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Dr Sarah Maitland, Senior Lecturer in Translation Studies

[s.maitland@gold.ac.uk](mailto:s.maitland@gold.ac.uk)

Goldsmiths, University of London

## **Imagining Otherness: On Translation, Harm, and Border Logic**

### **Abstract**

Using theoretical frameworks drawn from the fields of cultural anthropology and political philosophy, this article pursues connections between disparate discussions of representation and identity politics to consider the determining role that translation plays in constructing relations of power between the translating 'self' and the translated 'other'. With reference to a theatre translation case study, it argues that the act of translation subordinates the position of the other to the biographical journey of the translator. By transforming the status of a living author from one of writing *subject* to representational *object*, translation is conceptualised as a form of so-called 'status misrecognition' that threatens to displace the author's agency in translation, preventing them from participating as a peer in the passage from imagination to realisation in the target language. By emphasising greater author engagement in the translation process, this article calls for the first steps in a translational 'politics of recognition' by which the shape of translations would be informed by an increased valorisation of the status of authors as active participants in, rather than objects of, the imaginative acts that lead to translations.

**Keywords: Theatre Translation; Politics of Recognition; Coevalness; Cultural Anthropology; Hermeneutics.**

Can translation do harm to the other? My enquiry relates not to *another*, but to *the* other, to the symbolic exteriority that is translation's object, to the entity which, in the interplay between identity and difference, is the 'not-self' the translator imagines when contemplating how to balance what is offered by a text written in one language with the needs, wants, and expectations of an audience that speaks another. I am not asking whether translation can do harm to another *person* – numerous scholarly interventions argue that it can – but whether, at the level of the imagination, a border exists between translator and text that results in a harm of *perception*, disabling translation's capacity to embrace otherness before the concrete act of translation begins. In an essay entitled 'The Difficulty of Imagining Other People', Elaine Scarry (1996) writes that '[t]he way we act towards "others" is shaped by the way we imagine them'. Even when the other is a friend, our capacity to imagine them 'in their full weight and solidity' (98) is limited primarily by our ignorance of their pain, which in turn, enables us to inflict injury:

The action of injuring occurs precisely because we have trouble believing in the reality of other persons. At the same time, the injury itself makes visible the fact that we cannot see the reality of other persons. It displays our perceptual disability. For if other persons stood clearly visible to us, the infliction of that injury would be impossible (102).

Translation seems a special case of 'perceptual disability'. It starts with a mystery – with a text whose meanings are occluded from an audience that cannot understand the

language in which the text was written originally. As intercultural outreach across a distance of time and space between the text in its historical moment and the knowledges and expectations of the translator's future audience, translation creates a difference – between the translator as representing subject and the text as object of representation. The foundation from which translation proceeds, therefore, is one of *opposition*. If it starts from a lack of understanding between the language that is 'own' and the language that is 'other', then it follows that translation is also an *identification* process based on the perception of a borderland that separates the two. For this reason, translation is properly concerned with the domain of the *imagination*: with our recognition of something 'other' to our own domain of understanding.

Implicit in Scarry's argument is the sense that if we do injury to others through the failure of our imagination to reflect their full complexity, then we must acknowledge this and do something about it. She suggests a strategy of 'imaginative recovery' aimed at achieving equality 'not by trying to make one's knowledge of others *as weighty as* one's self-knowledge, but by making oneself ignorant about oneself, and therefore *as weightless as* all others' (105). She cites Bertrand Russell's 'rotation of nouns' method, by which newspaper readers should substitute the names of alternative countries to test the prejudicial limits of their responses. Such a call would have us translate *weightlessly*, by taking responsibility not just for the way in which translation represents the other into being, but also for ensuring that such representation does them *justice*. But what is 'justice' in this context of perceptual disability? Is it possible to rotate all the nouns, as it were, and represent apolitically? These ideas, rooted in the plane of philosophical discourse, find their analogue in the domain of identity politics and the notion of 'recognition'. How we recognise difference – that is, the extent to which the identity of others is included or excluded from our horizon of representation – can be fundamental

to their quality of life. To imagine another, and to conceptualise one's own position in response, is to represent difference along a sliding scale of esteem and disdain, accommodation and rejection. Using theoretical frameworks drawn from the field of cultural anthropology and relating to the construction of otherness in ethnographic writing, and with reference to political philosophy, this essay pursues connections between disparate discussions of representation and identity politics to consider the determining role that translation plays in according value to others. Taking as a starting point the productive notion of the 'border', I argue for a way of conceiving of translation as a primary site of human interaction that is shaped and challenged by the world-making<sup>1</sup> quality of the language that we use.

### **Border hermeneutics**

In many respects, translation occasions the dissolution of borders. It means surmounting the barrier that prevents a text written in one language from being understood by a reader that speaks another. One of my most recent professional projects was to translate *Los amos del mundo* (2016) by playwright and director Almudena Ramírez-Pantanella.<sup>2</sup> Almudena directed its first professional production in Madrid in February 2018 and it was our ambition is that she might do the same for English-speaking audiences in London. Since Almudena is based in Madrid and I am based in London, we would meet up when we could or we kept in touch by email or WhatsApp. We would talk in Spanish and English about my progress with the play; I would ask her questions and she would tell me how she imagined a particular scene or character. We would look at the text together and experiment with different approaches for the translation. 'Translation', in this sense, is not just a description of what I was doing with Almudena's play; it is also what we were doing to ourselves, across every interaction along the way. As much as I was engaged in

representing what I believed the Spanish text offered in the context of an English-speaking audience, I was also engaged in representing myself – *both* to Almudena, as I articulated a vision for the role I believed I could play in the collective process of meaning-making in the theatre, *and* to diverse range of other audiences, made up of actors, stage team, costume, set and music designers, who we hoped would join us in the rehearsal room to explore creatively the myriad possibilities for dramatic potential the ever-evolving translation playtext presented, as well as our eventual spectators. At the time, these audiences existed only in our imaginations.

As we contemplated how the translation could take shape in the workshopping and rehearsal space, and how it could later play to English-speaking audiences, ‘borders’ for us were not just experienced at the immigration checkpoints of Heathrow and Barajas as we travelled to meet up with one another. They were present in the otherness of the text, in the difference of its cultural references, in the identity of its characters, in their motivations and fears, shaped by human experience that is other to that which I have experienced and foreign to the imagined audiences for whom I was writing. They were also borders of the mind. On one side, me, with the knowledge that I have and do not have, with the history I have lived and not lived, and with the absences, experiences, beliefs, politics, interests, and influences that make me who I am and shape my worldview. On the other, the text, written by another, with knowledge, history, absences, experiences, beliefs, politics, interests, and influences that are different to my own, that have been shaped in a time and space I have not shared, and which imbue the text with a realm of experience that is other to that which I understand intuitively.

It is not until a text is read by a translator with the *intention* of translating it – for an audience that is other than the audience for which it was intended originally – that these borders become apparent. They exist only in the conditional mood of *being-*

*translated*, in the imagination of those who are charged with contemplating how a text, which is now a text-for-translation, could be shaped to play to a *possible* audience in a *possible* time and place. The province of translation is in the realm of possibility, which is to say, in the imagination. As with Scarry's evocation of the interrelatedness of imagination and injury, the relation that binds translation to its others is precisely circular because the borders translation crosses are borders that it creates, and the borders it creates are borders that are shaped by the uniqueness of the human actors brought into an encounter predicated *on the projection of the imagination towards the futurity of reception*. Thus, when Benjamin asserts, somewhat provocatively, that a translation has no significance for the 'original', what he gestures towards is a view of translation in which a difference is recognised between the original itself and the original *qua* text-for-translation. The latter exists only in the imagination of its future translator, as a function of intentionality. It will be imagined differently by different translators in different times and places, and it may be translated for different audiences, for different reasons, and under different circumstances. It becomes a *becoming*, a transformation of what *was* into a *what could be*. It is this *could be* of a translation-before-its-future-audience that defines in the mind of the translator the *what is* of the text-for-translation in the here and now.

The identity of my intended translation was a response to the audiences of my imagination, to the spectators I hoped would come to see the play, and to the creative teams with whom I would work to make meaning of it in the rehearsal space. Hermeneutically, this goes beyond Hans Robert Jauss's notion of the horizon of expectation, for there is more going on than a reader understanding a text according to the codes, conventions, culture, and politics unique to her own historical moment, constructing it as an answer to questions she herself poses. Translators are not just

readers engaged in understanding; they are also writers, and the writing they produce is inflected by their understanding *into the future*, of audiences that do not yet exist, but whose needs, wants, and expectations must nonetheless be imagined and responded to. The paradox of translation is that it both constructs and dissolves its own borders, releasing in the mind of the translator potentially infinite possibilities for meaning-making at the time of reading, yet also fixing in the domain of the real the fruits of the translator's reading at the time of writing. It was the London-based audiences of *Los amos del mundo* – as much in the rehearsal space as in the auditorium – that animated my translation. As an interpretive process rooted in the sphere of understanding, it was my *hermeneutics of expectation* that defined and directed the differential ways in which I imagined the differing needs of these audiences. This hermeneutics means that the next translation commission could – should! – produce different results. The physical borders of my translation were constructed in London, but it is my hermeneutics of expectation as a translator that defined the categories of difference that rendered it outside of these borders conceptually.

### **Where is the harm?**

The role of the translator as an active interpreter means that the translation is contingent on the translator's interpretive response to the objects of translation – real and imagined – encountered and appropriated across a cognitive impasse. It becomes a transformed text, decontextualised from its original context of production and reception and reconfigured in the light of the translator's interpretation of the needs of the text and its receivers. It is this interpretive scope for transformation that creates the potential for harm, since, as Maria Tymoczko argues, 'differences in cultural power and prestige manifestly affect every level of choice in translation' (2007, 196). This cross-cultural



'intelligence-gathering' constructs representations of the other in line with dominant views and 'maps' particular identities onto them (197). In response, Tymoczko promotes a greater sense of self-conscious reflexion within the translation process and sketches the figure of the 'engaged' translator, who 'rouses, inspires, witnesses, mobilises, incites to rebellion, and so forth' (2000, 26). Engaged translation thus becomes a form of activism, capable 'of achieving demonstrable social and political change' (24).

Tymoczko's counter-intelligence project is joined by other strategies aimed at reducing translation's representational lacunae by harnessing the disruptive power of cultural difference. Prasenjit Gupta, for example, calls for the translator to 'mark' and 'convey' qualities in and around the text that attract the translator's interest. These qualities of 'delightful difference' deviate from 'established target-language modes' and awaken the translator's 'desire' precisely because they contain 'something that is not available in current practices in the target literature' (1998, 188). This 'revelation of a different world-view' (189) resonates with Lawrence Venuti's evocation of a strategy that

signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language. In its effort to do right abroad, this translation method must do wrong at home, deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience (1995, 20).

Predicated on the *re*-presentation of difference for strategic purposes, such methods aim to restrain ethnocentrism by constructing reading experiences that perform their own otherness through material qualities that make them different to texts that uphold the dominance of target-side values. This is what Gupta terms 'deep resistance', resulting from the 'structural, conceptual, or culturally expressive quality of the text' that brings to

light differences of world-view and value systems (1998, 188). Likewise, when Venuti writes that the 'foreign' in 'foreignising' translation 'is not a transparent representation of an essence that resides in the foreign text and is valuable in itself, but a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current target-language situation' (1995, 20), what he proposes is a theory and practice of translation concerned with ways of reading and writing that 'recognise the linguistic and cultural difference of foreign texts' (41). Here, 'recognition' is not synonymous with denotation; it is the making explicit of the political dimensions of a resistant translation practice by which the illusion of an easy flow of meaning is disturbed.

### **'Signalling' difference: a politics of recognition**

What does it mean to 'mark', 'convey', 'signal', or 'recognise' difference? One answer lies in politicising both what we mean by 'difference' and how we ascertain which aspects to 'recognise' over others. Rooted in Hegelian philosophy and taken up in recent years by political theorists, 'recognition' is a productive notion for conceptualising struggles over identity and difference, and its primary objectives appear strikingly analogous to that of resistant translation projects. For many, it is synonymous with multiculturalism in the Anglo-American context, in which different identity groups are granted different levels of positive affirmation according to their size and role in society (McBride 2009, 96-108). Given that majoritarian groups are seen to be accorded greater rights and opportunities than others, a so-called 'identity politics' hinges on demands by minority groups for greater recognition of their place.

For Nancy Fraser, this demand concerns the level of social status conferred upon groups as bearers of difference. She observes an 'institutionalised subordination' by which certain groups are denied the status of full partners and ability to enjoy rights and

opportunities on a par with other more powerful groups as a consequence of structurally-embedded approaches to cultural value 'in whose construction they have not equally participated and which disparage their distinctive characteristics or the distinctive features assigned to them' (2003, 29). Unlike identity-based recognition, which seeks to redress deprecatory attitudes to difference, Fraser's status-based alternative is founded on the normative structures of social interaction that prevent equality of participation in the first instance:

On the status model, misrecognition is neither a psychological deformation nor an impediment to ethical self-realization. Rather, it constitutes an institutionalized relation of *subordination* and a violation of justice. To be misrecognized, accordingly, is not to suffer distorted identity or impaired subjectivity as a result of being depreciated by others. It is rather to be constituted by *institutionalized patterns of cultural value* in ways that prevent one from participating as a peer in social life (ibid).

Misrecognition is the absence of reciprocity, where certain actors are constituted structurally as 'inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible hence as less than full partners in social interaction'. 'Status equality' can exist only when the same actors are supported to participate equally in social life, and this means examining institutionalised patterns of cultural value 'for their effects on the *relative standing* of social actors' (ibid).

There is an intriguing resemblance here to emancipatory arguments in translation theorisation, where we might discern a difference between identity-based (Gupta and Venuti) and status-based recognition approaches. Throughout much of this article I have described a structural relation of translation that presumes an author and a text on one

'side', and, on the other, a translator and their audience(s), with the interpretive freedoms, needs, wants, and expectations of the latter two driving how the translation is shaped. This relation subordinates the status of the author, who goes from writing *subject* to *object of representation*. The *text* becomes the focus of the translator's writing and it is the translator who enjoys the agency to *rewrite* it in the language of the target audience. When viewed through the lens of Fraser's identity politics, 'misrecognition' here displaces the author's agency to represent, preventing them from participating as a peer in the passage from imagination to realisation in the language of the translation. 'Recognition', by extension, would mean transforming this representational relation, so as to ensure greater reciprocity and participation in the processes of imagining and responding to the needs, wants, and expectations of a translation's future audience(s). To be 'recognised', the author would require increased status, both as *co-interpreter* of the possibilities for meaning-making the text presents, and as *co-writer* of these possibilities for the benefit of future audiences.

In the case of *Los amos del mundo*, both translator and author were able to speak one another's language fluently. This meant that in all face-to-face or asynchronous interactions, no single language held primacy. Through a series of collaborative workshops – some involving just myself and Almudena; others involving actors, other translators, producers, and directors – and focused on the ongoing development of the translation, the author played an integral role alongside the translator in shaping the translation towards its imagined audiences. This was the first time I have worked in this way with an author, and the decision to prioritise consultation, collaboration, and co-development was deliberate. Here, we come close to a translational model of status recognition where interactional and representational conditions were created that enabled the author to participate in the meaning-making process not as object, but as *co-*

*subject* of representation. As a participation-orientated status intervention, rather than an identity-based approach, such a form of recognition does not focus on elevating the author as a bearer of culture. Instead, it aims to support the author as an interlocutor in a dialogue, to collaborate in the production of a translation on a more egalitarian level. This makes it an inherently political measure, for it does not claim to eradicate the contingent nature of representation but attempts deliberately to confer value on the role of the author from *within* the representation process itself. As an approach, it is deliberate, deliberative, and necessarily partisan.

### **The denial of coevalness**

Not all projects lend themselves to such an ideal. What happens, as with many theatre translations, when the author of the play is no longer living and cannot participate alongside the translator in the process of representing the text in translation? When the author is not involved in the production of the translation, the ‘over there’ and ‘back then’ of text and author mean that the multiple encounters that characterise the act of translation – intercultural, intertextual, and interpersonal – are also journeys through time, in the mind of the translator, *backwards* towards the author and the text in their original time and place, and *forwards* towards new audiences in an all-new setting. The potential for harm arises because this form of translation also produces knowledge in the here and now.

In the context of historical translation, the translator must balance potentially competing concerns – for the play, on the one hand, in its ‘home’ context of signification (and because the text is *not* the performance, here we have another level of translation – from page to stage), and, on the other, for its future presence in translation, within a context of signification that is at a remove – in time and space – from that of the text-for-

translation. In something close to what Benjamin calls the 'simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present' located within 'Messianic' time (1968, 265), the translator must write a text that remembers *back* to the connections of its 'past' potentials for performance, while crafting simultaneously an identity for the text that allows new connections and understandings to be activated in the 'present'. As David Johnston observes:

Any cultural artefact may be read as an exteriorisation of artistic identity. In other words, the particularity, for example, of a theatre text is inseparable from the way in which that text exteriorises, or performs, the artistic project of its author. It is this project that we need to insert into a performance space, remembering that performance is always defined by the here and now (2009, 263).

The translation must look across the space-time continuum to forge an identity for itself that both dissolves *and* supports that which makes the play 'particular'. Its particularity is that which resists translation, but it is also this particular quality of uniqueness as an 'artistic project' that creates a desire for translation in the first instance. As a reader charged with interpreting the author's project, and as a writer charged with creating opportunities for its 'insertion' into the 'now' of translation, the translator's hermeneutic positionality in the present defines the place from which the temporal border with the past is constructed.

Historicism here comes at a risk. In a seminal critique of the representational devices of 'temporal sequencing and distancing' that enable anthropologists to pronounce from a distance 'the discourse that pretends to interpret, analyse, and communicate ethnographic knowledge to the researcher's society', Johannes Fabian

(2002, 71 and 72) warns that the danger of temporal distancing from the object of enquiry is the denial of 'coevalness', that is, a '*persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*' (31). This 'petrified relation' (143) elides the contemporaneousness of Anthropology's other to the speaking/writing subject and ignores that all talk about the other is constructed from the point of view and historical context of the anthropologist doing the talking. At the level of the lexicon, for instance, he observes a number of 'time-distancing' devices (75) through which anthropological discourse denies the presentness of its objects of study. Fabian gives the example of *savagery*, which may be intended as a technical term by some writers to denote different stages in a developmental sequence. But, he warns, 'no degree of nominalist technicality can purge the term of its moral, aesthetic, and political connotations' (75).

What of time-distancing lexis in translation discourse? Consider the use of language in two different translations of Benjamin's essay on the task of the translator, in which a translation either 'proceeds' (Benjamin, trans. by Rendall 1997, 153) or 'issues' (Benjamin, trans. by Zohn 1996, 254) from an 'original' (Benjamin, in both Rendall and Zohn). Because it comes 'later' (Benjamin, trans. by Rendall 1997, 153) than this original, it is said to represent its 'afterlife' (Benjamin, trans. by Zohn 1996, 254). Translations that are more than 'transmissions of subject matter', moreover, come into being when a work, 'in the course of its survival, has reached the age of its fame' (255). But they do not so much serve the work's fame 'as owe their existence to it' (Benjamin, trans. by Rendall 1997, 154). In them the 'life' of the original 'achieves its constantly renewed, latest and most comprehensive unfolding' (154). The language of Benjamin's essay – enjoying a translational afterlife of its own – locates translation's most obvious object of enquiry – the text-for-translation – in a 'past' that is respective to the 'present' of the translator,

through terms such as *the original*. In one sense, nothing can be 'original' until something later in time attempts to approximate it. Being *original* means being first, earliest; it has a temporal quality that exists only in opposition to an *unoriginal* 'copy' that succeeds it. A temporal scale is constructed, starting from the moment in which the translator lives and writes, and along which the age of the original and the age of the translation are marked and differentiated. Each life force is intertwined with the other, such that the translation would not exist without the previous existence of the text on which it is based. Through this intimate connection, the original achieves renewed and continuing life in the translating present, but it is a 'comprehensive unfolding' that from the perspective of the translator places the original firmly *in a past-to-be-renewed*.

Fabian also points to verbal and pronominal markers that create an 'ethnographic present' through which a categorical view of a society at the time of observation is 'frozen'. 'Ideally and typically', he explains,

the first person singular *I* should co-occur with tenses marking the genre discourse/commentary, e.g. the present. This would reflect the locutionary attitude or communicative situation where a speaker conveys directly and purposefully to a listener what he believes to be the case or what he can report as a fact (2002, 84).

By combining the present tense with the autobiographical *I*, the subject of anthropological discourse/commentary makes clear that the information being communicated is a message addressed to a listener by a speaker with a particular purpose. In contrast, the genre of history/story favours the third person, which is not really a 'person' but a descriptive apparatus, since the communicative situation is one of



historical narrative with no element of dialogicality. For Fabian, anthropological discourse/commentary should be dominated by the present tense and pronounced by an *I*; yet, he finds, the present tense co-occurs with the third person, 'they are (do, have, etc.)' (84). By deploying this form of 'nonperson third person' in anthropological accounts where the incidence of the present tense would normally be considered indicative of a relation between two or more subjectivities, pronouns and verb forms in the third person mark the communicative relation as one of *person versus nonperson*. The continued and pervasive use of this nonperson third person has the effect of marking an 'other' about whom the anthropologist writes, and who exists outside the dialogue between the anthropologist and the scientific community for whom they are writing. 'He (or she or it) is not spoken to but posited (predicated) [...]', he writes (85). Though subjects in their own right, the others of anthropology – the people on which anthropologists' findings are based – are removed from the communicative situation, further denying them coevalness (86).

What would it mean to imbricate these insights within a critique of translation, in a context where, of necessity, the *you* the translator addresses when asking questions of the author in the translating present gives way to the *you* of the audience in the present of reception? As Fabian argues:

The use of the present tense in anthropological discourse not only marks a literary genre (*ethnography*) through the locutionary attitude of discourse/commentary; it also reveals a specific cognitive stance towards its object, the *monde commenté* (Weinrich). It presupposes the givenness of the object of anthropology as something to be *observed*. *The present tense is a signal identifying a discourse as an*

*observer's language*. Such a language provides glosses on the world as *seen* (86-87).

Translators and authors may well exist as contemporaries, and the communicative situation between them may well be dialogical, as in my experience with *Los amos del mundo*. When the author and I discussed my latest translation draft, the *you* we were addressing was each other. We each had a stake in the interaction and we each had something particular to say. But other addressees relating to our imagined communities of reception also played a role. If (in this form of translation, at least) the translator's first *you* is the author, does the presence of a spectatorial *you* obliterate this first dialogism or add a second alongside it? The answer depends on the extent to which we insist on the persistence of an 'ethnographic present' in translation. To observe such a phenomenon, the intersubjective engagement between translator and author would have to give way to the translator's own engagement with the text-for-translation as object of observation. A translational pronouncement would have to be made to an audience by an 'I' in the present tense, on what is believed to be the case about the text-for-translation, and through the use of verbal and pronominal markers a nonperson third person – the author – would have to be posited outside of this discourse.

These conditions are fulfilled perhaps most obviously by historical translation, where the deceased author is unavailable as interlocutor. The author could not be the translator's addressee, and instead would be constructed at the time of translational observation through the discourse of translation articulated. But a similar phenomenon can also be observed even in contemporary translation. Surely every translation is the result of a certain taking of positions and every translation is a statement by a translator pronouncing in the third person that 'this is what the text "says" (to me)', 'this is what (I

believe) this character is 'doing/thinking/feeling'? Is not the submission of every translation an assertion addressed to its commissioner or audience in the here and now that 'this is what (I think) the text "means" (to me)? Both historical and contemporary translations are discursive statements on the 'meaning' of a text (to the translator), the taking of a specific cognitive stance, in which the claims of the translator are articulated through the present tense of critical commentary in the third person. What the translator finds in the text, and writes in the translation, are the organic results of a particular understanding, influenced by and orientated towards the perceived needs, wants, and expectations of an audience the translator addresses. As such, they are interpretive pronouncements written into the text of the translation and ventured from the observational present of the translator.

### **The translator and the possessive past**

In Fabian's critique, temporalisation is further cemented through the formulation of knowledge that is rooted in the anthropologist's autobiography, where the other as 'object or content of anthropological knowledge is necessarily part of the knowing subject's past' (88). By drawing critical attention to the historical conditions under which personal experience is produced, we valorise self-reflexivity and underscore the importance of subjectivity in the process of knowledge-creation. This is the difference between *reflexion*, which reveals the anthropologist-as-subject, and *reflection*, which attempts to increase perceptions of objectivity by masking the selfhood of the anthropologist in the production of anthropological discourse. To take a reflexive, rather than a reflective stance, is to eliminate epistemological hypocrisy by bringing the subject of observation to the forefront (89-90). Fabian illustrates this point with a critique of an example from *The Savage Mind* (1966), in which Claude Lévi-Strauss asserts that

'primitives', much like 'us', rely on the observation and interpretation of natural phenomena: 'The procedure of the American Indian who follows a trail by means of imperceptible clues . . . is no different from our procedure when we drive a car . . .' (cited in Fabian 2002, 91). For Fabian, the qualifier *imperceptible* bears an intriguing function

as an index revealing (or hiding) the fact that not one but two subjects inhabit the semantic space of the statement. One is the Indian who 'follows a procedure', the other is the ethnographer to whom the Indian's clues are imperceptible. Such literary sleight-of-hand camouflages the second subject *in order to* mark the observation as objective fact (ibid).

In this way, all statements about others 'are paired with the observer's experience' (ibid). In the semantic space of a translation, it is the author who gives the clues and the translator who investigates. While the selfhood of the translator is sometimes masked, it is through their frame of experience that the clues will be deciphered, and this is neither automatic nor objective. In an introduction to his translation of *Beowulf* (1999), for example, Seamus Heaney writes that what he had always loved about the poem

was a kind of foursquareness about the utterance, a feeling of living inside a constantly indicative mood, in the presence of an understanding that assumes you share an undeluded quality about the *Beowulf* poet's sense of the world [...] (xxvii-xxviii).

The *Beowulf* poet is present in the directness of the voice, despite the elaborate speech. But the translator is also there, looking back to his first experience of the poem in earlier

years, framing its translation according to his own readerly journey. When Heaney asserts that it is impossible to achieve a complete appreciation of the poem without recourse to an immense corpus of secondary scholarship, and that, nevertheless, 'readers coming to the poem for the first time are likely to experience something other than mere discomfiture when faced with the strangeness of the names and the immediate lack of known reference points' (xi), we can read that Heaney, too, experienced the joys and opportunities of the strangeness of the names and unknown reference points, rather than their alienation. He is present as a subject here, both as a reporter of information about the poem *and* as one who experiences its power for himself.

With anthropological discourse, Fabian links the autobiographical present with the so-called 'possessive past', which consists of 'an irrepressible urge' on the part of anthropologists 'to recall, refer to, cite, and recount experiences with "their natives"' (2002, 93). In a section entitled 'About this translation', Heaney recounts his first invitation to translate *Beowulf*:

This was during the middle years of the 1980s, when I had begun a regular teaching job in Harvard and was opening my ear to the unmoored speech of some contemporary American poetry. Saying yes to the *Beowulf* commission would be (I argued with myself) a kind of aural antidote, a way of ensuring that my linguistic anchor would stay lodged on the Anglo-Saxon sea-floor (1999, xxii).

It proved a mammoth task, and, feeling defeated, he turned to other work. 'Even so', he writes, 'I had an instinct that it should not be let go. An understanding I had worked out for myself concerning my own linguistic and literary origins made me reluctant to abandon the task' (xxiii). He realised that certain lines in the first poem of his first book

followed the requirements of Anglo-Saxon metrics: 'Part of me, in other words, had been writing Anglo-Saxon from the start' (xxiii). He goes on to observe that while he considers *Beowulf* his 'voice-right', for the poet growing up in the political and cultural conditions of Northern Ireland in the middle decades of the twentieth century, and seeking to collapse the 'Irish/English duality, the Celtic/Saxon antithesis' (xxiv), the tendency towards cultural determinationism presented a challenge:

Sprung from an Irish nationalist background and educated at a Northern Irish Catholic school, I had learned the Irish language and lived within a cultural and ideological frame that regarded it as the language that I should by rights have been speaking but I had been robbed of. [...] I tended to conceive of English and Irish as adversarial tongues, as either/or conditions rather than both/and, and this was an attitude that for a long time hampered the development of a more confident and creative way of dealing with the whole vexed question – the question, that is, of the relationship between nationality, language, history and literary tradition in Ireland (xxiii).

He writes of the history of 'language-loss and cultural dispossession', the temptation towards binary linguistic thinking (xxiv), the opening up of the 'linguistic river of rivers' (xxiv) in which the binary became diluted, and the glimpsing of an 'elsewhere of potential that seemed at the time to be a somewhere being remembered' (xxiv-xxv). He writes of framing the cadences of the opening lines to suit the 'big-voiced' Scullion men of his extended family (xxvi), and of translating the first word, *hwæt*, into Hiberno-English Scullion-speak, with the particle 'so'. In that idiom, he explains, "so" operates as an expression that obliterates all previous discourse and narrative, and at the same time

functions as an exclamation calling for immediate attention' (xxvii). This approach complements his stated desire to retain the poem's directness, despite the ornate style and opaque narrative construction.

Heaney's reflexions draw attention to the subjectivity of the translator, and while his approach in translation is paired with biographical experience, the text is not commodified. Heaney's biography is not incidental but integral to the translation. Its structure, rhythm, and lexis are shaped by life experience, by his desire to come to terms with the tensions of cultural determinationism and the role that language plays within it. The borders between reader and writer, text and translator, life history and translational trajectory, are blurred. Where the man ends and the poem begins is unclear, for his biographical experience not only shapes the contours of the translation; it is the driving force behind it. I am reminded here that in this article I, too, have offered my own, much less lyrical, reflexions on my translation of *Los amos del mundo*. My biography, as a translator and academic, and the changing critical positions I articulate, are linked so inextricably that it is hard to separate the one from the other, for my observations are rooted in my ongoing experience with the play. When viewed from the perspective of Fabian's critique of the elision of the anthropologist's role in the construction of the other, 'self-reflexion' in this article is a circular dialectic, between the text and me, and between me and myself. The pronouncements I make on translation here, as in elsewhere, are not objective 'facts' but subjective acts of knowledge-creation. Translation theorisation in this article, as with Fabian's conceptualisation of anthropology, is above all the ongoing development of subjectivity.

## **Conclusions**

Like anthropological discourse, translation is often described as a form of representation that denies the other. Much has been made in the scholarship of translation's representational deficiencies, of its failure to separate itself from asymmetries of power and knowledge through which foreign cultural values are constructed according to local mores, yielding representations that serve negative intercultural agendas rather than give voice to those they represent. By considering in-depth a critique of cultural anthropology, we find that translation frames its other according to the biographical journey of the translator, creating a temporal distance between the translator as interpreting subject and the author as object of observation. If, *pace* Scarry, our acts of imagination cause injury to the other, and, *pace* Tymoczko, representation cannot rid itself of the relation of power that inheres when one agent undertakes to represent another, then the question we must ask is whether alternative forms of translation can be found that acknowledge the constraints of an interpretive structure that privileges the agency of the translating side to represent, while being also somehow more representative. By prioritising author engagement, we take the first steps in a *translational politics of recognition* – by which the shape of translations would be informed by an increased valorisation of the status of authors as agents and participants in, rather than objects of, the imaginative acts that lead to translations.

Such status-based recognition projects would focus on promoting greater reciprocity by transforming the structural conditions through which authors and translators not only interact, but also participate in knowledge-creation. At its most basic, this would entail prioritising projects where living authors could work alongside translators as co-subjects in the interpretive process. This might mean supporting authors and translators financially to participate in collaborative workshops aimed at drafting translations together or convening critics or readers' focus groups to work with



authors and translators to enhance ongoing translations. Publishers might consider allowing authors to work with translators of their own choosing or ensuring that authors are involved in some way in the process of selecting translators. Publishers might also empower authors *to translate themselves*, by supporting them through continuous professional development to take charge of their own processes of bilingual representation. Theatre companies, meanwhile, could commission professional actors to join the translator and author in interrogating the draft translation in the rehearsal space and facilitate its refinement by dramatising the text through staged readings. Theatre festivals commissioning surtitles for international productions could support playwrights, translators, surtitlers, and projectionists to work in partnership to produce content that is reflective of everyone's contribution to each stage of the creative process. Such possible alternatives to border thinking in translation practice would go some way towards avoiding positioning author and translator on opposing sides. Though not suited to all translation projects, they would enable authors and translators to translate together from a position of coevalness, as co-equal subjects collaborating in the imaginative processes that feed into the construction of a translation.

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<sup>1</sup> I owe this turn of phrase to the *Language Acts and Worldmaking* project, which argues that language 'is a material and historical force, not a transparent vehicle for thought. Language empowers us, by enabling us to construct our personal, local, transnational and spiritual identities; it can also constrain us, by carrying unexamined ideological baggage. This dialectical process we call "worldmaking"' (Language Acts and World Making 2019).

<sup>2</sup> *Los amos del mundo* was awarded the 2015 Calderón de la Barca prize by the Ministry of Culture through the National Institute of Performing Arts and Music (INAEM) in recognition of merit and to encourage the work of young dramatists.