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The Original is Unfaithful to the Translation: Towards Recognising Originality in Translation

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In his "Sobre el *Vathek* de William Beckford [On William Beckford's *Vathek*]" (1943), Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) paradoxically claims '[e]l original es infiel a la traducción [the original is unfaithful to the translation]'.[1] With these seven words, Borges disrupts the very core of traditional Anglo-American translation studies: in a context where translations are generally regarded as *secondary* to their source texts (ST)—temporally, textually, and in status—Borges affirms that a translation can assume an *independent* existence. A further implication of Borges's (seemingly illogical) declaration is that, in some ways, the translation may be *truer* to the fundamental "spirit" of the original *than the original itself*.

This essay shall thus take Borges's words as a starting point to investigate the possibility of a translation becoming an "original" against which the ST can be measured for "faithfulness", with the ultimate aim of recognising the originality in translation.[2] I shall begin by defining the term "translation", both as an *act* and *product*,[3] and will then introduce the general "invisibility" of the translator and commonly perceived "inferiority" of translations. The third section will

[1] *As quoted in:* Sergio Gabriel Waisman, *Borges and Translation: The Irreverence of the Periphery* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 113.

[2] Although part of this discussion involves engagement with current copyright laws, for the purposes of this essay, the kind of recognition I am most concerned with stimulating first are rather *cognitive* and *perceptive* recognitions that happen internally within the translator (affecting the way they make translation decisions) and within the image of translation in discourses of translation (shifting the position of the translator and TT).

[3] For the purposes of this essay, I will generally discuss translation with *literary* translation in mind (reflecting the context of Borges's quote), though I shall also sometimes consider other "genres" of translation.

outline some source-oriented theories of translation through the umbrella concept of "faithfulness" to the ST. The following section shall tackle alternative conceptions of the relationship between the ST and target text (TT)—first through a consideration of the plurality of meanings "translation" both *outside* and *within* the Anglo-American tradition, and then through an overview of some systematic, functional, and ideological views of translation. I will then briefly consider the circumstances under which an original may be regarded as "unfaithful" to its translation, with the final section dedicated to a reflection on how the translation may come to be regarded as an "original" in its own right.

1. TOWARDS INTERPRETING "TRANSLATION"

In general, translation involves the relationship:

Source Text (ST) → Target Text (TT),

whereby the *act* of translation begins with a starting text (ST) and involves a set of processes that change or "carry it over" into a different form—that is, the final translated *product* (TT). In its narrowest and most common formulation, a translator "reapproximates" a text that originally existed in one language (the *source* language or SL) into another language (the *target* language or TL)—a communicative act that generally improves the ST's accessibility.

Roman Jakobson (1896–1982), however, broadens the boundaries of translation by expanding it to cover three types of transference: (1) *intralingual* translation (or "rewording"), whereby translation occurs *within* the same language; (2) *interlingual* translation (or "translation proper"), whereby translation occurs *across* different languages; and (3)

intersemiotic translation (or "transmutation"), whereby translation occurs between different sign systems altogether.[4] The common tie between these diverse categories (and thus, what assumedly lies at the heart of translation) is the change or *exchange* that occurs in the translation process—resulting in *differences* between the source and translation (whether these occur in the language, mode, or both).

As for exactly *how* the exchange between the ST and TT is achieved, theorists hold differing views of how this is (or *should*) be done. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), for example, claims that:

> 'Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him, or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him.'[5]

Although this quote was later interpreted in terms of the "foreignising" versus "domesticating" debate, Schleiermacher essentially characterises the continuum along which *all* theorised strategies of translation must ultimately lie: the *source*-oriented (**ST** > TT) versus the *target*-oriented approaches (ST < **TT**).

[4] Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 114.

[5] *As quoted in:* Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Application*, 4th ed (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 48.

2. THE "INVISIBLE" TRANSLATOR AND THE "INFERIOR" TRANSLATION

Translation is ultimately a site of contesting powers where a range of agents and other influences are at work. Although the author of the ST is unlikely to be *actively* involved in the translation process (except in the case of self-translations or when otherwise consulted), the author still retains a measure of power over the translation in the form of the ST.

Historically, the Anglo-American tradition has viewed the act of translation as something qualitatively *distinct* from the "original" act of writing. Lawrence Venuti (1953–), for example, attests to the historical "invisibility" of the translator. He attributes this to an 'individualistic conception of authorship' that reduces translation to an inferior, secondary status: 'only the foreign text can be original, an authentic copy […] whereas the translation is derivative, fake, potentially a false copy.'[6]

Under this interpretation, translation is therefore perceived as an "inferior" pursuit, where the positions of the translator and TT are subordinated to the "authority" to which they must always refer back to (that is, the author and ST respectively):

Author (→) **Source Text (ST)**

↓ ↓

Translator (→) Target Text (TT)

Indeed, these asymmetrical relationships are reflected in, and further entrenched by, the 'ambiguous and unfavourable legal status of translation, both in copyright law and in actual contractual arrangements.'[7]

[6] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 6–7.

[7] *Ibid.*, 8.

Feminist theorists draw further parallels between the status of translations and women. Lori Chamberlain, for example, observes how translation discourses are couched in the language and metaphorics of gender. In the context of the paradigm opposing productive (or "masculine", and thus "primary") and reproductive (or "feminine", and thus "secondary") work, originality and creativity are understood in terms of *paternity* and authority. Thus, the "original" labour of writing (a masculine, primary activity) is opposed to the "derivative" labour of translating (a feminine, secondary activity).[8]

Under these conditions, translated literature tends to be judged against the criterion of "fluency", whereby a "good" translation acts like a pane of glass. A translation should not be recognisable as a translation but should rather read like an "original"—which, in this case, is measured by the linguistic and stylistic norms of the receiving audience.[9] Although the notion of "fluency" is very much dependent on a target-oriented approach (in the sense that it must adhere to target language and cultural norms), the need for this "illusion of transparency" is ultimately associated with the heightened status of the original.

3. MEASURING "(UN)FAITHFULNESS" IN TRANSLATION

Another concept traditionally entangled with theories of how translation should be measured is the idea that the TT must somehow remain "faithful" to its ST. [10] Returning to the

[8] Lori Chamberlain, "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 314.

[9] Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 1.

[10] Note here that I use the "faithful versus unfaithful" opposition as an umbrella concept to connect overlapping translation ideals like equivalence, accuracy, adequacy, and fidelity. I find this approach generally appropriate as these notions are all essentially *source*-oriented, in the sense that they focus on the relationship that a TT has with its ST (as opposed to target-oriented approaches, which are more concerned with how the TT will be received in the target context).

gendered metaphorics of translation, this yardstick of "faithfulness" reveals a cultural association between the issues of fidelity in translation and in marriage. The seventeenth century image of *les belles infidels*, for example, both feminise and sexualise translations—like women, translations may either be beautiful or faithful, but rarely both.[11] Fidelity is here defined by 'an implicit contract between translation (as woman) and original (as husband, father, or author)', and there exists a "double standard" where 'the "unfaithful" wife/translation is publicly tried for crimes the husband/original is by law incapable of committing.'[12] Only the translation can be guilty of infidelity and it remains the duty of the translator (in a male, potentially "seductive") to *protect* the "chastity" of the original text (which is now figured as female).[13]

Yet another concept traditionally bound up in the interpretation of the word "translation" is the idea that a "good" one must somehow be "equivalent" to its original, else it risks being an "unfaithful" (or "bad") translation. The concept of equivalence presumes that an "accurate" or "adequate" translation must have a relationship of "sameness" or "similarity" with its ST:

Source Text (ST) = Target Text (TT),

yet theorists disagree about just what should remain "equivalent" between the ST and TT.[14] Traditionally, "equivalence" has been used in relation to *linguistic* aspects only. Yet translations may be equivalent at the level of words, sentences, paragraphs, grammar, or text,

[11] Chamberlain, "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation," 315.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*," 315–316.

[14] Giuseppe Palumbo, *Key Terms in Translation Studie*s (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 42.

for example, and similar in either meaning, form, or else in the "effect" the text has on its target audience (or any combination thereof). But to *which* aspect must a translator pay most attention to first when aiming to preserve the "faithfulness" of the translation?

A text is produced in a certain context and is made up of several overlapping and interrelated components (morphemes, words, sentences, grammar, paragraphs, register, style, layout, function, and so on). Ideally, a translator would be able to balance all these potential forms of equivalence between the ST and TT, but of course this shall never be possible in any real sense. Equivalence can never be achieved perfectly as no two isolated components of different languages or modes can correspond exactly:

Source Text (ST) ≠ Target Text (TT)

Indeed, before even *considering* the meaty problem of culturally-specific concepts, so too may the supposedly simple, shared concepts between cultures only achieve imperfect approximation (due to differences in cultural perceptions or collocations in language, for example). Furthermore, concepts may not remain equivalent even *within* the same language—obtaining different meanings and connotations across different topolects, sociolects, and technical terminologies.

As for which type of equivalence is most important in translation, there has been no consistent and definite answer. Early conceptions of translation theory in European tradition, for example, were most concerned with the distinction between "word-for-word" versus "sense-for-sense" translations—an opposition that has continued in debates concerning the pairings of "form" versus "content" and "literal" versus "free" translations.[15] Yet while the

[15] Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Application*, 32.

concept of "fidelity" had initially been dismissed as literal, word-for-word translation (faithfulness to the *form*), by the seventeenth century it had instead come to be identified with freer, sense-for-sense translations (faithfulness to the meaning or *content*).[16] "Faithfulness" is thus an evolving concept, which has advocated differing strategies to different people in different contexts.

4. TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE VIEWS OF THE ST-TT RELATIONSHIP

Translations need not always aspire for close fidelity (and thus subordinate themselves) to the ST. One needs only to look beyond the western perspective and through the prism of different words and metaphors for "translation" to realise this. The word "translation" entails the meaning of "transporting" or "carrying over",[17] which brings to mind a *spatial* image (perhaps helping to explain, for instance, why translation is often imagined as a process that occurs between different languages and geographical locations). Conversely, India has a more *temporal* impression of translation, where two common words for translation are *rupantar* ("change in form") and *anuvad* ("speaking after" or "following")—neither of which imply fidelity and both of which accept processes of "transcreation" into their definitions.[18] Another conception is that of the Chinese *fanyi* 翻译—a compound of *fan* 翻 ("flip" or "turning [the leaf of a book]") and *yi* 译 ("interpret"; a homonym of *yi* 易 "exchange")—which evokes the

[16] *Ibid.*, 41.

[17] *Ibid.*, 8.

[18] Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 68–69.

reverse of an embroidery (with its loose ends and variations in patterning from the front), and thus implies that translation is not expected to be equivalent in all respects.[19]

Yet even *within* the European tradition, the high-status of the ST has not always plagued the translator. Instead, the notion developed 'as a result of the invention of printing and the spread of literacy, linked to the emergence of the idea of an author as "owner" of his or her text.'[20] Recent theories have also emerged to challenge the dominance of the ST over the translation process, which reveal that it is possible—if not more *desirable*—to prioritise the TT over the ST.

4.1 Poly-system Theory and the Literary Context

Translation occurs not in a void, but against the context of a complex web of cultural, social, political, historical, and other environmental factors. Itamar Even-Zohar's (1939–) poly-system theory, for example, focuses on *literary* context and conceives of literature as being made up of multiple systems in which different literatures (and different genres within each literary system) compete for dominance. According to this theory, translated literature remains in a secondary, marginal position when the literary tradition is strong,[21] such as in the Anglo-American tradition where there is a primarily unidirectional flow of translation *out* of English and into other languages and cultures. On the other hand, however, translated literature may

[19] *Ibid.*, 72.

[20] Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, "Introduction: Of Colonies, Cannibals and Vernaculars," in *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

[21] Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 193.

take a more central position when a culture's literature is either: (1) "young"; (2) "peripheral" or "weak"; or else (3) when there are turning points, crises, or a literary vacuum to be filled.[22] Lin Shu's 林紓 (1852–1924) 1903 translation of *Aesop's Fables*, for example, can be set in the context of the massive wave of translation *into* Chinese and *from* Western literature during the late-Qing and early-Republic period in China—a phenomenon attributed to the social, cultural, and political upheaval troubling China at the time (thus correlating to Even-Zohar's third condition).

The position that translated literature occupies within the poly-system is significant in that, not only does it determine its socio-literary status, but it also determines *how* translation practice is approached. Where translation occupies a central or *primary* (and thus "innovative") position in the poly-system, translators tend to opt for approaches that adhere more closely to SL norms—likely breaking TL conventions in the process.[23] Conversely, where translation occupies a peripheral or *secondary* (and thus "conservative") position, translators tend to favour its assimilation to TL norms.[24] Respectively, these two approaches can be understood to correlate to Gideon Toury's (1942–2016) notions of "adequacy" (a *source*-oriented approach) and "acceptability" (a *target*-oriented approach).[25] In the case of the latter approach, the power relationship between the ST and TT is levelled out, or even reversed, as the ST no longer remains the main reference point in the assessment of whether a translation is a "good" translation.

[22] *Ibid.*, 193–194.

[23] *Ibid.*, 196.

[24] *Ibid.*, 197.

[25] Gideon Toury, "The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 201.

4.2 Functionalist Approaches: Text Types and *Skopos* Theory

Functionalist approaches regard translation as a communicative act that aims to produce a TT that is *functionally* equivalent to its ST (though it is recognised that the aims of the TT and ST *may* differ).[26] Katharina Reiss (1923–2018), for example, distinguishes between three main communicative forms: (1) *informative*, which focuses on communicating *content* (or "plain facts"); (2) *expressive*, which concentrates on communicating *artistically organised* content (that is, a creative expression of the sender's attitude); and (3) *operative*, which aims to communicate in a *persuasive manner* (that is, to induce a specific behavioural response).[27] The text type thus informs the sender which language style is most appropriate to communicate its message—which is logical, aesthetic, and dialogic respectively (although a mix of styles may be used if a text has more than one function). [28]

Similarly, *skopos* theory regards translation as a *purposeful* action, whereby decisions made in the translation process are governed by a certain aim (the *skopos*) which the TT is intended to fulfil—thus a "good" translation satisfies its function.[29] While this theory does not reject the concept of equivalence altogether, it certainly subordinates it to the *purpose* of translation and consequently "dethrones" the ST. Instead, the focus is oriented on the TT and

[26] Of course, this raises the issue of whether it is possible to always know the intentions of the original author and commissioner of the translation.

[27] Katharina Reiss, "Type, Kind and Individuality of Text: Decision Making in Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 163.

[28] Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Application*, 115.

[29] Palumbo, *Key Terms in Translation Studies*, 107.

its context, with translators possessing the agency to determine for themselves the role that the ST plays in their translational action.[30]

The extent to which a text must be "rewritten", and the kinds of strategies employed by the translator, are therefore determined on a case-by-case basis according to the unique circumstances of the project (which includes, but is not limited to, the commissioner, end-user, translator, and the wider context of publication). For example, if a translation is intended purely for academic or posterity's sake, a source-oriented approach that aims for close textually equivalent (or even literal) translation is probably most suitable. For entertainment purposes, however, a target-oriented approach prioritising free, fluent, and creative translation would be more appropriate.

4.3 Theories of Power: Constraints, Politics, and Ideologies in Translation

It has already been noted that the act of translation cannot be completely isolated from its context. Instead, issues stemming from *power* underly decision-making at all levels of the process—from text selection, to the translation strategies adopted, and to the ways in which the TT is received in a given culture.[31] Thus, language constraints (such as textual "faithfulness" to the ST or else the constraints imposed by the differences in languages) are only *one* consideration a translator must contend with.

André Lefevere (1945–1996), for example, posits translators as operating under a number of additional constraints (which primarily derive from the beliefs and norms of the target culture), including: patronage (realised in economic and political power), the translator's

[30] Hans J. Vermeer, "Skopos and Commission in Translational Action," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 222.

[31] Palumbo, *Key Terms in Translation Studies*, 88.

ideology (both political and ethical), and other poetical constraints.[32] Furthermore, translational action is a communicative process that involves a series of roles and players (all of whom have their own personal interests and powers) and, distinguishing "loyalty" (an *interpersonal* category) from "faithfulness" (a *intertextual* category), Christiane Nord (1973–) describes how translators have a 'responsibility […] toward their partners in the translational interaction.'[33]

One of the ethical dilemmas of the translator is to balance these conflicting environmental constraints and interpersonal loyalties towards the multiple agents with stakes in the project.[34] Indeed, Nord explains that "loyalty" commits the translator *bilaterally* (to *both* the source *and* the target side), which means respecting the intentions and expectations of *all* the partners in translation and justifying translation strategies used (especially when they do not match one or more of the partners' expectations).[35]

An idea connected to Lefevere's view of constraints that, through translation, literature can be manipulated and rewritten according to ideological or poetological concerns (whether these be conformist or rebellious).[36] Translators have tremendous power in that they are positioned to anticipate the potential effects of certain linguistic choices and expressions on the

[32] Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Application*, 199–200.

[33] Christiane Nord, "Function plus Loyalty: Ethics in Professional Translation," *Génesis Revista Científica do ISAG* 6 (2007): 15.

[34] These agents include, but are not limited to: the ST author, the "patron" (the client, or whoever else commissions the translation, which may or may not be distinct from the publisher), the imagined audience, and other intervening agents like critics, public authorities, or parents (in the case of children's literature).

[35] Nord, "Function plus Loyalty: Ethics in Professional Translation," 15–16.

[36] Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Application*, 199.

intended audience, and thus they also have the ability to abuse this power (by ignoring the expectations of their partners, or by infusing the translation with their own ideological views).[37]

In a similar vein, postcolonial theories acknowledge the inherent violence in the act of translation and connect translation to the history of European colonialism—where translation saw Europe as the great "original" and took shape 'within the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism'.[38] Careful attention must therefore be paid to the "hegemonic" power structures of translation (an idea that maps onto poly-system theory), but also to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942–) calls the "politics of translation". Spivak cites, for instance, the example of feminist Bengali writers, and is concerned with the ideological consequence of the translation of 'Third World' literature into hegemonic English (and languages of the ex-colonisers), where the voices and identities of the politically less powerful are eliminated and standardised.[39] While this kind of view might lead back to source-oriented approaches of translation when translating *into* a hegemonic language and culture (prioritising "foreignisation" over fluent or "domesticated" translations), its origins are vastly different from early conceptions of "faithfulness" to the ST as it is portrayed in the frame of the need to be decidedly *visible* in order to resist against traditionally hegemonic powers.

[37] Christiane Nord, "Manipulation and Loyalty in Functional Translation." *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 14, no. 2 (2002): 42.

[38] Bassnett and Trivedi, "Introduction: Of Colonies, Cannibals and Vernaculars," 3–5.

[39] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 399–400.

5. WHEN THE ORIGINAL IS "UNFAITHFUL": INVERTING THE ST → TT RELATIONSHIP

I return once more to the metaphorics of "fidelity", where the relationship between the (masculine) ST and (feminine) TT is perceived to parallel that of a traditional marriage between a man and "his" wife. Like in traditional conceptions of infidelity in *marriage* (where only the *woman* could be found at fault), infidelity in *translation* has traditionally been perceived as a unidirectional force that makes it impossible for the original to be guilty of infidelity. Over time, however, the institution of marriage has changed to grant women greater equality in both status and rights—might the same phenomenon have happened for their metaphorical counterparts (the TT) in translation? Can the ST *truly* be unfaithful to the translation?

Borges, of course, believes this to be possible—as is apparent in his clever inversion of the usually less questioned claim that "the *translation* is unfaithful to the original". His view repositions the status of the translation so that it sits equal to, if not *above*, the ST:

Source Text (ST) → Target Text (TT) *OR*

Target Text (TT)

↓

Source Text (ST)

Logically the inversion ST ← **TT** is impossible: the initial act of translation relies on the chronological progression **ST** → TT.[40] But there may also be certain circumstances where this is more true—particularly when taking a *functional* view of translation. The functional view of

[40] One interesting (but tangential) consideration is how a translated text may, in some (albeit rare) cases, end up having a greater influence than the original—to the extent that it may affect how the ST is perceived and potentially even cause *alterations* of the original text (which might look more like **ST** ⇆ **TT** than ST ← **TT**). However, this reversed process can only occur *after* the **ST** → TT relationship plays out in the initial translation.

translation, of course, prioritises the intended message of communication—whether this be defined in terms of the supposed *purpose* and attitudes of the sender (the "spirit" of the text), or else the actual *effect* of the message on its receivers. Adhering too strictly to the constraints set by the ST, for instance, may actually result in a translation *failing* to fulfil its intended function—or, to flip this around, the ST may be "unfaithful" to the translation because it is not consistent with the envisioned *purpose* of translation (which may lie in the exact content of the ST, or else in the manner of its expression).[41]

Take the case of a multi-lingual exhibition in New Zealand, for example, where the purpose of translation is to improve the *user-friendliness* of the information provided (both in terms of accessibility and inclusion). Exhibition labels and other texts are written first in one language (in this case English), ready to be translated into the other languages—but the functions of *all* texts are to engage and inform the audience. For an exhibition label written in English about the Dutch tradition of Sinterklaas, for instance, it makes sense for it to begin by explaining *what* it is (acknowledging the fact that the average English patron is not expected to have this knowledge). When it comes to the *Dutch* translation of that same label, however, the explanation included in the ST no longer remains appropriate because it does not contribute towards engaging and informing the audience—and in fact may even work to do the exact *opposite* (as all those who can read Dutch are expected to *already* have that knowledge).[42] Complete adherence to the ST, therefore, can sometimes *betray* the intended purpose.

[41] I imagine such an incompatibility between the ST and the TT's function could exist regardless of whether the TT's function remains the same as that of the ST.

[42] I owe this example to Joost de Bruin's talk on his involvement in the translation of exhibition labels for the Oranjehof Dutch Connection Centre at Te Awahou Nieuwe Stroom, which was presented at Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, NZ, October 15, 2018.

6. REDEEMING TRANSLATION: AN ORIGINAL IN ITS OWN RIGHT?

Traditionally, it has been axiomatic to believe that translations may never even *begin* to approach the original, and talk of translation has thus often been understood in terms of "loss". However, if it is possible to *lose* something, then it must also be possible to *gain* something. Although rare, on occasion the original author—including the likes of Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014)—will comment that they *prefer* a translation to their own, original work. In an encounter with a French admirer (who had favoured the French translation over the original English), for example, James Thurber (1894–1961) exclaimed 'I tend to lose something in the original.'[43] Although this was perhaps spoken somewhat ironically, it does attest to the fact that something can be *gained* in translation. And, if something can be gained, it must therefore also be possible for a translation to be "just as" good as its original, if not "even better". Indeed, Borges is one such advocate that a translation may, on rare occasion, *surpass* its original.

An assumption underlying the supposed "superiority" of the original is a belief in its "inviolable integrity", yet the opposition of the "untouchable" (and thus "perfect") original with the conversely subordinate translation is inevitably misleading: the very notion of "perfection" involves 'a static construct in a static context and presupposes a static ideal'—putting it at odds with the dynamic forces of language, society, and culture.[44] Indeed, if "accessibility" was the criterion by which a text was judged, then 'every contemporary

[43] *As quoted in:* Eugene Eoyang, "I Lose Something in the Original: Translation as 'Enhancement'," in *Translation of Poetry and Poetic Prose: Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 110*, ed. Sture Allén (Singapore: World Scientific, 1999), 296.

[44] *Ibid.*, 297, 310.

translation is superior not only to the obsolete original, but to every previous translation.'[45] And, if a translation *can* exceed its original, than surely it *also* deserves recognition as an "original" in its own right?

6.1 Towards Conceiving the Translation as a "Original"

Viewing the ST and TT as static entities paints an incomplete picture of translation. In the relationship **ST** → TT, a TT will never be "final"—no matter how many critics declare it to be the "definitive translation". The principle of accessibility shows that, as languages and cultures change and transform, new translations are needed to replace older translations which, just like their sources, can become "stale" or outdated.[46] More editions of the ST will follow—new translations in target language or context, contemporary "updates" or adaptations in the source language or context, and yet further *translations* of translations. Just as the TT cannot be the "end", the ST may itself not be the "beginning" of the translation chain, in the sense that it is not the "original" original.

While the concepts of a "source" and "original" text both refer to an initial "starting" text, they contain slightly differing (albeit overlapping) connotations. When Lin Shu worked to translate *Aesop's Fables* into Chinese in the early twentieth century, for example, his *starting* text was most likely Reverend George Fyler Townsend's *Three Hundred Æsop's Fables Literally Translated from the Greek: With Fifty Illustrations by Harrison Weir* (1874).[47] As far as is known, however, the fables were *first* transmitted orally among the lower classes of

[45] *Ibid.*, 309.

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Bryony Campbell, "'Localising' the Foreign: A Sociohistorical Reading of Lin Shu's *Yisuo yuyan*" (CHIN489 Essay, Victoria University of Wellington, 2017), 18; It should be noted that the exact source for Lin's translation remains unclear. Pei-Lin Wu identifies Townsend's *Æsop's Fables* as the most probable source for Lin's translation in "Aesop's Fables in China: The Transmission and Transformation of the Genre"

Ancient Greece in the fifth or sixth century BCE. Therein is illustrated the difference between the "source" and "original": the "source" for Lin's *Yisuo yuyan* 伊索寓言 (1903; *Aesop's Fables*) was Townsend's book which, in turn, was itself a translation (or perhaps even a *translation* of a translation) of the "original" fables from Ancient Greece.

Thus, chronologically speaking, both a "source" and an "original" text similarly *precede* its translation—a translation cannot exist without another text existing before it. The semantic difference between the two, however, lies within the potential proximity between the "translation" and its "preceding text" in the translation process: a translation is always produced *directly* in reference to its "source" text (which may or may not be the "original" text); on the other hand, a translation may be *indirectly* produced from the "original" text, should it be mediated first through either one or more additional translations (which applies to *translations* of translations, as in Lin Shu's *Yisuo yuyan*). Thus, the relationship between the "source" and its translation may often be closer than that between the "original" and its translation (where there could be any number of intervening factors between).[48]

Conceptions of an "original" are also further problematised by its potential instability. We can never know, for example, *exactly* how "faithful" later translations of *Aesop's Fables* are to its first "original"—its initially *oral* nature of circulation no doubt made certain modifications unavoidable before the stories were eventually transcribed. Similarly, many other "original" texts have been lost in time—including many of the Chinese classics, for instance, where later copies have now assumed statuses as "originals" (in the sense that they have become the "authoritative" basis for translation). What does it mean, then, for a work to be "original"?

(ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012). However, while Wu specified the 1867 edition, my own study comparing the order of the fables suggests that its 1874 edition is more likely.

[48] Despite acknowledging this distinction between the "source" and the "original", I find that these two concepts are generally used interchangeably (with "original" simply meaning a "source" text)—albeit with the exception of cases like Lin Shu's *Yisuo yuyan*. I thus assume Borges's "original" to subsume both meanings.

In copyright law, an original is defined by what it is *not*: a "copy". The act of "copying" relates to the (relatively unimaginative) tasks of "reproducing", "recording", or "storing" some material, by any means, and in any material form or medium.[49] While translations involve some form of alteration and are thus not *prima facie* copies of the original, neither are they legally classified as an "original". Instead, as a translator's potential for originality is regarded as being inherently limited by the ST, translations are classified as "adaptations" or "derivative works" that are based on an original work of authorship—a midpoint, then, between an "original" and a "copy".

Since rights of authorship are granted on the basis of "original creation"—defined as original *expression* rather than original *thought*—translators *may* be permitted to copyright their work when they translate into a different language (where the translation is thus recognised as another, potentially original, form of expression).[50] Ultimately, however, the status of the translator as an author remains ambiguous. '[T]he translator is and is not an author', Venuti claims: the translator's rights are ultimately surrendered to the original author, who enjoys the exclusive rights for authorising alterations of the text (including translations) according to the original terms of their copyright.[51]

[49] *Copyright Act* 1994 (New Zealand). Version as at 01 October 2018. http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1994/0143/latest/DLM345634.html

[50] Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 9.

[51] *Ibid.*, 8–9.; Note, too, that contractual arrangements often surrender the translator's rights to the publisher, organisation, or other client (or "commissioner") of the translation.

6.2 Towards Recognising the Translator as "Author"

In copyright law, the author is (1) 'he to whom anything owes its origin; originator; maker' and, for a work to be granted copyright protections (that is, for it to be regarded as an "original"), (2) 'originality is required.'[52] The definition of this "originality" is crucial to the question of whether a text passes as an "original", yet it has been variously described in copyright law as: (a) the *contribution* of the author (the individual *effort*); (b) the original *expression* of the author (which contains the unique *personality* of the author); (c) an appreciable amount of *creative* authorship; or else (d) simply the *absence* of plagiarism.[53] *Can* the translator be recognised as an author?

Venuti recognises that that the language (or *expression*) of the translation decisively "originates" with the translator, yet the first condition of authorship cannot be completely satisfied as the translator's reliance on the ST means that they cannot be the TT's sole origin.[54] For him, therefore, 'a translator's originality lies in choosing a particular foreign text and a particular combination of dialects and discourses […] in response to an existing cultural situation.'[55] Indeed, this acknowledgement of the translator's originality corresponds to (a) and (b), where the *personal* labour and character of the translator is particularly noticeable in decisions concerning language (consider, for example, how two different translators will never produce exactly identical translations of the same text). A translation is also likely to satisfy (d) in the sense that, by its very nature, translation expresses a message in a manner *distinct* from

[52] Howard B. Abrams, "Originality and Creativity in Copyright Law," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 55, no. 2 (1992): 6.

[53] *Ibid.*, 6–7, 15; Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 9.

[54] Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 311.

[55] *Ibid.*

the original—and, even if it expresses similar content in a similar order, it is still recognised as a *legitimate* (albeit secondary) form of creation.

The most contentious aspect of originality concerns the further definition of (c)—just what does it mean for an author to be "creative"? Part of the aim of creation is to present *novel* (that is, "original", "unexpected", or "new") ideas, and thus "creativity" relates to processes of intellectual production, thought, and conception—which is further distinguished as 'some injection of independent aesthetic or artistic judgment in the decisions concerning the selection, coordination, or arrangement' of the content.[56] Another aspect of creativity regards the ability to balance the need of being both novel and *appropriate* (that is, "useful" and "adaptive" towards constraints).[57]

Translation, by necessity, involves change and transformation—translation is an act of "rewriting", and more generous definitions of translation accept translation as "adaptation". Creative skills are often required to successfully reconcile conflicting notions (like between fidelity and freedom) and conflicting loyalties (towards different agents involved in translation).[58] Furthermore, translations can be conceived as "reincarnations" that enrich the life of an original. Creativity is at the very essence of translation and thus, so too, must the act of translation contain aspects of originality. It therefore follows that a translator can, more or less, be regarded as an author of an "original" work—an association that becomes stronger the greater the use of techniques like rewriting or adaptation.

[56] Abrams, "Originality and Creativity in Copyright Law," 18.

[57] Lucía V. Aranda, "Forms of Creativity in Translation," *Cadernos de Tradução* 1, no. 23 (2009): 23-24.

[58] *Ibid.*, 24; Abrams, "Originality and Creativity in Copyright Law," 17.

Venuti notes that the even the *thought* of recognising the translator as an author challenges the individualistic conception of authorship upon which the "original" text is defined, suggesting that 'no writing can be mere self-expression because it is derived from a cultural tradition at a specific historical moment.'[59] Under this conception, the very idea of "originality" is called into question: all writing is undertaken under specific political, literary, and sociohistorical conditions, which the writer draws on in their creation and in a sense "copies" (whether intentionally or not).

More radically, Octavio Paz (1914–1998) characterises translation as a *primary* (rather than marginal) activity, where *all* acts of creation and communication are simply another form of translation:

> 'Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text. No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation - first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase.'[60]

In a similar vein, Carlos Fuentes (1928–2012) views "originality" as a cultural construct: 'the sickness of a modernity that is always aspiring to see itself as something new.' [61]

If we accept such conceptions that overturn the existence of "originality" and thus challenge the notion of authorship upon which the "original" is based, then the distinction

[59] Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 311.

[60] *As quoted in:* Bassnett and Trivedi, "Introduction: Of Colonies, Cannibals and Vernaculars," 3.

[61] *Ibid.*

between the original and the translation is understood to be a complete fabrication in the first place. Yet, in practice, these distinctions continue to be made between the original and the translation. Where does the boundary lie? At what point is the translator allowed to forget the author and the ST and become the so-called "owner" of the TT? At what point does a creation cease existing merely as a translation and become an "original" in its own right?

6.3 Towards Finding a "Balance"

The nature of translation is such that it is impossible, not to mention *irresponsible*, to completely disregard the importance of the "original" ST. Firstly, to ignore the origins of a translation would result in a paradox, for the translation would never have existed without the "original" in the first place. In light of this recognition, loyalty or, at the very least, *respect* towards the author cannot be totally ignored in translation. Secondly, translations tend to be produced in the service of someone *else* (whether this be defined in terms of commissioner or the intended audience), and with that comes a set of responsibilities that form the professional ethics of translation—among which, for example, include faithfulness (or at least "respect") towards the ST, and loyalty to the author of the ST.

Yet at the same time, translators also need to be able to move *beyond* the ST, and consider a range of other factors (including the other players in translation and the target context in which it will be published). This is certainly made easier once the translator gives themselves freedom from the ST constraints by treating the translation as if it is an original piece of writing.

The key, therefore, is to find the right balance between adhering to the original and treating the translation as an original in its own right, but to do this a translator must first 'abandon the concept of the original as an ideal to be approached, and remember that, even in the most exalted examples, [they] are not dealing with a sacred text but with a human

construct.'[62] Put simply, the ST and TT must first be approached as *equals* engaged in a meaningful and cooperative dialogue of exchange. Once the translation assumes a more "final" (which, in this case, means "polished" or "refined", and not "last ever") version, *then* could we begin to regard the text as an original in its own right.

7. CONCLUSION

Venuti calls translators to action, arguing that they must force a revision of the cultural, economic, and legal codes that marginalise and exploit them and their work.[63] Much of this effort to make translation more visible would rely on shifting the typically subordinate position of the translator and TT in the Anglo-American tradition—statuses that both originated in, and continue to be perpetuated by, copyright laws and the gendered metaphorics of translation.[64]

Definitions of "good" translations and translation strategies crucially centre around the relationship between the ST and its translation. Conventional yardsticks for the evaluation of the TT are the ST and the target context, which correlate respectively to *source*-oriented and *target*-oriented translation strategies, while notions like "faithfulness" (an *intertextual* category) and "loyalty" (an *interpersonal* category) have often dominated discourses of translation. Alternative views of translation (including: poly-system theory, text types and *skopos* theory, and views on the power of translation), however, place translation as operating in a wider historical, social, and political context. The target context, therefore, is an important

[62] Eoyang, "I Lose Something in the Original: Translation as 'Enhancement'," 309.

[63] Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 311.

[64] *Ibid.*; Venuti offers the suggestion that this can be achieved through 'developing innovative translation practices in which [the translator's] work becomes visible to readers, but also by presenting sophisticated rationales for these practices'.

consideration, and the ST may be somewhat incompatible with the intended *function* of the TT (to the extent that the ST could be considered "unfaithful" to it its translation).

Borges's assertion that 'the original is unfaithful to the translation' is a gnomic and provocative declaration that prompts a fresh perspective on translation through the inversion of the more traditional claim that "a translation is unfaithful to its original". The assertion opens up pathways into discussions concerning copyright law, originality, and the ethics of translation, for example, and questions the very foundation of more traditional theories of translation that focus on the "untouchable" status of the original.

Redeeming the translation as an original in its own right is a thorny issue as the meanings of "originality" and "creativity" (and thus those of "authorship" and an "original" work) are somewhat abstract and, once it is recognised that no literature exists in a vacuum, it is difficult to know where to draw the line between original and non-original creation. Borges, of course, claims that it *is* possible to consider the translation as an original work, and even suggests that the translation may *surpass* the original. However, it should be noted that the recognition that a translator can become an author does *not* automatically give them the freedom to completely ignore the translation's "humble" beginnings. Rather, in the initial act of translation this recognition should allow the translator and translation to enjoy a "cooperative" relationship with their "equal counterparts" of the author and ST, while the TT can move on to a more independent existence (as an "original" work) only *after* the translation has been refined through this dialogue between the ST and TT.

This essay has been an overview of how the claim 'the original is unfaithful to the translation' deconstructs certain assumptions about translation, and I regret that I cannot more exhaustively and intensively explore these issues, as well as the implications these ideas have

for translation practice. But, for now, as to the questions of *how* an original could be "unfaithful" to its translation, and *when* a translation can (or should) be recognised as an original work, I offer the somewhat unsatisfactory yet all too frank conclusion: there is no short, universal answer—*it all depends on the context*.

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