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Dong Yang
University of Georgia
ORCID 0000-0001-5332-7291

The Art of Double-Betrayal, or What Comparatists Can Learn from Translators

At stake is the question: how can one approach another self-affirming culture or *Bildung*, similar or radically different, without imposing judgements based largely on pre-established and ethnocentric hierarchies of values? Where can one establish an ethical foundation such that peaceful dialogue and mutual understanding do not metamorphose into a recurrence of cultural hegemony and colonial cultural hybridity? As comparatists who refuse to devote ourselves exclusively to national or local cultures but aim to construct a map of cultural interactions with a broader scope, the dual task of both opening the possibilities of cultural interaction and at the same time keeping imperial and national powers from engaging in destruction seems timely. To this end, it is necessary for comparatists to learn a lesson from translators, whose ultimate task resides chiefly in mirroring the primary text and establishing relations with the other without assigning imperialistic or national signatures, or as Goethe (1749–1832) guides us, "to make the translation identical to the original so that it can stand not just *instead of* the other but actually *in its place*" (Bernofsky: 146). During the reciprocal transition between languages, the translators themselves must retain an awareness of the gains and losses and function as transparent catalysts – becoming-imperceptible in their own presence in the translation – and

thereby help carry the content of one culture to the other while minimizing the loss of nuances in the process.

In light of the necessity of such an ethics of translation as a key to intercultural communications, this paper seeks to provide an ontological account of language that grounds the translation process and that can consequentially serve as a practical standard for comparatists, through inquiries into the seminal theoretical works of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Antoine Berman (1942–1991), and Emily Apter (1954–). I argue that to prevent translation from becoming an explorative apparatus of hegemonic power that leads to cultural appropriation and domination, translators need to continuously stay aware of the fundamental and pre-originary care one innately bears towards the other. The translation activity, henceforth, is essentially dualistic in that an ethical evaluation perpetually parallels and examines the intensification and direction of the fluidity of power. In addition, this essay aims to cultivate a new understanding of the Italian adage "translator, traitor": instead of casting a negative light on the occupation of translator, one might treat the inevitable "treachery" involved in the translating practice as an indication of the non-identical nature of the ethics of translation. Hence, I propose that the ethics of translation – as that of comparative literature as a discipline – is constitutive of a non-national, non-identity, and non-subjective set of ethical principles that sustains and balances the powers coming from the host regions of related languages, while acknowledging the naturally irreconcilable and chronologically dynamic tensions in between. The very technicalities of the translating practice consist not only of the mechanical endeavor of pairing up words of various linguistic origins, but indeed an art of creating relations for a communicative understanding and experience of the foreign other, and simultaneously presenting a self-effaced invisibility of committed identity through a gesture of double-betrayal and resignation.

Culture, world, and the task of comparatists

Of all the troubles and coercions that unequal power generates in multiple dimensions of human society, language seems to be most problematic, as the generative condition for any creation and event pertinent to the faculty of

imagination, in line with Derrida's valorous and proper identification of the productive functioning of language as the generative ground of both literary and concrete events: "Who would contest that without languages, acts and events of language, no institution, no literature, no translation could have the least chance of appearing or of even being imagined?" (Derrida, 2008: 24) The very obstacle that comes unavoidably with the disseminating fashion of the life of language, however, lies primarily – if not entirely – in the impossibility of constructing an ideal type of language or writing that bears no traces of the writer's distinct signature or style inherited from his or her multiple cultural, historical, and psychological backgrounds. As Roland Barthes (1915–1980) aptly observes in his philosophical debut on language, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), "it is impossible to write without labelling oneself" (Barthes: 1). Language, for Barthes, is understood as a diagram that composes a horizontal dimension of a generative field of expression; as well as a vertical dimension that necessarily imposes or marks a personal style on the order of words. As he puts it,

> A language is therefore a horizon, and style a vertical dimension, which together map out for the writer a Nature, since he does not choose either. The language functions negatively as the initial limit of the possible, style is a Necessity which binds the writer's humour to his form of expression.
>
> (Barthes: 13)

Barthes situates his reflections on the essence of language within the limit of individual writers, and thus he may have omitted the perilous consequences that such personal "labels" can bring forth when linguistic practices become a collective activity, namely, the potentiality of constructing a powerful order of discourse by an assemblage of individuals to suppress and subjugate others. Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and Félix Guattari (1930–1992) remind us, in their collaborative work *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), of the structural nature of language and the enforcement of social order and obedience through the emphases on the dogmatic rules of language. They remark, "The elementary unit of language – the statement – is the order-word […] A rule of grammar is a power marker before it is a syntactical marker" (Deleuze, Guattari: 76). Apart from communicating and expressing, therefore, language, at the same time, executes a political or social function of practicing power and setting in motion the fluidity of power in the hierarchy. Thus, given the inclination and

possibility of language to fall prey of the political regime, Deleuze and Guattari argue that an ongoing recurrence within the language in the spirit of Nietzsche is necessary in order to create a "line of flight" that deterritorialize the molar and static force that attempts constantly to formulate power hierarchies. Ronald Bogue (1948–) aptly distills and synthesizes the diagnoses and therapeutics of language in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical reflections: "The line of flight ultimately is the trajectory of a process of becoming-other, the course of a line that always 'passes between'. The line of flight is both inside and outside language, and its presence is manifest in a constant tendency of language to move beyond itself" (Bogue: 6).

Such a self-reflective and self-regenerative model of language is concerned not only within certain particular cultural spheres but also the planetary conception of the global, with the latter being only more in need of consideration and theorization. In *Remapping Knowledge: Intercultural Studies for a Global Age* (2006), Mihai Spariosu (1944–) postulates a theory of the "local-global" – after decades of inquiries and witness of the transformation and turbulences in the process of globalization – to designate the status of cultural community in the age of globalization as a co-presence of both local and global elements, and emphasizes the necessity of establishing "a transdisciplinary field of intercultural studies" (Spariosu: 34) to surpass the limitations cast by conventional cultural models. This symbiotic cultural theory entails an inevitable and perennial tension between a self-sufficient and exclusive localism and an expanding and encompassing globalism; and during such a continuous conflict, culture emerges as a product. Spariosu warns against the will to the forceful implementation of doctrines for the purpose of forging a unitary globality, a dangerous idea he terms as "globalitarianism" (Spariosu: viii); as well as the radical resistance from the self-enclosed ideology of the local, typically presented in the form of terrorism. The new dynamism of global intercultural contact – envisioned by Spariosu with the lucid recognition of the emergence of technology and information science – should orient itself principally toward fostering the well-being of "any future human community" (Spariosu: ix) and interdependence through nonviolent dialogues. The advancement of Quantum Relations in theoretical physics – Spariosu argues – marshals a cluster of viable tools for the study of

global cultural interactions, considering its adherence to such fundamental notions as alterity and adversity.

Such a theory of cultural globalization finds its foundation in Heidegger's (1889–1976) ontology, which – through an analysis of the thingy work of art as a microcosmic exemplar – highlights the essential strife between the world, "the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people", and the earth that "is self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing" (Heidegger: 47). The holistic notion of Being (*Sein*) necessarily, for Heidegger, assumes instability and conflicts as the grounds for its very sustainability, "World and earth are always intrinsically and essentially in conflict, belligerent by nature" (Heidegger: 53–54). The world parallels the notion of the local in cultural studies, though its openness belongs only to the historical community; whereas the earth corresponds to the universal tendency of cultural hegemony to appropriate the particular and the local. What is important in the opposing conflict between the open and concealment for Heidegger, is that the conflict serves as the source of truth, which "happens only by establishing itself in the conflict and sphere opened up by truth itself" (Heidegger: 59) and in turn addresses the significance of the studies of cultural interactions between the various locals on a global scale. However, even though Heidegger refrains from adding any negative connotations to the nature of conflict between the earth and the world, his belief in the process of obtaining Truth by opening up the other that naturally folds and encloses itself invites us to register the intensity of power involved and whether certain ethical limitations should be presumed, lest it give rise to any possible destruction or appropriation. The new paradigm of transdisciplinary intercultural studies situates the perpetual local-global conversations within the process of hylomorphic flow, formulated in the collaborative work of Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), in which they postulate the composition of the world in a schizophrenic fashion as an infinite number of desiring machines that constantly produce a unificatory and imperceptible flow of both material and conceptual elements, without any supposition of beginning and ending.[1]

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[1] For a genealogical and philosophical analysis of the concept of flow, see Yang, Dong. *Action and Relation: The Spinozian and Humean Foundations of Deleuze and Guattari's Theory of Affect*. MA Thesis. Athens: The University of Georgia, 2017.

The patterns of a cultural or ontological model of intercultural communication receive their echoes in the discipline of comparative literature studies. In other words, as a principle held by contemporary cultural studies and philosophy with a continental orientation, comparative literature engages the unavoidable tendency of globalization on both a theoretical and concrete path. Comparatists, ever since the founding of their discipline – what Claudio Guillén (1924–2007) terms as "the French Hour" – have functioned primarily as observers of these tensions and conflicts, inquiring into the literary influences and transmissions between national and cultural spheres, without a pre-determined posture of "cultural nationalism" and "narcissistic instincts" (Guillén: 4). Coincidentally and curiously, the thriving of the discipline depends on the emergence of modern national literatures that poses a challenge for the static foundation of the canon; hence Guillén concludes, "We then find ourselves before a fruitful historical paradox: the rise of nationalism will lay the foundation for a new internationalism" (Guillén: 27). The task of comparatists to juggle between the two cultural and political tendencies subsequently encounters a difficulty that is evident even in Guillén's rendering of the discipline as "supranational", as a discipline whose "[…] point of departure is not found in national literatures, nor in the interrelationships between them […]" (Guillén: 3), but rather, as suggested in Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur*, from the vantage of the *literati's* awareness of the cosmopolitan co-existence of all contemporary literatures. The occupation of comparatists needs constant self-reflection; otherwise the "abuse of confidence" will eventually return in disguise – as, for example, in Eric Hayot's (1972–) analysis of the "Eurochronology" of modernism, which "does not have to be the result of any explicit eurocentrism" (Hayot: 6). Comparison here provides subtle excuses for ethics to unbind itself and don new rhetorical masks for arbitrary literary judgements. Comparatists, however, by no means stand alone on the moral front: faithful translators seem necessarily to deal with the conflicts of local-global interactions by the nature of their mission, and they have developed a *techné* of double-betrayal from which comparatists can learn.

Translation in the age of untranslatability

The urgency to incorporating a *techné* of double-betrayal – particularly for comparative studies in its most general sense, and the practitioners whose scope of work encompasses more than one language zones – is becoming more intense in the age of untranslability, a field established by such translation theorists as Barbara Cassin (1947–), Emily Apter (1954–), and Jacques Lezra (1960–), who – leaning toward the deconstructionist endeavor of Derrida and de Man (1919–1983) – postulate the impasses of untranslatable words as a new direction for comparative literature. Published first in French, the philologist and philosopher Barbara Cassin's *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (2004) gathers some fine essays and analyses from theorists around the world and provides a map of untranslable terms in philosophy that may potentially jeopardize the universality and applicability of any philosophical attempt. Untranslatability, originally conceived in Diderot (1713–1784) and D'Alembert's (1717–1783) *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751–1766) as the noumenal linguistic restrictions cast upon the human understanding with theological grounding (Apter: 119–120), receives an expanded explication in Cassin's *Vocabulaire* after more than two centuries, as linguistic *aporias* coming from "the logic of grammar, the limits of reference, the outer reach of thinkability or the difference between meaningful and meaningless propositions" (Apter: 11). The untranslatable turn in philosophy also generates resonances and contemplations on the previous models adopted in the study of comparative literature. Apter foresees such a possible influence and sketches an appendix to Cassin's groundbreaking work as well as a manifesto for reviving the discipline of comparative literature, in *Against World literature: on the Politics of Untranslatablity* (2012). Apter outlines the new challenge comparatists face after the publication of *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* in her introduction. Though Apter lauds the efforts of scholars of World Literature for the "deprovicialization of the canon and the way in which, at its best, it draws on transition to deliver surprising cognitive landscapes" (Apter: 2), the monolingualization of literatures coming from various linguistic origins, Apter reminds us, runs the risk of the falsehood of believing in two radicalized poles of either "cultural equivalence and substitutability" among all

cultures and nations or "the celebration of nationally and ethnically branded 'differences' that have been niche-marketed as commercialized 'identities'" (Apter: 3). Regarding the spirit of World Literature as "the entrepreneurial, bulimic drive to anthologize and curricularize the world's cultural resources" (Apter: 3), Apter maintains that the translatability assumption imbedded in the model of World Literature may "fall prey inevitably to the tendency to zoom over the speed bumps of untranslatability in the rush to cover ground" (Apter: 3). In light of this imminent *aporia* between certain literary scholars' ambition to establish a universal field of World Literature and the unsurpassable and unignorable untranslablity of concepts and untransferability of meanings, Apter seeks to directly face the problem itself and "activate untranslatability as a theoretical fulcrum of comparative literature with bearing on approaches to world literatures, literary world-systems and literary history, the politics of periodization, the translation of philosophy and theory […] as well as ethical, cosmological and theological dimensions of worldliness" (Apter: 3). What concerns Apter, therefore, is not only the methodologies that comparatists utilize to foster understandings between cultures; a co-existing ethical quest is also present and, as she criticizes, largely ignored by other scholars dealing with related subjects: "they fail to answer fully the challenge of making comparative literature geopolitically case-sensitive and site-specific in ways that avoid reproducing neo-imperialist cartographies" (Apter: 42). Thus, Apter suggests that we bypass the World Literature model and replace it with a dualistic and dynamic foundation of comparative literature with respect to translation studies, and as she presents the hypothesis "translation and untranslatability are constitutive of world forms of literature" (Apter: 16).

One may pause, while reflecting on Apter's critique of World Literature, to consider the causes of such a tendency of monolingualism and expansionism in the acts of attending to other culture and literature within the discipline of comparative literature. The initial ethical endeavor to care for and balance the disparity of power, in American academia, has been fostered in two major ideological and theoretical areas – multiculturalism and post-colonialism – where, supposedly, counter-forces to the imperial and dominant power from the past centuries have been generated. Such wishful thinking, however, has perhaps led proponents of these tendencies astray and thus has become yet

another instance of the situation they aim to tackle. Looking at the early twentieth century, one may identify the lineage of metamorphosis of the two principles into transnational studies, ethnic studies, etc. What coexists alongside this academic development is the phenomenon of academic starship and the affirmative territorialization of powerful discourses on the part of leading figures in the fields. Dorothy Figueira (1955–), in *Otherwise Occupied* (2008), incisively exposes such movements in the humanities, as well as the ingenuity of American monolinguialism in the construction of multicultural studies, and offers a thorough critique of the betrayed academic stars who appear to lead others the wrong direction. For Figueira, the penetration of power into universities and the politicalization of education have caused fundamental problems concerning the true beneficiaries of multiculturalism as well as the sincerity and authenticity of postcolonialism, resulting in a clownish showmanship, such that "The critic must self-fashion him- or her-self through imaginary marginalization resulting in the wide-ranging identification of a privileged class of academics with the marginalized Other" (Figueira: 36). The primary symptom Figueira diagnoses lies in the cultivation of a type of commodity fetishism in English departments, which tends to express sympathies and the care for the "exotic" other only through writings in the English language, a renewed and more finely disguised version of cultural hegemony as an aftermath of political strategies, "They not only offered English departments a politically correct identity but also provided additional market fields critical knowledge" (Figueira: 57). Such a rather well-adjusted and playful position of academics in a becoming-monolinguistic society is termed by Figueira the "brahminization of theory" (Figueira: 36), and it has proved a failure in addressing the imbalance of cultural disparity by ignoring the fundamental problem of the language.

The crisis in comparative literature caused by monoligualism, as Apter and Figueira have shown, thus demands a revitalization of the concept of the discipline, not as an attempt to construct territories of translated texts in the form of any particular language with the translatability assumption adopted in the model of World Literature, but as an endeavor to construct time-sensitive versions of world cartography that dynamically and constantly record and engage the alterations of the meanings of words. Such a vital demand for the proliferation, development and survival of diverse literatures engenders natural

symbiotic relations between comparative literature and translation studies. Endorsing and inspired by Barbara Cassin's theory of the untranslatables, Apter articulates a definition of comparative literature that is ever-evolving and in the process of changing: "Cassin's *Vocabulaire* […] gives rise to an idea of comparative literature as a discipline that derives its raison d'être from the constant updating and revision of vocabularies of cultural references; the better to serve as a kind of self-translating machine of the humanities" (Apter: 39). The processive model of comparative literature entails Apter's cautious awareness of the potential of cultural appropriation and intervention – determined and framed by the very nature of the discipline – that comparatists may initiate in the age of globalization, since comparative literature "is no more beset than other humanities fields by the constraints imposed by its historic subject fields (genres, periodizing frames, theoretical paradigms)" (Apter: 42), which have endowed comparatists with the power of judging and categorizing alien literature and culture, with certain presumed criteria. Apter reminds us of the "disciplinary paradox", coined by Nirvana Tanoukhi, that comparative literature as a discipline focusing primarily on national traditions, "depends for its existence on the entrenchment of nation-based geography" (Apter: 42). The clusters of national, cultural, and linguistic elements may lead to the construction of a value hierarchy that imposes subjective and unethical judgements on the content under analysis. After delineating the potential ethical crisis in comparative literature, Apter suggests that comparatists embrace and learn from translators, in particular their ways of treating the untranslatable concepts and traditions, which Apter calls a "translational model of Comparative Literature" to avoid any direct contact with the political sphere, since "their plurilingual composition embodies histories of language travel that do not necessarily reproduce imperial trajectories" (Apter: 42). Apter accurately underlines the interrelation between comparative literature and translation studies, and at the same time reminds us of the necessity of formulating an ethics of comparison that prevents interferences from any pre-established power structure. But what is such an ethics? What are the ethical principles that are mutually sharable between translators and comparatists? A detour to Derrida's theory of translation and its affiliation with comparative literature may suggest an outline for such an ethics.

Derrida and the ethics of translation

Who would have thought that the then unknown presenter Jacques Derrida at the 1966 conference under the theme "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" hosted by Johns Hopkins University could so profoundly influence the modes of thought in countless humanities and social sciences disciplines and engender a fever of French Theory that has lasted to the present? Though trained in philosophy, Derrida has had an in the field of literary studies that is certainly not subsidiary and trivial. As Anne Tomiche (?–) summarizes, Derrida's legacy for comparative literature consists of three kinds: "the way he conceives of the notion of 'literature' […] the way he problematizes the relation between 'literature and philosophy' […] his work on the question of translation" (Tomiche: 339). Derrida became particularly interested in the philosophical aspects of translation and the relationship between translation and the discipline of comparative literature around 1979–1980, with a lecture and roundtables conducted at the University of Montréal and the subsequent publication of *The Ear of The Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation* (1982); and a seminar hosted at Yale Comparative Literature Department at the invitation of Paul de Man, which later appeared as an article titled "Who or What Is Compared? The Concept of Comparative Literature and the Theoretical Problems of Translation" in *Discourse* (2008) – thanks to the archival effort of Derridian scholar Dragan Kujundžić (1959–).[2] The first text – through a reading of Nietzsche's (1844–1900) autobiography *Ecce Homo* (1888) – functions as an apology for Nietzsche's posthumous negative influence by arguing that the dissemination of the autobiography depends not on the author's own signature but the ear of the other who cosigns with differences in hearing or translating the original text. In Nietzsche's reflexive account of his life, one's birth immediately involves a "riddle" – two co-existing elements – the death of the father and the life of the mother: "I am, to express it in the form of a riddle, already dead as my father, while as my mother, I am still living and becoming old" (Derrida, 1985: 15).

[2] As he writes in the introduction to the volume of *Discourse*, Dragan Kujundžić discovered the typewritten manuscript between 2002 and 2003, and then organized a series of events in the form of a conference and journal as a gesture to pay Derrida respect. See Kujundžić, 2008: 8.

The death of Nietzsche's father and the life of his mother at the moment he is born, together, help foster the sense of self in Nietzsche's course of life, which, in turn, leads to Derrida's association of Nietzsche's description of his life with the process in which one obtains an identity and becomes oneself. Such a process is represented through the development of the name: "There, this is who I am, a certain masculine and a certain feminine. *Ich bin der und der*, a phrase which means all these things. You will not be able to hear and understand my name unless you hear it with an ear attuned to the name of the dead man and the living feminine – the double and divided name of the father who is dead and the mother who is living on" (Derrida, 1985: 16). But the transferring and continuation of the name after death – the living, namely – depends not on the bearer of the name but on the persons who listen to the name and revive it in the process of infinite eternal return; hence, according to Derrida, one cannot ascribe to Nietzsche the atrocities that the Nazi perpetrated: "One can imagine the following objection: Careful! Nietzsche's utterances are not the same as those of the Nazi ideologues, and not only because the latter grossly caricaturize the former to the point of apishness" (Derrida, 1985: 30). In the following round table discussion on the subject of translation, Derrida points out that the translation activity shares a mechanism that is similar to the continuation of a proper name such as Nietzsche. There always co-presents a translatability for the lasting of the life of a word, and an untranslatability that prohibits any thorough and faithful delivery of the original meaning: "I would say that this desire is at work in every proper name: translate me, don't translate me. On the one hand, don't translate me, that is, respect me as a proper name, respect my law of the proper name which stands over and above all languages. And, on the other hand, translate me, that is, understand me, preserve me within the universal language, follow my law, and so on" (Derrida, 1985: 102). Derrida's explication of the process of translation is surely similar to his theory of hauntology articulated in the late work *The Spectre of Marx* (1993) that the present lives under the influence of the ghostly presence of the dead. Translation parallels such a mechanism by constituting a medium through which a spectrum of temporality stretches from past to future.

A sense of vitality exists inherently in the act of translating that pertains not only to the communications between two linguistic communities but also

to very survival of texts, which serves as a theoretical ground for Emily Apter's time-sensitive and dynamic definition of comparative literature. Derrida's seminar at Yale University during 1979–1980 further underlines the inherent contradiction between comparative literature as a discipline and what Derrida considers "the essence of literature" (Derrida, 2008: 41); in other words, the untranslatability of proper names that come into being through the self-enclosed cultural community. As Dragan Kujundžić elaborates, "[…] literature keeps a secret to itself, in principle inaccessible to a comparison that a discipline of comparative literature, a violent opening of a secret in fact, would have exposed" (Kujundžić : 9). What initiates the lecture comes from the impasse of translation Derrida discovers in the very name of the comparative literature discipline between comparative literature (the English name) and compared literature (direct translation from French):

> I am a foreign 'visiting professor,' speaking in his own language, but within the enclosure of an American university department dominated linguistically by English and whose title is not 'compared literature' [*littérature comparée*], but, and I translate, 'comparative literature' [*littérature comparative*]. Depending on the language, as you know, the concept that I name in French '*littérature comparée*' receives titles or names, in the Western universities that have such a department, which translate into each other but which we would be mistaken to consider as strict equivalents.
>
> (Derrida, 2008: 25)

Derrida foresees a necessary transformation in comparative literature, therefore, from "a discipline of study" to "literature [as]… literary practice." (Derrida, 2008: 43) Interestingly, both texts point to an impasse in translation studies, between the untranslatability of proper nouns that belong only to one particular language or literary work; and the requirement of the readability of such proper names in another language that does not bear pure references:

> In fact, there are two simultaneous demands governing the proper name which one must not be too quick to separate from each other: on the one hand, a requirement of untranslatability and unreadability, as if the proper name were nothing but pure reference, lying outside of signification and language; on the other hand, a requirement of translatability and readability, as if the proper name were assimilated to the common noun, to any word that is caught up in a linguistic

> and genealogical network where meaning already contaminate nonmeaning and where the proper name is absorbed and expropriated by the common noun.
>
> (Derrida, 1985: 93)

Claude Lévesque even advances this *aporia* of translatability, in his response to Derrida's reading of *Ecce Homo*, by extending this unresolvable opposition to the political domain, between "nationalism and universalism" (Derrida, 1985: 93). Hence, translating and treating the untranslatable have become the seminal task of translators, and consequentially that task demands a new understanding and ethics of translation as literary practice.

Derrida derives a solution by exploring Benjamin's concept of "Überleben", translated as living on or survival as "the structure of the original" (Derrida, 1985: 121), of which the translator must be constantly aware and to which he must respond. In other words, before any translating practice, the translator must be equipped with a pre-originary duty and care for the very survival and growth of the original text, revealed as what Derrida calls the "translation contract", a commitment to "transforming the original as well as the translation" (Derrida, 1985: 122). The significance of Nietzsche's autobiography lies in the new understanding that the proper name – his own name – depends on two parts: the already dead and the living. Readers and translators, thus, react to and engage the living element of a text and aim at caring for and extending the duration of its survival: "To understand a text as an original is to understand it independently of its living conditions – the conditions, obviously, of its author's life – and to understand it instead in its surviving structure" (Derrida, 1985: 122). Benjamin (1892–1940) does a superb job of depicting and specifying the relationship between the life of the text and the translator who deals with the text: "Given the surviving structure of an original text – always a sacred text in its own way insofar as it is a pure original – the task of the translator is precisely to respond to this demand for survival which is the very structure of the original text. (Notice Benjamin does not say the task of translation but rather of the translator, that is, of a subject who finds him/herself immediately indebted by the existence of the original, who must submit to its law and who is duty-bound to do something for the original)" (Derrida, 1985: 122). It seems that Derrida's reading and interpretation of Benjamin comes from Levinas' (1906–1995) discovery of the pre-originary ethics that constantly

articulates "Thou shall not kill" as the primary order of ethics. Derrida then furthers the notion of duty for the survival of the text by stating that this "caring for" is fundamentally about admitting the very existence of language, which Derrida frames via his interpretation of Benjamin's well-known term "Die Reine Sprache", or pure language, denoting "not one which has been purified of anything; rather, it is what makes a language a language" (Derrida, 1985: 123). Derrida, however, does not merely posit certain abstract and ontological judgements; he also provides a set of criteria by which one can determine the ethical value of a translation activity: "translation augments and modifies the original, which, insofar as it is living on, never ceases to be transformed and grow. It modifies the original even as it also modifies the translating language" (Derrida, 1985: 122). By asserting these criteria, Derrida formulates a perpetual parallelism between the original work and its translations – the latter must grow with the former through self-updating and moving according to the evolution of the language into which it is translated. Respect for the existence of language, particular or univocal, may serve as the primal condition for Wai Chee Dimock's ambitious construction of "literary transnationalism", which argues for "the pluralingual dissemination of codes, genres, styles or ideas across the borders of time and territorial sovereignty" (Apter: 83). Being aware of and responsive to untranslatability also supports Apter's warning of the translatability assumption of World Literature or "oneworldliness" as a potential form of cultural hegemony.

However, as Derrida remarks, the act and process of translation between different languages will necessarily encounter *aporias* of untranslable words due to the deference of the proper name for its referent, which, surprisingly, constitutes the definition of comparative literature: "when a so-called proper name is not simply proper, when it maintains meaningful relations [*rapports significants*] with common nouns and the meaning meant [*le sens visé*] by common nouns, its resistance to translation carries with it entire regions of untranslabaility" (Derrida, 2008: 37). A proper name is by nature untranslatable, bearing a unique referent that could not be translated otherwise because of the limitation cast by its non-concepturalizable meaning. Throughout his essay, Derrida explores the fictional character Pangloss in Voltaire's' seminal novel *Candide* and delineates the phenomenon of the co-presence of both the

untranslatability of the anomalous name as a fictional creation whose signifier harbors nothing outside the literary work; and an absolute translatability once the proper name Pangloss becomes is perceived from the perspective of the cluster of associative elements in the fiction and thus the proper noun reaches "as close as possible to a common noun; it is loaded with meaning and visibly reaches (in a figural or allegorical fashion, as you wish) well beyond its individual bearer, its novelistic character" (Derrida, 2008: 39). Pan-gloss, the forged word bearing the meaning of "all languages", functions thus as a model of Benjamin's pure language, with the seemingly ironic impasse of coexisting translatability and untranslatability, which, Derrida maintains, "is the figure of a thesis on translation and comparative literature" (Derrida, 2008: 39). By likening the situation of Pangloss to the studies of comparative literature, Derrida therefore renders the discipline as a proper name that includes – at the same time – "an open yet unique ensemble of {unique} individuals that exist according to a certain mode but that, as such, are unique" (Derrida, 2008: 50). The act of comparative literature takes on the infinite process of comparing within the collective ensemble of individual works and of altering perspectives from self to the other, and *vice versa*: "The minimal consensus, the character of the comparativists, is that one must compare literatures among themselves, literary phenomena among themselves, or in any case phenomena having an essential relation with literature among themselves. One must compare literature with literature" (Derrida, 2008: 50). Following Derrida, the transitions of roles between subjective and objective angles in the very essence of comparative literature demand a new ethics that is capable of perpetually sustaining the balance of power.

From double-traitor to "the general man"

Basing his inquiries into the history of translation on the German experience during the romantic period, Antoine Berman attempts to construct a self-reflective theory of translation that has an ethics at its core, given the belief that a translator needs to cultivate a consciousness of "what translation must mean in our cultural setting today" (Berman: 4). Such cultural sensitivity that attends to two cultures with at least linguistic difference unavoidably has to solve the

accusation from the Italian adage "traddutore, tradditore" – translator traitor. Berman invokes Franz Rosenzweig's (1886–1929) well-known claim that the occupation of the translator is to serve two masters: the culture where the original text resides, and the culture of their own mother tongue. But such a position simultaneously makes it easy for the translator to fall under the accusation from either side, and even worse, being sympathetic toward two masters will situate translators as double-traitors to both. Hence translators find themselves constantly oscillating between imposing the other culture on their own and opening the other culture whose openness belongs only to its own historical community. As Berman asserts, "The very aim of translation – to open up in writing a certain relation with the Other, to fertilize what is one's Own through the mediation of what is Foreign – is diametrically opposed to the ethnocentric structure of every culture" (Berman: 4). And consequentially, "translation occupies an ambiguous position. One the one hand, it heeds this appropirationary and reductionary injunction, and constitutes itself as one of its agents […] on the other hand, the ethical aim of translating is by its very nature opposed to this injunction: The essence of translation is to be an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentering" (Berman: 4). With respect to the ethics of translation, Berman calls for the conception of the fidelity of the translator as an affirmative and defensive position, in a spirit more pertinent to science than art. In addition, given the differences between languages and the inevitable change – on both the levels of language and text – taking place in the act of translating, Berman insists that one should also raise the analytical awareness of the "'gains' and 'losses' manifested in all translations, even successful ones" (Berman: 6), while, echoing Schleiermacher, maintaining a sense of respect not for the culture but the language that "posits other language as ontologically superior to the translator's own language" (Berman: 8). The task of neutralizing pressures from both cultures and insisting on an ethics of translation with primary respect for pure language, in line with Berman's ethical and analytical model, seems doomed to fall into a moral dilemma between cultural fidelity and translation ethics.

I wish to point out, in conclusion, that the translation ethics of caring and duty for language *qua* language already signifies a transcendence beyond any national and cultural borders to the zone of indiscernible identities; and

transforms translators into unbound cosmopolitan general humans, or better, helps them take on the molecular line of flight of becoming-imperceptible of their own identity in the process of translating. The art of double-betrayal, thus, lies in the capability of initiating and facilitating cultural communication while serving the two masters well, invisibly, by positioning the translator herself as a Derridian *aporia* that is both present-functioning and absent – unsigning cultural codes. The translator is both particular and universal. Here I want to cite a poem titled "The Faith That Matters", by French poet and multilingual translator Armand Robin (1912–1961), whom Antoine Berman regards as a translator of "omnipotent cosmopolitanism":

> I am not Breton, French, Latvian, Chinese, English
> I am all that at once.
> I am the universal and general man of the entire world.
>
> (Berman: 138)

In the same vein, the ethical stance of comparatists in the act of comparing literature with literature by constantly changing subjective and objective dispositions – as Derrida notes – may also require a self-effacing and becoming-imperceptible of the one who compares, situating oneself in the process of displaying, as Guillén hopes, "the elucidation of the cross-fertilizations and other grafts that link these subspecies and give rise to their mutations, hybridization, and growth […] with a firm belief in the uniqueness of the character of each people" (Guillén: 36).

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The Art of Double-Betrayal, or What Comparatists Can Learn from Translators

Summary

In light of the perennial demand for an ethics of translation as a key to intercultural communications, this paper seeks to provide an ontological account of language that grounds the translation process and that can consequentially serve as a practical standard for comparatists, through inquiries into the seminal theoretical works of Jacques Derrida, Antoine Berman, and Emily Apter and with respect to such contemporary linguistic and

philosophical topics as cultural globalization, untranslatability, among others. I argue that to prevent translation from becoming an explorative apparatus of hegemonic power that leads to cultural appropriation and domination, translators need to continuously stay aware of the fundamental and pre-originary care one innately bears towards the other. An ethics of translation – as that of comparative literature as a discipline – is constitutive of a non-national, non-identity, and non-subjective set of ethical principles that sustains and balances the powers coming from the host regions of related languages, while acknowledging the naturally irreconcilable and chronologically dynamic tensions in between. The very technicalities of the translating practice consist not only of the mechanical endeavor of pairing up words of various linguistic origins, but indeed an art of creating relations for a communicative understanding and experience of the foreign other, and simultaneously presenting a self-effaced invisibility of committed identity through a gesture of double-betrayal and resignation.

Keywords: comparative literature, intercultural communication, ethics, translation, untranslatable, Emily Apter, Jacques Derrida, Friedrich Nietzsche

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, komunikacja międzykulturowa, etyka, tłumaczenie, nieprzetłumaczalne, Emily Apter, Jacques Derrida, Friedrich Nietzsche