes, they've alerted me to things that I wasn't so aware of before. I have read a study by Wang Baorong, where he looked at my translation of *Diqitian* (《第七天》) (Wang & Cui, 2019). I'd originally thought that I tended to put a high priority on fluidity and fluency in translation, which might lead me to make choices that made things easier and more accessible for the Western reader. But the conclusion of his study showed that, more often than not, I foreignized and preserved very typical Chinese expressions, and I didn't necessarily look for an English equivalent. I hadn't realized that. And so, it made me aware that it's not so clear-cut that sometimes I might choose a more reader-friendly translation, and other times I might more directly translate the Chinese expression into English. So, I find it quite interesting to read these studies of my work because it makes me conscious of things that I might not have noticed before. But I don't think that questions or comments have made me feel that I need to do something different. It's simply that I feel more knowledgeable and better informed on the basis of those observations from others.

YL: You and Goldblatt would like to contact the author when encountering unfamiliar or ambiguous expressions in the translation, while translators such as Carlos Rojas never contact the author during his translation. How did your contact with the author improve your translation?

AB: I originally was a scholar of Ming and Qing fiction. My dissertation is on Pu Songling (蒲松龄) and *Liaozhai zhiyi* (《聊斋志异》). If you study the writing from the late imperial period, you cannot communicate with the authors. You can't ask them questions, as they're no longer alive. And so, one thing that appealed to me about translating living authors is that you have the opportunity to interact with them, ask them questions, and have conversations with them. So, my approach is to reach out to the author, make contact, and then, if I have questions, ask them. It seems to me the more I know, the better equipped I'll be to do a translation. When I translated *Zaixiyuzhong huhan* (《在细雨中呼喊》), a question arises when the narrator mentions "yang" (羊), which is an issue that also comes up in the English translation of *Huozhe* (《活着》). Just what are "yang"? Are they "sheep", "lambs", or "goats"? How exactly should you translate the word? It seems to me quite helpful to know what Yu Hua has in mind when he uses it. Also, in *Zaixiyuzhong huhan*, he mentioned "xiao lu (小路)," which means some kind of "little road." So what exactly is that little road like? Is it paved? Is it just a mud track? Is it wide enough for a vehicle, or is it just a footpath? It seemed to me it would be helpful to have an image in my mind of this "xiao lu," for then we can know how to render it in English and create an image in the reader's mind. If I ask the author questions like this, I typically get

a specific answer which can help give the translation a clear focus.

For me, it's illuminating to know what Yu Hua had in mind when he used to pick a word. Otherwise, there's a danger that I might misunderstand and go off on the wrong track a little bit. I think the more I understand the author's vision of what's happening in their book, the better and stronger position I will be in to create that in English.

YL: Does it mean that you would like to reproduce or recreate the author's thoughts rather than create the literary text?

AB: Not always. I still have my own vision and understanding. I can't hope to grasp all the thoughts in the author's mind. I'm sure they have other thoughts and ideas. And it's not as though I go through the book asking the author to explain every line. But some words are ambiguous and don't give me a clear picture. Then, I might well consult the author about just what's the implication there.

YL: How do you understand Yu Hua's views on the translator's position between loyalty to the ST and the consideration of the target readers' language norms and reading expectations?

AB: I sense that Yu Hua has quite a balanced and nuanced view where, on the one hand, he would like to see the subject of the ST reflected fairly faithfully, but not so faithfully that the target text (TT) might seem awkward or unnatural when that's not true of the ST. I think he's made it clear to me and other translators that he understands that the target language has its own norms and that the translator needs to take those into account. So, I think it creates a good deal of healthy flexibility that encourages me as a translator to represent and recreate the ST as fully as possible, but at the same time not feel that I need to be enslaved by it. I do not feel inhibited from using some creative touches here and there to most effectively convey the spirit of the original.

YL: *Boy in the Twilight* was not published until 11 years later after you accomplished its translation. Yu Hua's fame during the 11 years must be helpful for its publication. How have you seen the change in Yu Hua's popularity in America since you started to translate his works?

AB: Right. So it's true that back in 2002 when I completed the translation of *Boy in the Twilight*, Yu Hua's editor in New York felt it wasn't the right time to release the book because she felt it wouldn't sell well, and maybe Yu Hua wasn't well enough known for the book to attract attention. But it eventually was published, in part because Yu Hua had published *Brothers*, which attracted a good deal of media attention, and in part because *Boy in the Twilight* came after *China in Ten Words*, which is a very successful book. So that gave Yu Hua's editor the extra confidence that *Boy in the Twilight* wouldn't just disappear without getting some notice. So yes, the increasing reputation of Yu Hua certainly helped his later books to get published and to get attention.

YL: How did you adjust *Boy in the Twilight* during the 11 years? Have you made any revisions to it?

AB: Yes, I did. In fact, I think that originally your assumption was that *Boy in the Twilight* was my first translation, and then *Cries in the Drizzle* was my second. But it's not quite that simple: I completed the manuscript for *Boy in the Twilight* before *Cries in the Drizzle*, but

Cries in the Drizzle was published first. And so what this meant was that a lot of time passed between my completion of the manuscript of *Boy in the Twilight* and its publication. I didn't just put it aside and not look at it. I went back to it occasionally and made some revisions. And so some of the differences you notice between *Cries in the Drizzle* and *Boy in the Twilight* are actually because, by the time *Boy in the Twilight* was published, I'd developed some ideas that I didn't have when doing *Cries in the Drizzle*. For example, the question you focus on in your research is the way that direct speech is introduced. I think when I was doing *Cries in the Drizzle*, I focused on other issues. And so I didn't give so much thought to whether I should translate "said" or leave it out. In contrast, *Boy in the Twilight* is a thin book and not nearly as substantial as *Cries in the Drizzle*. And the language of *Boy in the Twilight* is simple and very economical. So, it seems particularly important in *Boy in the Twilight* to not have words in English text that are redundant or unnecessary. That's why, in *Boy in the Twilight*, as you notice correctly, the ST often says, "So-and-so said," but I might omit that in my English translation because it's clear from context who is speaking. Because the text is so terse and compact, tags like, "So-and-so said" appear to be not really necessary. In the case of *Cries in the Drizzle*, whose language is richer and there's more happening, I think I really didn't give so much attention to how direct speech is introduced. *Cries in the Drizzle* follows the Chinese text more closely because I was a less experienced translator when I did that book. The revised final version of *Boy in the Twilight* that has been published and that you're working with reflects my more advanced ideas and more sophisticated sense of what needs to be in the book and what doesn't need to be there.

YL: On the website "Goodreads," *China in Ten Words*, *The Seventh Day*, and *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows: A Memoir* are the three best-selling books among all your translations. Do you think readers in the English world are fond of non-fictional works?

AB: Non-fictional works can certainly sell very well. Plenty of memoirs written by famous people are best sellers. But fictional books can sell even better. I am not saying Yu Hua's fictional books sell better, but generally, a novel can be very popular and sell many copies. I think *China in Ten Words* sells well because it's a very readable book. It contains lots of good stories, and there's humor and some very memorable scenes. It's an appealing concept to examine different aspects of the Chinese experience through the lens of ten words in the modern Chinese lexicon. That's a design that a lot of people can enjoy. The author of *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows: A Memoir*, Ai Weiwei, is a very famous artist and activist, and he too has a very interesting story to tell. And so I can see why that book is popular, too. It's got nice illustrations. He talks about his father's life as well as his own. So it's a very rich book.

YL: According to your understanding, why does *The Seventh Day* gain more popularity than Yu Hua's other fictional works?

AB: We're only talking about the ones I've translated, right? In terms of the books I translated, *Cries in the Drizzle* is perhaps not an easy book to like. It's got a lot of unattractive characters. One of the most sympathetic characters, Su Yu, dies right about 1/3 of the way through the book. The novel has been described as a collection of short stories loosely linked together, and it's a little bit hard to follow. Because events are not presented in chronological order, the novel jumps back and forth between different phases in the narrator's life. It's not the most reader-friendly narrative. *Boy in the Twilight* is a short story collection. Short stories generally tend to engage readers less than a novel, which can draw you into its world. You identify with the characters, sympathize with them, want to know what happens to them, and

can feel fully absorbed. So, novels tend to be more popular than short stories. And then *The April 3rd Incident* is also not so easy to like; the stories are a bit strange. So that leaves *The Seventh Day*, a short novel, a little over 200 pages long—a nice, comfortable length. You have a central character who's quite likable. It's definitely got more commercial appeal than the other fictional works I have translated.

YL: All your translations were published by the American press. What is the scope of your assumed target readers when you are translating each book? Have you considered the readers in the English world outside of America?

AB: I assume that readers would be intelligent people who perhaps know something about China or at least are curious about China. They've read literature and appreciate good writing. I imagine they could be living in America, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, or Canada. I don't have any concrete idea where they are. They are obviously people who are comfortable with reading English. They even may not be native English speakers.

YL: The data about the lexical density or the vocabulary richness of the ST and the TT showed the vocabulary richness in your translation would change with that of the ST and was closer to that of the general corpus of English original writing with time. The findings suggested that you are faithful to the ST in the choice of words. On the other hand, the vocabulary usage of your translation was increasingly similar to that of the English original writing rather than the translated text. What do you think of the findings about your vocabulary choices?

AB: I translated five Yu Hua's books altogether, and we're talking about only four works of fiction. So, four books aren't that much. And the differences between their lexical density might be influenced by the other variables. *Cries in the Drizzle*, for example, is set clearly in the larger half of the Cultural Revolution, and that affects its language. *Boy in the Twilight*, on the other hand, is set in the early reform era. It's not clear to me that it is my vocabulary that has changed rather than that the vocabulary of Yu Hua's work has changed.

YL: Compared with Andrew Jones' translations, the average sentence length of your translations was closer to that of the ST and the norms of Chinese original writing. Have you realized that you attempted to use some strategies or devices like semicolons or dash to reproduce the ST's style of parsing the sentences?

AB: Yes, I was aware of that, and it was a conscious decision to try to replicate or, at least, to some extent, reflect the original sentence length in the ST. I think one feature of Yu Hua's writing is that there are quite long sentences in some of his books. However, the sentences often don't have a strong grammatical structure, so there is quite often a series of things that happen, and they're linked with commas. In English, however, it seems a bit clumsy to continually use commas to connect things. So, the temptation for the translator is to break a long sentence into multiple short sentences. The drawback to that is that whereas Yu Hua's prose flows quickly, once you change commas to periods the action seems to slow down. So, I made an effort to avoid both the over-use of commas and the over-use of periods, using relatively open punctuation in order to capture the pace of Yu Hua's writing.

YL: Were you conscious of applying various devices to preserve or change the ST's sentence forms at the beginning of your translation journey?

AB: Maybe I had sharper awareness as time went on, but from quite early on, I felt it was best to avoid breaking a long sentence into multiple short sentences.

YL: In my study, your four translations of Yu Hua's works were investigated based on your creating time. The results of the average sentence length showed that you were closer to the English writing norms in your first translation (*Boy in the Twilight*); you were loyal to ST in your second one (*Cries in the Drizzle*); you became flexible in parsing the ST's sentence to keep the balance between the loyalty and readability in your later two translations. Have you realized the changing style of your way to parse the ST's long sentences?

AB: I would note that Yu Hua's style has changed, too. It would be appropriate for my style to change because he hasn't had a single style throughout his career. For example, take *Zaixiyuzhong huhan*. I think a number of people commented it's quite a Westernized style of Chinese writing that Yu Hua uses in that book. Unlike in, say, *Huanghun li de nanhai* (《黄昏里的男孩》), there tends to be a strong grammatical architecture in *Zaixiyuzhong huhan*. Yu Hua said that's perhaps because, at that time, he was reading a lot of Western fiction in Chinese translation. So I found *Cries in the Drizzle* fairly easy to translate, given its literary style and quite elegant language. I felt *Cries in the Drizzle* translated smoothly without me needing to make many adjustments in a sentence. *Boy in the Twilight*, on the other hand, has many sentences of the kind I was just describing, where a series of events are linked by commas and packed into a single sentence. In my mind, that needs some adjustment to make it palatable to English readers.

By the time I translated *The Seventh Day*, I had already accumulated experience working with Yu Hua's writing. I think I probably had built up a strategy for dealing with things that came up. Maybe things went more smoothly. Of course, the language of *The Seventh Day* is fairly simple. I wouldn't say it's a terribly difficult book to translate. So it maybe wasn't that big a challenge to translate or to make it comprehensible, explicit, and simple because, in Chinese, it's perfectly comprehensible. I think *The April 3rd Incident* was more challenging, because these are difficult stories in Chinese, with elements that are liable to confuse the reader. I wanted to retain some of those features, but at the same time, I didn't want to so perplex the book's readers that they could not make sense of what they were reading. That's why I made an effort to make the stories a bit more accessible. So I feel it wasn't so much that my style was changing, but rather the particularities of the texts that I was translating.

YL: Was it your decision to italicize or capitalize certain words or paragraphs, such as conversations or the narrator's illusions in Yu Hua's avant-garde works?

AB: Italicizing certain passages in The April 3rd Incident (particularly in the title story and Summer Typhoon) was my idea; I felt it would help make the stories easier to follow and enjoy. I had noted that William Faulkner uses italics in some of his novels to signal a character's internal musings, and I found this to be a useful device. I consulted Yu Hua on this point, and he strongly approved.

YL: While Jones only italicized the words in the speaker's directly reported speech, you italicized the words in the speaker's spoken words and the narrator's narration. Do you have different rules to choose the italicized words in the spoken words and narrator's narration?

In terms of the speaker's spoken words, I think my approach is probably similar to other translators in that if it's important that direct speech captures the emphasis in the speaker's words, then italics can come in helpful in order to underscore where the emphasis in the sentence is. So, although the ST may not use italics as it's not normal in Chinese for italics to be used that way, it's customary in English when a written text wants to emphasize where the stress is in a sentence. I think my practice is in keeping with the generally prevailing practice. In terms of the narrators' narration, there are some capitalized words in *Boy in the Twilight*. But that was the work of the book designer, Iris Weinstein, I think the idea was to give the book more visual interest. It highlights the change in time between one section and another. But that wasn't a decision I made.

YL: In *The Seventh Day*, I found you mainly italicized words in the utterances between Yang Fei and his wife. Do you think the reason is that you are impressed by the passion and regret between them?

AB: Yang Fei's wife appears mainly in the early part of the book. After that, she disappears. I see one use of italics on page 51. "Then she pinched my nose. 'Why didn't *you* pursue me?'" I italicized "you" because I think without it, the line would be less effective and clear. The italicized word shows that she was pursued by the other men. It's obvious that Yang Fei's marriage was an important event in the character's life. So, anything I can do as a translator to make that experience come alive for the reader is valuable. It would be unfortunate if this episode came out in a flat and uninteresting way. It wasn't that I personally was invested in the character's love affair and marriage, but rather that I felt it was important for the book for this relationship to come across vividly. I didn't necessarily think the relationship between Yang Fei and his wife was more important than all the other relationships, but at least in this part of the book it's the main focus of interest.

YL: For example, A: "Who are you?" they asked.
B: "Who are you?"
In the above two examples, A is a direct speech (DS) with a reporting clause "they asked," and B is a free direct speech (FDS). What are your principles for translating FDS and DS?

AB: When you first start out as a translator, you tend to follow the ST quite closely. So, if the ST says, "So-and-so said," your impulse is to include that in the translation. At the outset, when I translated *Cries in the Drizzle*, I was inclined to follow the lead of the ST by identifying the speaker with "they asked," "she said," or whatever. But over time I came to feel that it was a mistake to follow the ST too closely; if it's clear to the reader who says something, then you don't need to say so in the translation. I was more conscious of that when revising *Boy in the Twilight*. There's an example in the story *Their Son* (*Tamen de Erzi*, 《他们的儿子》), where the son takes a taxi home, and his parents are horrified by his extravagance. In the original, when the father and mother speak to each other, the narrator each time identifies who is speaking. Actually, there's no ambiguity about that, and to the English reader, these tags seem unnecessary. So I felt the translation would be stronger if I simply omitted them. My approach to repetition in that passage is similar. I think the husband is named four or five times, and the wife is named four times. But to English readers, the pronouns "he" and "she" differentiate them perfectly well—we don't need to be reminded of their names all the time. So again, it seems to me that being too faithful to the ST can be detrimental to the translation if this leads to redundancy or unnecessary repetition.

YL: Have you changed your principles of translating FDS and DS with time?

AB: Obviously, it's worked out a little bit differently from your original understanding. *Cries in the Drizzle* reflects my early priorities, where I was inclined to follow the ST in explicitly identifying the speaker each time there was direct speech. But gradually, it became apparent to me that often the translation is more powerful and direct if those reporting clauses are omitted. That's why *Boy in the Twilight* has much less of "he said" and "she said." It's more direct.

With the passage of time, I can't always explain why I made one choice or another. There was a certain element of instinct about what worked well in that particular situation. I don't think I necessarily had a consistent policy. I looked at things on a case-by-case basis.

I haven't really thought very much about my strategy in the later two translations. But I'm certainly conscious of the differences between *Cries in the Drizzle* and *Boy in the Twilight*. As I explained, *Cries in the Drizzle* was my first published translation. Although I had completed a first draft of *Boy in the Twilight* some years earlier, because of the long delay before the book's publication I had more time to think about *Boy in the Twilight* and more time to revise and polish the translation. *Cries in the Drizzle* reflects my relative lack of experience with translation. In comparison, *Boy in the Twilight* shows my confidence to intervene more firmly, because I had already translated three or four books by the time it was published.

YL: You actively changed the position of the reporting clause, while Jones reserved over 98% of the ST position of the reporting clause. As authors always place the reporting clause before the utterance in the original Chinese writing, you switched their position to place them after the reported speech, following the norm of English writing. What is your purpose for altering the position of the ST's reporting clause?

AB: As you say, the norm of English writing is to have the reporting clause after, so I'm following the English convention. It wasn't clear to me that there was an advantage for the reader to have the reporting clauses come first. Although that's the norm in Yu Hua's texts, I didn't see that the English reader benefited from it. If you have the speech first, the speech more quickly captures the readers' attention. Then the reporting clause just clarifies who says it, in case there is any doubt. Andrew Jones was a translator of *Xu Sanguan maixuejie* (《许三观卖血记》). We need to take into account the particularities of each book because they're not all the same. It seems to be a characteristic of *Xu Sanguan maixuejie* that there's a lot of direct speech. It's almost as though it's a drama where the characters are playing different roles. The advantage of maintaining the subjects and the ST position of the reporting clause is that it mimics the original, like in a script of a play, where you identify the speaker before they say their piece. Some chapters in *Xu Sanguan maixuejie* consist almost entirely of dialogue. That may be why Jones followed the source text so closely. But the books that I translated are organized differently.

YL: Do you think the position of the reporting clause can influence the stylistic effects of the text and readers' reading experience?

AB: It's hard to quantify their influence. I'm a bit doubtful whether this is a really important issue. Does the translation benefit from preserving the position of the reporting clause that one finds in the source text? You could argue that because it is less familiar to the English reader,

it might make more impression. It might be positive. But, on the other hand, readers might find it annoying or strange in a not such a good way. You would have to ask readers about that. I cannot read their minds. I don't know what they think about it. I know only what seems best to me.

YL: Do you have another plan for your next translation?

AB: I'm currently translating excerpts from *Xu Xiake Youji* (《徐霞客游记》), the travel diaries of a late Ming explorer and traveler. It's a collaborative project, with several other scholars involved. I'm going to China next week, and may well develop plans for new translation projects while I'm there. We'll see.

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The Crisis of Modernity: Cioran – International Colloquium

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The latest International E.M. Cioran Colloquium, which takes place every two years in various cities around the world, was hosted on 24–25 October 2023 by the Complutense University in Madrid under the patronage of the Romanian Language Institute, The Romanian Cultural Institute and the Romanian Embassy in Spain. Forty international academics and Cioran experts from the US (Arizona State University), South America, Europe and Japan lectured and debated topics related to "The Crisis of Modernity" as reflected in some of Emil Cioran's 40 books, translated into all major languages. I spoke with writer and Professor Felix Nicolau who teaches Romanian language and literature at Complutense University and who participated at the colloquium.

Felix Nicolau is a Romanian philologist, lecturer in Romanian culture at Complutense University of Madrid and professor at the Technical University of Construction of Bucharest, Department of Foreign Languages and Communication. He is a lecturer at the Romanian Language Institute in Bucharest and is affiliated to the Doctoral School of the University "1 Decembrie 1918" in Alba Iulia, Romania. He is editor of the *Swedish Journal of Romanian Studies* at the University of Lund, Sweden, where he taught for 4 years, editor of Madrid-based journal *Littera Nova*, and of Dublin-based journal *Itaca*.

He holds a PhD in Literary Studies from the University of Bucharest with a thesis on Romanticism in the creation of Mihai Eminescu. His books include *The Nuclear History of Culture. Hermeneutic Quanta*; *Ingen fara på taket/ Totul e sub control. Lär dig rumänska/ Învaţã limba românã*; *You Are not Alone. Culture and Civilization*, *Morpheus: from Text to Images. Inter-semiotic Translation*; *Communication and creativity. Interpreting contemporary text*; *Take the Floor. Professional Communication Theoretically Contextualized*; *Cultural Communication: Approaches to Modernity and Postmodernity*; *The Inhuman Aesthetics. From Postmodernism to Facebook*; *Eminescu's Code*; *Anti-canonics; Homo imprudens.*

As a writer, Felix Nicolau is a member of the Romanian Writers' Union and contributes literary criticism and history to numerous literary magazines. He has published several books of poetry and two novels: *Kamceatka.Time Is Honey,* At the Hands of Women*, Tender and Cool*, *Bach, Manele and Kostel*, The Conquest of Laughter, *The Invention Fair.*

George Stanica (GS): The essay you presented was about climate, illness and mysticism or quasi-mysticism in some works by Cioran which was partially the topic of Christian Santacroce, one of Cioran's translators and Paolo Borges of the University of Lisbon. What is your understanding of mysticism in Cioran?

Felix Nicolau (FN): In my opinion, Cioran is a good connoisseur of mystical writings and mystical concepts. This can be seen in many of his books, particularly in *Tears and Saints*. As a master of paradox, Cioran is also anti-mystical in the sense that he sees no hope in the transcendent, the ardor of prayer or asceticism simply irritates him, which makes him resemble a damned nineteenth century Romantic hero. However, it is an irritation born out of frustration; he wishes he could have been capable of such ardor, such devotion and self-denial. His theological conception being a Gnostic one at its core – the Demiurge is fundamentally evil – it follows that mystics are misguided overachievers. So Cioran is a mystic *à rebours*. I agree

with Patrice Bollon who considered him a dandy (Vălcan 2018: 13), in the profound sense, not the sartorial one. This also implies some kind of play-acting, i.e. Cioran in real life was not an uptight person, as the tone and drift of some of his works may suggest. Moreover, his exile and character condemned him to marginality and asymmetry (*Ibidem*: 14), and thus to a certain kind of freedom.

GS: What was the view expressed by Christian Santacroce on Cioran's mysticism?

FN: Santacroce translated Cioran's book *Tears and Saints* (1937*)* into Spanish, a zenith of youthful intensity (Vălcan 2018: 246), which was followed by a spiritual decline that Cioran then lamented all his life. At the same time, this book is his most lyrical, so the essayist's inverted mysticism is fuelled by lyricism. In his paper, Santacroce highlighted the religious background of Cioran´s existentialism.

GS: Prof Mattia Luigi Pozzi of Italy spoke about the irrational side of the books written by Cioran as a reader of Hegel. That sounds quite intriguing as Hegel was a systematic philosopher of reason, exemplified by his "Phenomenology of Spirit."

FN: Indeed, Pozzi calls Cioran a heretic (Mattia Luigi Pozzi 2011: 5). In essence, Cioran takes advantage of the Hegelian triadic metaphysical system in which evil and non-existence are co-opted in contradiction to classical metaphysics based on dualist-axiological oppositions (Pozzi 2008: 212). Cioran also takes advantage of Nietzsche's contribution to this dismantling of the perfectly structured and almost mechanical idealism expounded by Hegel. Especially since it has been hypothesized that Cioran might be seen as the follower or even the emulator of the asystematic Nietzsche, which is only valid at the instrumental level. Nietzsche creatively uses contradiction as *dynamis*. Moreover, Cioran placed Bossuet, Hegel, Marx, apostles of logic and meaning, in the same paradigm. He says that this kind of pure-and-hard rationalism is providential-like in nature and thus makes the smooth transition from theology and metaphysics to historical materialism (*Exercises d'admiration*). Cioran´s idiosyncrasy after the early quasi-Hegelian books, dreaming of the militarism of the Spirit on horseback, of hierarchy, of system and of academic and political rationalism, also feeds on Hegelian energetism and dynamism. Cioran's mature and old-age writings operate under the same demolishing but invigorating Hegelian antithesis; except that the optimistic classicist synthesis will never emerge in the thinker twinned with Pascal, Schopenhauer, Shestov, Rozanov and the morphic Pessoa, as José Thomaz Brun presumes (Vălcan 2018: 30)

GS: You spoke about the influence of climate on Cioran's life, Prof Monica Garoiu and Prof Ciprian Vălcan spoke about Cioran's love for Spain. Could you sum up your views and the other views expressed at this colloquium on Cioran's fascination with Spanish culture and climate?

FN: A lesser-known of Cioran's works is the *Talamanca Notebook* in which the thinker laments the declining quality of Spanish melancholy. He probably has in mind the galloping modernisation of this country. The contemporary Spaniard, although it may not be appropriate to generalise, seems to me neither melancholic nor mystical. Cioran wrote inspired by reading and wishful thinking. In Ibiza he behaves like a vampire: he only goes out at dusk, the sun makes him sick, and he comes back as white as when he left the house. And yet Spain and its representative culture fascinate him. He may have also slipped allusions into his travel accounts: necessarily he was supposed to appear different, disconnected, feigning disability, in

reality cultivating his aristocratic morbidity. So, it was Spanish culture that fascinated Cioran rather than the climate of the country; at least the climate of the middle and Southern areas. Of course, the Spanish-speaking lecturers were happy to point out Cioran's relationship with Spain (and Latin America). Santacroce recounted a trip he and Cioran had taken through Spain, a Spain that was still ancient, where to the essayist's mind everything seemed far away and long ago.

GS: Apathy, laziness and the nonsense allowing us to live in the world, topics debated by prof Lopeztello and philosopher Carlos Javier Gonzales Serrano. How could we sum up their views on Cioran's Wallachian nothingness as presented by the two speakers?

FN: Lopeztello was impressed by Cioran's style and seemed to admire Cioran's courage in dispelling the neutrality claims of academic philosophy. For Cioran, consciousness is the ultimate source of suffering, hence his interest in lucidity and death. These topics would bring Cioran closer to the Pre-Socratics. When confronting these unbearable evils, he uses the weapon of irony, the only one that could combat man's innate perversity. But what convinces Lopeztello to study Cioran's work is its capacity to reflect a common, non-elitist reason, uniquely capable of revealing the monstrosity of history.

For Carlos Javier Gonzales Serrano, Cioran appears to manifest mystical-religious tendencies, but without metaphysical impetus. This would translate into a lack of philosophical system, which for a system philosopher can mean laziness. Cioran's pessimism has a metaphysical basis which is paradoxically centred on the everyday and on the Camus-like absurd. In Serrano's view, the submission to chance in Cioran's books appears to be converted into a radical humanism: suffering must be contained in order not to turn the world into a vale of tears; in fact, a stoic face of the thinker who lived detached from material affluence.
His "agony-method", i.e. the renunciation of any hope that would sustain the Sisyphean effort imagined by Camus, implies total scepticism. Here is a similarity and a difference to Hemingway, for whom the struggle must be waged even beyond the hope of success, although there are stories by Hemingway in which fatalism drives the protagonists to inaction and surrender. Cioran's agonistic method leads neither to inaction nor to false hopes, but to a sometimes sarcastic, sometimes detached reflection on history and the everyday.

GS: Prof Juan M Marin of Jaume I University in Spain spoke at this conference about the success and failure of Cioran's struggle with French and his attempt to become one of the great masters of the French Language. Is there any doubt that Emile Cioran achieved his aim?

FN: Not only did he succeed in French, but Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, translator of two of Cioran's books into English, says that she has identified the rewriting of important portions of his Romanian texts into French, so that she decrees that his entire French oeuvre is "a translation-cum-rewriting of his Romanian oeuvre". Thus, T*ears and Saints* was twice rewritten and then tacitly integrated into his first book published in France, *Précis de décomposition*. Her hypothesis is that Cioran resorted to self-translation and along with it, rewriting.

According to Cioran's account, after eight years of relocation to France, while translating Mallarmé into Romanian, he realized he had to start writing in French. This transfer to French meant a linguistic *askesis* or, as he declared, "putting on a straight jacket". So, the passionate

rationalist managed to happily combine the elegant rigidity of French with the brash flexibility of Romanian.

GS: Prof Alexandra Gruzinska of Arizona State University presented her reflections on Cioran's "*élan vers le pire*". Did she share Manuel Gregorio Gonzales's interpretation of Cioran's view on history?

FN: In addition to the *l'élan vers le pire / the drive to the worst*, Cioran has an Excel table view of history. Thus, he mixes civilisation with culture and considers that there are major and minor cultures. The minor ones are so mainly by their own fault and in order to escape the curse, they have to abolish their internal law so as to enjoy a flourishing development like the major ones. Minor forms of historical life are generators of inferiority complexes. Major cultures would be animated by a history instinct, very close to the idea of vital space, *Lebensraum*, while minor cultures would degenerate if left to evolve organically. So, there would be a cultural determinism similar in kind to the Calvinist one, a *numerus clausus.*

Prof Gruzinska presented the case of Witold Gombrowicz, who also believed that small cultures could become big through certain processes. As a matter of fact, Gombrowicz continued to write in Polish all his life, arguing that Western cultures do not have a monopoly on greatness. So, Gombrowicz would nurture a superiority complex that would manifest itself in a camouflaged form in Cioran. Prof Gruzinska believes that Cioran's initial historical pessimism, especially about the future of Europe, was unjustified. Today, with the economic and political crisis, she is no longer so sure that Cioran was wrong.

GS: The Spanish writer Pablo Javier Perez Lopez presented the paper, LA DESOLACIÓN COMO ETICA. Desolation means, in all Latin-based languages, loneliness, emptiness, forsakenness, bleakness, sadness and melancholy. Perez Lopez described Cioran's desolation as his ethics; could you give us a summary of his view?

FN: He finds a similarity between the Romanian poet Eminescu's and Cioran's visions, namely that the Romanian people would be afflicted by sadness, skepticism, pessimism and fatalism, that Romanians are a melancholic people. The essence of this ontology would be the word "dor", considered by Cioran as the Romanian particularization of nostalgia. The popular songs called "doine" are also witnesses of this pessimism and defeatism. Hence the lack of tragic courage and the feeling of permanent exile that would haunt the Romanian soul. On the other hand, Romanians suffer from a soulful excess that gives it a tragic sense of existence that is Oriental in nature, but also peripherally European, as in the Spanish and Portuguese cases. Of course, all these considerations are philosophical–anthropological constructs without much connection with the reality on the field.

As to *desolación como etica/ desolation as ethics,* It should not be forgotten that Cioran was a man of contrasts. He had condemned Romania for its technological and institutional backwardness, but after years in Paris he felt nostalgic for the Romanian and Spanish villages, as well as for his contact with simple people. Pablo Javier sees him not so much as purely cynic, but as a Socratic cynic, someone who lives on the margins in order to maintain authentic relationships. Consequently, he identifies a denying humanism, an ethic of a Romantic devoid of Romanticism, an ethic that is built through temperament and acceptance of otherness. Clearly this would be an ethic of the old Cioran, and not of the young Cioran, an abysmal, perhaps even Adamic, morality in a vacuum.

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Alice HEATHWOOD, an AALITRA member, is a French to English translator and interpreter specializing in literature, the arts and culture. She studied French and Journalism at the University of Queensland and obtained a Double Masters in Translation and Interpreting from Monash University and University Jean Moulin Lyon III. Her published translations include the poetry collection "Man is a restless night" by Léa Abaroa and Frédéric Débomy's graphic novel "Burma: the final battle". An extract of her translation of Jean-François Beauchemin's Le jour des corneilles appeared in the journal *Asymptote*. She has attended various professional development workshops, including the British Centre for Literary Translation's summer school, the French literary translation association's ViceVersa workshop and University of Bristol's Bristol Translates program. In 2024, she won the AALITRA translation awards' first prize for prose fiction (French into English).

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Hélène JACCOMARD's career spans almost thirty years of research and teaching at the University of Western Australia, where she also gained her PhD in the early 90s. In recent years, alongside her affiliation and active contribution to French studies, she has branched out into Translation Studies, teaching and publishing in the field, and being active in significant professional organisations. She has published five books of literary criticism, close to 60 refereed articles and two translations. Since 2008 she has been the Managing editor of the French studies journal *Essays in French Literature and Culture*, established more than 60 years ago at the University of Western Australia. Since 2024, she has taken the role of co-editor of T*he AALITRA Review*. She is a member of the Advisory board of the Australian Journal of French Studies, Monash University.

Yajie LI, whose research interests include corpus-based translation and literary translation, holds a doctoral degree in translation studies. In her study, she focused on Barr's consistent and evolving stylistic features, constructing a parallel and comparable corpus comprising four of Barr's translations and two of Andrew Jones' translations of Yu Hua's fictional works. Based on her research findings, she conducted an interview with Barr to explore his awareness of linguistic nuances, strategic translation choices, and core translation philosophy.

Annette MITCHELL is currently a PhD student at the University of Newcastle where she is undertaking a translation and exegesis of Chantal Danjou's work *L'Ombre et le ciel : Le Ciel et l'ombre*. She holds an Honours degree in Italian and Master's degrees in French Studies, Sociology, and Translation, and has worked as an academic in the 1990s and early 2000s at several universities in NSW. Her work background includes research positions at Macquarie University and the University of Western Sydney.

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