

14 Footnotes *sans Frontières*

Translation and Textual Scholarship

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If we take at face value Walter Benjamin's famous conclusion that "The interlinear version [. . .] is the archetype or ideal of all translation" (2006, 307), then a translation, any translation, is a sort of prolonged annotation. In the century-old Loeb Classical Library series, which will serve here as an archetype or ideal of the relationship between translation and textual scholarship in the Anglophone world, the original Greek or Latin is on the left-hand page with its translation on the facing page and the footnotes (always resolutely sparse) positioned beneath both original and translation. James Loeb's purpose, set forth in a statement published in the series' earliest volumes and now on its Web site, was to "make the philosophy and wit of the writers of ancient Greece and Rome once more accessible by means of translations that are in themselves real pieces of literature [. . .] and not dull transcripts [. . .] and to place side by side with these translations the best critical texts of the original works" (Harvard University Press n.d.).

Both the belletrist nature of its translations and the paucity of its annotations were indicators that the Loeb series was aimed at general readers, not scholars, and it was welcomed as such by Virginia Woolf in a 1917 paean characterising the Loeb Library as a "gift of freedom" for the "ordinary amateur" (Harvard University Press n.d.).¹ Yet, with its continuous publication of revised and new editions—as advances in scholarship affect understanding and hence translation, and as our view of translation itself evolves along with our approaches to it—the Loeb Library also confirms the intimate link between translation and textual scholarship.

In his magisterial overview of the field, David Greetham defines textual scholarship as "all the activities associated with the discovery, description, transcription, editing, glossing, annotating and commenting upon texts" (1994, 2). Though translation per se is not on his list (or even in his index), it can and does involve, to varying degrees, each of the activities Greetham mentions. Examples abound of translators who discovered or identified texts, from the nineteenth-century scholars who travelled to Iraq to acquire the fragmented cuneiform tablets they would later study, compare, piece together and translate into what we know as the Epic of Gilgamesh, to the youthful would-be translator of, say, contemporary Japanese

fiction, who reads something excerpted in a Japanese literary magazine or Web site; tracks down the complete work; secures grant funding, a publisher and translation rights; and finally brings the work into his or her language. As for description, in addition to those found in essays or studies translators may write about the texts they work on, translation itself can be understood as a kind of prolonged description of the source text in another language (or dismissed, by those with little knowledge of either translation or transcription, as simple transcription). Translation's editorial component is clear, as well; where differing versions or editions of an original text exist, translators are called upon to compare and choose among them, often producing a translation based on a composite of variant originals, as in the celebrated edition of Chekhov's letters by Simon Karlinsky and Michael Henry Heim, which draws from comparative reading of three varying censored editions of Chekhov's correspondence (Heim and Karlinsky 1973, ix). Barbara Cassin (2010) has compared the textual *fixion* by the philologist Hermann Diel of the sole surviving work of pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides to an act of translation. Diel's production of Parmenides's *Poem* by long analysis and interpretation of the fragmentary manuscripts that cite or allude to it is part and parcel of "le trafic de la lettre" subsequently carried forward by the text's multiple translators in an *arborescence* of interlinked and forking paths and complex interpretative decisions. Cassin cites Borges: "Erudition is the modern form of the fantastic" ["La forme moderne du fantastique, c'est l'érudition"].²

Finally, translators are often called upon to gloss, annotate, comment upon and provide source references for the texts they translate (the famous Translator's Note), and their efforts to create a more informed intellectual and cultural context for their work can go far beyond that. Ammiel Alcalay tells me that before he could publish his 1996 anthology of translations of contemporary writing from Israel, *Keys to the Garden*, he had first to establish a framework, in his 1993 study *After Jews and Arabs*, within which the translated work could be received. Along the same lines, Peter Cole, who translates from Hebrew and Arabic, has sought to widen the cultural space for such works by establishing a publishing house, Ibis Editions, to bring into English books that "embody the cultural cross-fertilization that characterizes the best writing from the Levant" (Ibis Editions n.d.).

In a thoroughly enjoyable treatise, Anthony Grafton points out that in all its manifold variations, the footnote itself—for of Greetham's list of the activities associated with textual scholarship, it is annotation that primarily concerns us here—may well have originated in the ancient practice of inserting a gloss to explain a foreign or difficult word between the lines or along the margins of a manuscript (1999, 27–28). While our archetypal page layout—translation on the facing page, footnotes below—suggests that translation and annotation are two very different practices, the distinction grows ever hazier the more closely we scrutinise them. Even the movement between languages that initially seems a key distinguishing factor turns out

to be quite irrelevant. Roman Jakobson's well-known tripartite classification of translation begins with "intralingual translation", which he defines as "an interpretation of verbal signs by other signs of the same language" (2000, 139). Meanwhile, Jacques Derrida has noted that "it is not contradictory to the concept of annotation that it be done in a language different from that of the annotated text" (1991, 196).

Further insight into the vagueness of conventional distinctions between translation and annotation can be gleaned from the popular Web site Rap-genius.com (its motto: "Our aim is not to translate rap into 'nerdspeak', but rather to critique rap as poetry"). Here is its transcription of the first two lines of rap artist Kanye West's 2010 "Dark Fantasy", delivered, on the recording, by Nicki Minaj, in a British accent:

*You might think you've peeped the scene
you haven't, the real one's far too mean*

Clicking on these lines, the consulter of Rap Genius learns:

. . . the intro is a thuggification of children's author Roald Dahl from "Cinderella" in his book "Revolting Rhymes":

*I guess you think you know this story.
You don't. The real one's much more gory . . .*

Suggesting that the herd has turned against Kanye like a pack of youths. The public doesn't know what really goes on behind the scenes.³

This is certainly helpful, but is it a source reference, a commentary or a sequence of translations (Dahl of Charles Perrault, West of Dahl, the Rap Genius commentator of West)? And how will its status change in the likely event that a Kanye enthusiast in Beijing works it into Mandarin?

Perhaps annotation and translation are like twins who become separated, only to meet up later in life and discover that their fates have been strangely similar. In historiography, the focus of Grafton's work, the annotation of source references is a crucial demonstration of the historian's authority, establishing the basis and precedent for the historical account he or she presents and thus making it verifiable. Nevertheless, even in that field, extensive annotation readily becomes emblematic of "sterile pedantry" and has, Grafton points out, been reviled as "the quintessence of academic foolishness and misdirected effort" (1999, 25). The degree to which translation, too, is a conventional object of scorn has been well documented. "Let's not kid ourselves", a widely read 2005 essay by Wyatt Mason begins: "everyone hates translations". The impassioned fans on Rap Genius, who spend untold hours elucidating lyrics (some of them by Maya Angelou), may not see it that way, but it's probably more often the case that both translation and

annotation are suspected of denaturing the texts they purport to explicate, rendering them lifeless, dull and dry, clouding them over with intermediary and extraneous matter, getting in their way. Can you dance to erudition?

What most fundamentally unites translation with annotation is their mutual orientation towards a clearly delimited subset of readers. The nature of any given translation or corpus of annotations is dictated not by the original text, but by the readership for whom the translation or edition is destined. Quite obviously, a translation intended for a Portuguese audience will differ greatly from one of the same work destined for readers of Japanese. The same can be said of annotation; every note of whatever sort anticipates the lacunae, requirements and areas of expertise of a specific group of readers. Australians require no clarification of a mention of the Burke and Wills expedition; Americans do. Professional Shakespeare specialists demand a facsimile edition of Shakespeare's First Folio that indicates which of the Folger Library's copies was the source of each page; desperate undergraduates want a cheap paperback that will tell them what on earth a "moiety competent" is. The authors of crowd-sourced explanations on Rap Genius may feel strongly that the commentary offered in *The Anthology of Rap* (Bradley and DuBois 2010) represents precisely the type of "nerdspeak" they are eager to avoid. In that sense, translation and textual scholarship both evoke the infinite potential avatars of a given text or narrative (be it literary, documentary or historical) across the unlimited series of finite circumstances within which it can be reread—in other words, rediscovered, retold, reinvented.

One of my favourite footnotes occurs in Heim and Karlinsky's aforementioned Chekhov volume, appended to a letter sent to Maxim Gorky from Yalta on 15 February 1900. Praising the sensory immediacy of one of Gorky's stories—"Twenty-Six Men and a Girl"—Chekhov dashes off a line translated as: "It very strongly evokes its setting. You can smell the rolls." The following footnote is appended:

The kind of roll that Chekhov mentions is the hard one with the hole in the middle which is now called "bagel" in the United States. But a translation of *bubliki* as "bagels" would have moved the setting of Gorky's story from a bakery in Russia to a New York Jewish delicatessen for most American readers. (Heim and Karlinsky 1973, 382)

The relevance to translation of Viktor Shklovsky's fundamental notion of defamiliarisation (остранение) becomes apparent. For Shklovsky (1991) the artistic techniques that induce defamiliarisation serve to delay easy understanding so as to break through the veil of habit and open the mind to new and fresh perceptions. Here, the translator/annotator might be tempted to trade on the familiarisation effected by immigrants from the Slavic world who collectively transformed a characteristic Eastern European foodstuff into something that by 1973 was strongly associated with certain ethnic

enclaves in north-eastern urban centres of the United States. Yes, a бублик is a bagel. But to translate it as “bagel” would be to effect a kind of reverse defamiliarisation, making the бублик all too misleadingly familiar, reincarnating the Gorky story Chekhov alludes to as an Isaac Bashevis Singer tale, set in Brooklyn. A very different footnote would be required in a place where the bagel remained unknown (if such still exists on our globalised Earth), and none at all might be needed in a culture where the bagel, while familiar, remained so strongly associated with its point of origin that the first evocation it brought to mind was an Eastern European scene. (Glossed as “rice sandwiches” by the writer credited with first introducing the term into English in 1893,⁴ sushi has since become familiar worldwide, but translators of Japanese literature, at least in the United States, need not worry about evoking anything but Japan when they translate 鮓 as sushi.⁵)

As globalisation perpetually shifts the gamut running between familiar and unfamiliar, the question of what needs to be translated or annotated for whom is in constant flux—but this is nothing new. The evolution of technology, however, has brought new factors into play. When readers in most parts of the globe can, within seconds, establish the basic facts of the Burke and Wills expedition for themselves, annotators and translators may well consider themselves permanently relieved of the need to provide that sort of information. Any visitor to Rap Genius who doesn’t recognise the name “Roald Dahl” has only to click on it to reach Dahl’s Wikipedia entry (though a familiarity with Cinderella is taken for granted and no hyperlink is provided there). Even in our old-fashioned medium of print, a translator who ponders the possibility of a brief footnote to give basic information on an obscure Danish theologian whose name crops up in a Kierkegaard essay might well reject the idea, given that a reader interested in learning more about that odd name—Pontopiddan—need only pull out a cell phone to encounter far more information about Erik Pontopiddan (1698–1764) than any reasonable footnote would give.

Have the search engines rendered annotation unnecessary, even as digital translation is fast making human translation obsolete? Heim and Tarlinsky’s translation/annotation of Chekhov’s бублик attests to the fact that machine translation, however sophisticated it might become, will always be something quite different from literary translation. Whether it is a program that performs translation or a Big Data search engine such as Google Translate, a mechanical translation device will not translate бублик as anything but “bagel”; that tautology is the successful performance of the machine’s task. Nor will it append a footnote discussing the factors that influenced its decision. Literary translation is the re-embodiment of a text within the lived experience and erudition of a translator, using rational thought, sense memory, nostalgia, yearning and a host of other conscious and unconscious factors to negotiate among shifting resonances of meaning that echo against and through a given culture at a given moment. To put it in Saussurian terms, while machines can select and reorder signifiers,

sometimes successfully mimicking the way humans have previously done so, only humans can experience and create signifieds.

Likewise, rather than putting an end to any need for annotation, the Internet's offer of unlimited positive data at the touch of a button instead calls on annotators to undertake more focused analysis of a given textual question in relation to its present context, rather than simply presenting data that any search engine could provide. (What does Pontoppidan seem to have represented for Kierkegaard and his contemporaries? Where else does Kierkegaard mention him? etc.)⁶

Another reason for questioning the boundary that purports to separate the twin phenomena of translation and annotation lies in the fact that it is constituted so differently in different languages, media, genres and individual practices. Take, for example, two recent translations of Spanish Golden Age poetry, both published by university presses: Christopher Johnson's 2009 *Selected Poetry of Francisco de Quevedo* and the section of Roberto Tejada's (2010) poetry collection, *Exposition Park*, entitled "Golden Age".

Both sets of translations, seeking to engage the reader emotionally and intellectually, clearly strive to be "real pieces of literature [. . .] and not dull transcripts". In his preface, Johnson expresses the conviction that Quevedo's verse "will win him an English reader's devotion" (2009, 24). Both Johnson and Tejada eschew footnotes in favour of less intrusive endnotes, attaching no mark to the poems themselves that might deflect the reader's attention from them. Johnson's translations appear in the familiar parallel text format with the originals on the left and a discreet numeral every tenth line; his thirty pages of endnotes aim "to give the poems some historical context, identify important literary precedents, and adumbrate somewhat major themes and currents of reception" (191). In keeping with our Loeb archetype, his work anticipates a reader, possibly even an ordinary reader, who approaches these texts as literary classics of lasting significance and wishes to enter their sphere via translation, with the aid of a limited degree of contextualisation.

Tejada's translations are also presented bilingually. However, they are unexpectedly positioned *above* the Spanish; here, the original is footnote. Both text and translation are on the right-hand page while other poems by Tejada himself appear on the left. Indeed, it isn't immediately clear which of the poems are translations, for Tejada's translations dispense with the original sonnets' organisation into quatrains and tercets, introducing neologisms ("wind-corpses") and employing a kind of cubist syntax, full of sharp corners, hard assonances and unexpected shifts, that at first seems more connected to the other English poems in the collection than to the Spanish. A closer reading reveals responsive and responsible translations that bear an attentive, devoted and intricate relationship to the Spanish poems they grow out of.

The single paragraph among the volume's endnotes entitled "Golden Age" reads not as annotation but as prose poem; it offers no additional information on any given word or line of text, but rather a glimpse into the project

as a whole: “The timing of translation, like any measurement of when and where to act, matters deeply to the ethics and energies of a language and its culture” (2010, 66). Tejada’s goal, as the arrangement of his pages and the nature of his annotation suggests, is not to assist the reader into a timeless space of classic literature, but to wrench the Golden Age sonnets into the present, expending their cultural capital in the service of a fiercely urgent *now*. In Tejada’s rendering, Garcilaso de la Vega’s lover’s lament might be the voice of a community or individual in the United States today, caught between English and Spanish, assimilation and racial discrimination:

for if, with this very hand I could slaughter
 myself, why—not on my account but because
 so suited—would my enemy do otherwise?
 (Tejada 2010,17)

Though I’ve dwelled on the contrasting layout of their pages, the more crucial distinction between Tejada’s work and Johnson’s resides in the fact that Tejada is identified as the author of the book in which his translations appear, while Johnson is billed as editor and translator. Therein lies the origin of the hierarchical relationship between original and translation/annotation that Tejada’s page layout and translation technique seek to challenge; it is Tejada’s status as author that permits him to mount such a challenge.

Pursuing this elusive boundary into the realm of much of my own work as a translator, I will note that while contemporary Anglophone convention makes annotation (of any sort) a viable recourse for translators of poetry, be it of recent or archaic vintage, translators of fiction confront a different situation. The annotation of a fictional work (by anyone other than its author) typically occurs long after original publication; the notes arrive as confirmation of the work’s classic status.⁷ Perhaps in partial result of this, the Anglophone publishing sphere, and particularly the commercial publishing industry—the sector where contemporary fiction writers have a financial interest in seeing their works appear—only rarely tolerates or even entertains the idea of annotation by the translator of a work of recent fiction. When it is not used as a device by the author himself (in such works as Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*), but introduced into the text by another, the footnote in and of itself, in the context of contemporary fiction, turns out to have semantic content: that content can be translated as “meant for scholars and not for the ordinary reader”. The Anglophone anti-footnote stance in the practice of translating contemporary fiction can be confirmed in any bookstore, magazine or library; I’ll mention here the annual *Best European Fiction* anthologies, edited by Alexander Hemon and published by the Dalkey Archive Press, which present work from across Europe rendered into English by a myriad of translators. Among the hundreds of stories that have appeared in the series since its inception in 2010, not one has been annotated by its translator.

Though this is by no means true of every literary culture,⁸ within the Anglophone sphere, recourse to annotation in the translation of contemporary fiction tends to be regarded as evidence of inadequate skill. The performance of recent or recently translated fictional works is not to be interrupted by asides, references or extraneous information that would distract us, pull us out of the immediate experience of the text. Nuances of meaning, sources and additional contextualisation are to be worked into the translation itself via a literary virtuosity whose tools include techniques such as what Jason Grunebaum (2013) calls the “stealth gloss”, the incorporation of contextual information that is presumed self-evident by the original but is deeply unfamiliar to readers of the translation. The example Grunebaum gives from his translation of Uday Prakash’s novel *The Girl with the Golden Parasol* involves inserting into the text, after a line he translates as “it was two days to Rakshabandhan”, the supplementary clause, key to any understanding of what follows (and as unnecessary and redundant for readers of the original Hindi as a description of Christmas would be for an Episcopalian), “when sisters tie colorful threads of affection—the *rakhi*—around the wrists of their brothers, or those they consider like their brothers” (2013, 162).⁹

Now here’s a curious paradox. Scandal might ensue if Brian Nelson were to insert such a gloss, adding to a line in chapter 4 of Emile Zola’s *The Fortune of the Rougons*, which relates that Jean never had so much as five sous to pay for a *Gloria*, the phrase “that delicious mixture of coffee, sugar and rum he craved” (2012, 299n).¹⁰ Meanwhile, for Grunebaum, it is a matter of firm principle *not* to define Rakshabandhan in a footnote: “if there were no footnotes in the original, I won’t use any in the translation”, he writes in a footnote to his essay (167 n2). It seems reasonable to assume that the difference in approach is attributable to the classic status of Zola’s work and the existence of a scholarly field devoted, among other things, to establishing the text of his books.¹¹ Such scholarship provides material for the prospective annotator/translator to draw on, but also limits the substance of the text—its every jot and tittle pored over and debated—to precisely what the editors of the critical edition or editions have established, thus perhaps rendering the work more brittle, less open to the interpolation of a stealth gloss or other collaborative techniques.¹² A work of contemporary fiction, unfixed by scholarship, more flexibly incorporates into itself the different contexts into which translation inserts it. A textual scholar may consider it his or her task to preserve a text from corruption; a translator of contemporary fiction is probably more concerned with attracting potential readers to it. And while a textual scholar is unlikely to do so, a living author can assent to any number of alterations and interpolations (though translators don’t always seek permission) and may even be eager for them when it is clear that recourse to annotation would affect the work’s saleability. Within the context of an academic conference on textual scholarship, Derrida describes the “rigorous, determinable exteriority of the annotation in relation to the principal, primitive text” as one of the “distinct predicates” of annotation

(1991, 196). But within the marketplace for contemporary fiction, that exteriority is not so rigorous after all.

In the end, it is our idea of what constitutes authorship that turns out to be key in making the distinction between translation and annotation. Yes, both are generally viewed as subordinate to the original text, whether their subordination takes the form of Benjamin's "interlinear version" or the relegation of annotation to the bottom of the page, the back of the book. The annotator, however, is the undisputed *author* of the notes, and this is true whether the annotator is author, editor or translator of the body of the text and whether the notes consist of source references, glosses, digressions or commentary. The relationship of translator to translation is more ambiguous, less immediately visible or graphically delineated. Most translations, of course—or certainly most translations of prose, fictional or otherwise—appear in editions that are neither interlinear nor bilingual; in such cases the translation *is* the page and the original is not present, or, as in historiography, is present only as annotation, as source reference. That may be why translation remains the more troubling instance of the famous deconstructionist "double bind". Derrida, extemporaneously translating himself, says to his academic audience: "[The text] says to the reader [. . .] 'Be quiet, all has been said, you have nothing to say, obey in silence', while at the same time it implores, it cries out, it says, 'Read me and respond: if you want to read me and hear me, you must understand me, know me, interpret me, translate me, and hence, in responding to me and speaking to me, you must begin to speak in my place, to enter into a rivalry with me' " (1991, 202). Deconstructionist texts such as Derrida's 1974 *Glas* propose new typographical layouts, a new textual topography to challenge the "theologico-political" hierarchy of original over translation, annotated text over annotating text. "Peeping the scene" in closer scrutiny of what translators actually do is another way of challenging a similar hierarchy which still seems to exist in the Anglophone university between the practice of textual scholarship and that of translation.

NOTES

1. It's not clear how many of today's "ordinary amateurs" are curling up with Loeb volumes of a summer's eve, but the library's name has, I am told by a colleague in classics, come to be employed as a verb among graduate students preparing for oral exams: "I Loebed the heck out of the Nicomachean Ethics last night", etc.
2. In other contexts, including a paper given by Cassin herself at the Lycée Henri IV in February 2000, this phrase is attributed to Gérard Genette, in reference to Borges. Both authors would undoubtedly have delighted in the conflation.
3. The Rap Genius Web site attributes this note to three authors, Maboo, DLizzie and Lemon; an accompanying graph shows that it was first created by Maboo who contributed 90 per cent of its content. As of 19 January

- 2013, it had been upvoted by 62 members and had received no downvotes. See Rap Genius (n.d.).
4. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (online edition, retrieved 10 January 2013) dates the first use of “sushi” to A.M. Bacon’s *Japanese Interior*: “Domestics served us with tea and sushi or rice sandwiches.”
 5. See also Maureen Freely’s account of her debate with Orhan Pamuk on whether or not to translate Turkish foods such as *börek* (2013, 121).
 6. A recent issue of the literary series *McSweeney’s* uses six versions of Kierkegaard’s 1844 “Skrift-prøver” to launch its romp through “twelve stories translated in and out of eighteen languages by sixty-one authors” (Thirlwell 2012). None of the six authors of versions of “Skrift-prøver” appends a footnote to Pontopiddan or includes any further information about him within the text.
 7. To give but one example, *The Great Gatsby* appeared in 1925, but the first annotated critical edition, by M.J. Bruccoli, was published by Cambridge University Press in 1991.
 8. Again, to give only one example, José Manuel Prieto’s densely intertextual *Livadia* (1999) has no notes, and neither does its English translation by Carol and Thomas Christensen, *Nocturnal Butterflies of the Russian Empire* (2002). The Russian version, *Ливадия*, by Pavel Grushko (2006), includes 155 endnotes.
 9. The dilemma Grunebaum describes in translating “chai” is akin to the issue Heim and Karlinsky confronted with “bagel”. In the world of the Hindi novel he translates, chai is “something that comes in . . . an oversized shot glass” and is “boiled in a dented aluminum pot over a cow-dung fire”. It has “a little layer of something brownish and thick and creamy floating on top that your average Starbucks chai drinker would likely describe as ‘gross’”. Meanwhile, for the US reader chai is “a beverage of double-digit ounces, full of Splenda, topped with soy foam and two shakes of ground cinnamon” (166–167).
 10. Nelson wisely opts to provide the recipe in a footnote, instead.
 11. In his select bibliography, Nelson pays tribute to Henri Mitterand’s “superb” scholarly edition of *Les Rougon-Macquart* in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1960–1967).
 12. Though perhaps not always. Is it a stealth gloss when John Rutherford unpacks the Spanish semantic echoes of the alternate forms of Don Quixote’s name mentioned in the first paragraph of the eponymous novel? “His surname’s said to have been Quixada, or Quesada (as if he were a jawbone, or a cheesecake)” (2003, 25). Might we conjecture that as more and more textual scholarship is amassed over the centuries its sheer accumulation gradually opens up greater freedom to the translator?

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