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**Mind style and visibility in translation – A stylistically aware translation of
Judith Hermann’s short story *Rote Korallen***

Contents

Introduction

Preliminary notes: the author and her oeuvre

1. Style, mind-style and awareness thereof – a theoretical framework for translation
2. Stylistic awareness in practice
 - 2a. Synopsis of *Rote Korallen*
 - 2b. Illustration of selected translation choices
3. Reader-responses and issues regarding fluency and visibility of the translator

Conclusion

Bibliography

Appendix: Judith Hermann – Red Coral (translated by Jana Loorparg)

Introduction

This project was created out of three things: a deep affection for the literature of Judith Hermann, curiosity of how her work has been translated into English, and a strong interest in pursuing my own translation of one of her texts. But before I go on any further, I need to make one thing very clear: there is nothing wrong with the existing translation of Hermann’s 1998 debut, *Sommerhaus, später*, out of which I have chosen the opening story as the subject matter of this essay. On the contrary: the existing translation is coherent, reads fluently, and was honoured with the Helen and Kurt Wolff Prize in 2003 as “an excellent transposition of the German work, which resulted in an impressive and rhythmically strong English text (...), captured the atmosphere of the original and admirably recreated the tone and language pulse of the German short stories.”¹ And so, when I say a strong interest in pursuing my own translation, I do not mean this in any way that suggests the existing translation is faulty and needs re-doing. Rather, the objective behind this project was to employ a different translation strategy in order to carry over essential aspects of Hermann’s text.

German is my native language, and as such I have a strong attachment to Hermann’s writing. Her work, defined by an unmistakable “elegiac tone” (Biendarra, 2014: 221), and bearing strong resemblance to the sober realism of Raymond Carver and Ernest Hemingway, divides critics and readers alike (Radisch, 2014; Reents, 2014; Hammelehle, 2014; Amazon reviews). As it stands, her debut *Sommerhaus, später* is currently in its twenty-second edition, and has been translated into over twenty languages. Hence, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that Hermann’s book is an important piece of German literature, and it is from this point of view that I first approached the existing translation, and later my own.

¹ Goethe-Institute USA 2019, Helen & Kurt Wolff Prize, Past Prize Recipient Jury Statements, available: <https://www.goethe.de/ins/us/en/kul/bks/hkw.html>

I decided to focus on one single piece from Hermann's debut, the short story *Rote Korallen*, which is also the opening story of the book. The purpose of this project was two-fold. Firstly, I wanted to explore the notion of a stylistically aware translation as put forward by the scholar Jean Boase-Beier (2019). This, almost unavoidably, led me to create a literal, almost word-for-word translation of the story – one that highlights Hermann's unique style, and thus gives priority to form rather than content in the target text.

Noord (1998) defines a literal or documentary translation as a translation that seeks to preserve as many source text elements as possible, thus adhering to extreme fidelity with the source text, and highlighting foreign elements through the preservation of source text structure and syntax. The opposite of such a translation would be an instrumental or free translation, which seeks to adapt the source text to target language conventions and cultural norms as seamlessly as possible, often moving away from the source text entirely. In between these two extremes, we can observe translations with varying degrees of adaptation, depending on the *skopos*, or function of the target text (Munday, 2008).

Judging from my own reading, and from the wording of the jury statement above, the existing English translation of *Rote Korallen* gives a lot of preference to target language conventions, rather than highlighting the structure, syntax and stylistic devices used by the author in the German source text. The result is a text that sounds almost like an English original, and neatly preserves the literary function of the source text. In contrast, by creating a literal translation, my aim was to move away from this 'seamless' approach to translation, which has been dominant in Anglo-American publishing industry for quite some time (Venuti, 2019). In short, I wanted to challenge the idea, that the readability of the target text is more important than preserving stylistic elements and the relationship with the source text, and that the translator should be invisible. And so instead of creating a comfortable, to-be-expected reading experience for the English audience that would take away from the author and put more emphasis on the reader, in the famous words of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1813/2014), I left Hermann alone, and moved the English reader towards her.

The result of this approach is a rather foreign-sounding text (cf. Appendix) that does not meet target readers' expectations, but shows high integrity with the German original, and in doing so illuminates Hermann's writing process and preserves her emerging voice (Section 1)). I am going to illustrate some of my thought processes behind certain translation choices in Section 2). Section 3) is dedicated to the applicability of such a translation in the real world. Since I managed to get some reader-responses to my translation from both German and one English native speaker, this part of the essay dedicates itself to the discussion of fluency and visibility.

Preliminary notes: the author Judith Hermann and her oeuvre

Judith Hermann was born in 1970 in Neukölln, West Berlin, where she grew up with her father, a piano teacher and stay-at-home dad, and her working mother (Kaindlstorfer, 1998). After completing her high school degree, she studied German and Philosophy at the Free University of Berlin, and also briefly pursued a degree in Musicology (Dammers et al., 2017). In 1992, Hermann moved to Prenzlauer Berg in the former East, where she enjoyed a bohemian lifestyle, working as a waitress in different cafés and bars, and producing small features for *Deutschlandradio* (Kaindlstorfer, 1998). In 1995, Hermann visited the Berliner Journalisten-Schule (Berlin journalist school) and in 1996, completed an internship with the German-Jewish magazine *Aufbau* in New York (Dammers et al., 2017).

Upon returning to Germany at the age of 27, Hermann began to write short stories. In 1997, she held both the Alfred Döblin Scholarship from the Academy of Arts, Berlin, and the *Werkstattsstipendium* of the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin (Prangel, 2002). In 1998, Fischer Verlag Berlin published her debut *Sommerhaus, später*, a collection of short stories. The book received a lot of attention from the media and literary critics, who hailed her as the rising star of German literature and "the sound of a new generation" (Literarisches Quartett, 1998). Since her debut, Hermann has published four more books – three short story collections and one novel – and

has been awarded several important prizes. For *Alice*, she was shortlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in 2012².

1. Style, mind style and awareness thereof – a theoretical framework for translation

Much of what makes Hermann's writing appealing is her unique approach to language, in other words, her style. Hence, it was of great interest for me to find a theoretical approach that would support a translation focused on the preservation of stylistic elements in *Rote Korallen* (henceforth abbreviated as RK). I found such a perspective in Jean Boase-Beier's "Style and Translation" (2019). Here, Boase-Beier, who has long been an active scholar in the field of style and translation, puts forward the concept of a 'stylistically aware translation', i.e. "reading the source text for style, and translating so that an analytical reader of the translated text will be able to analyse it stylistically, taking account of its internal coherence and its relation to the original" (ibid, p.128).

In the following section, I am going to outline the concept of style, as well as introduce the theoretical concept of mind-style, as first introduced by Roger Fowler (1977). I will also reflect on the stylistic strategy of foregrounding, as formulated by Leech (1963), which is of particular importance for this project.

What is style? Style, in its most basic definition, is the way in which a text has been written, i.e. the particular set of linguistic choices that work together to convey what the author wishes to say about a particular subject. Style is often determined by genre or text type, e.g. kitchen recipes will differ from press releases and medical statements, not only because of their content, but also in the way words and sentences are being used. In literature, style is "what makes any work uniquely itself" (Bellos, 2002:300). This is largely how we distinguish Hemingway from Hesse and Dostoyevsky from García-Marquez. Of course subject matter, genre and the time period in which a work has been written also function as important literary distinctions, but as readers of literary texts, we often feel that we can tell *who* we are reading, because we recognise tone, narrative technique and stylistic devices. *We read* the author, as well as the work, and this is where style becomes an interesting subject matter for translation, though some would argue that "style in this individual sense cannot possibly be the object of translation" (Bellos, 2002:299).

If we follow Jean Boase-Beier's line of argument (2003), then style is a *choice* made by an author, and this particular choice is the result of his or her cognitive state, which in turn is the result of a variety of factors – the author's world view, their cultural background, upbringing, education, the intended audience, and so on and so forth. This idea, that style is the result of a set of choices, is also referred to as *mind-style*, a term first coined in stylistics by the scholar Roger Fowler (1977). Fowler describes mind-style as "distinctive linguistic presentation of an individual mental self". However, Boase-Beier rejects Fowler's definition of mind-style on the basis that the term "mental self" conveys something all too permanent. She offers her own definition of mind-style: "a linguistic style that reflects a cognitive state. In particular it is a linguistic style characterised by distinctive and striking textual patterns" (Boase-Beier, 2003: 254). It is from this definition of mind-style that I am going to pick up my discussion of Hermann's short story RK, and outline its relevance to my own translation process.

RK was the first ever story Hermann wrote – a story told in three parts. What follows is evidence of her cognitive state, which I believe is crucial with regards to approaching the text for translation. The author has expressed in an interview that she felt uncertain about the writing process, as well as the topic she intended to write about, and that she wanted to stay as close to the story as possible.

"Diese drei Geschichten sind verbunden durch die immer gleichen Sätze: "Ist das die Geschichte, die ich erzählen will? Ich bin mir nicht sicher. Nicht wirklich sicher." Es war die erste Geschichte, die ich schrieb, und ich war mir wirklich nicht sicher, ob das die Geschichte war, die ich erzählen wollte. Ich

² <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/independent-foreign-fiction-prize-shortlist-a-whole-world-in-their-words-7640234.html>



hatte ein unbestimmtes Bedürfnis nach einer Geschichte und wusste auch so ungefähr, aber eben nur ungefähr, worum es da gehen sollte. Da habe ich diese Sätze immer so wiederholt, als müsse ich mich selbst vergewissern, dass das tatsächlich die Geschichte ist, die ich erzählen will. Es war eine Frage, die ich an mich selber gerichtet habe. Und diese wiederholte Anfangssequenz war eine Art roter Faden, an dem entlang ich mich durch die für mich damals sehr komplizierte Geschichte gehangelt habe. [...]

(Prangel and Hermann, 2002)

These three stories are connected always through the same sentences: "Is this the story, I want to tell? I'm not sure. Not really sure." It was the first story that I wrote, and I wasn't really sure, whether this was the story I wanted to tell. I had an undefined need for a story, and I knew approximately, but only just approximately, what I wanted it to be about. And so I kept repeating those sentences, as if I needed to convince myself, that this really is the story I want to tell. It was a question I posed for myself. And this repeated beginning sequence was like a red thread I used to pull myself along and through this very complicated story for myself back then. [...]

(Translation my own)

The way Hermann approached the writing of her story as outlined above, is important, because if "almost all texts indicate in their style the cognitive state of the speaker" (Boase-Beier, 2019: 133), then this would mean that we should find evidence of Hermann's approach in RK, i.e. we should be able to observe "distinctive and striking textual patterns" (ibid. p.254) that reflect this methodology, and indeed we do.

Central to RK is the emancipation of a first-person female narrator, who not only reflects on her past, but also has a deep desire to communicate and resolve these issues in the present. According to Bauer (2009), who examines Hermann's story through the lens of contemporary feminism, RK is about transgressing stereotypical gender roles and "promotes the idea that women, while aware of their historical context, have to reclaim control of images of femininity by creating their own narratives" (ibid. p. 52). Thus, in RK Hermann has created a narrator that is highly self-reflective ("is that the story I want to tell?"; 2001:1,10,21), but not exactly experienced in telling her own story – just like the writer herself. Just like the author is looking for a red thread in her narrative, so the narrator is looking for the red thread in her life. Stylistically, this is demonstrated through the use of very simple sentences that vary dramatically in length, frequent repetition of lexical and syntactic units, extreme lack of conjunctions, parataxis, and most strikingly, the use of metaphorical expressions drawn extensively from the domain of **water** (Pasko, 2012). Whilst frequent usage of metaphorical expressions in a literary text can also be projection of mind-style (Semino, 2007), in RK the heavy use of the **water** metaphor serves a different purpose: it builds a powerful bridge to the mythos of Undine (Stephan, 2002), present in Western literature since antiquity. And so, what we are dealing with here is a rather complex piece of writing that reflects the author's cognitive state in its mind-style and stylistic choices, whilst at the same time seeking to join a long-established literary tradition in a move away from conventionality, in search of a new, female narrative.

How then can we approach such a text for translation? As it turns out, we already have. If we keep following Boase-Beier (2019), then "the translation of a literary text is the translation of a particular mind of cognitive state as it has become embodied in the text" (ibid. p. 129). In other words, we need to translate from a place of awareness about mind-style in the text, and respect that every word on the page is a choice made by the author based on her cognitive state, that can and should, to varying degrees, be carried over into the target text.

RK is strongly characterised by *foregrounding*, which is more evidence that the author is in search here for a narrative. Foregrounding is a stylistic literary strategy that seeks to break through automated patterns in order to defamiliarise the reader. The main purpose of foregrounding is to purposely shift the focus from what is being said, to *how* it is being said, to "[deviate] from linguistic or other socially accepted norms" (Leech, 1969: 57). It makes sense that Hermann would employ such a strategy – consciously or unconsciously – given that the search for a narrative is at the core of this piece.

If what we are dealing here with is an author in the process of seeking and establishing a new type of narrative, then it follows that in translation we should preserve this process, in other words, we should *document* it. If in

the original, Hermann is shifting the awareness to how something is being said, then we should preserve this stylistic function in the target text also, and make it stand out. Once again, Boase-Beier affirms this: “texts in which the way of saying – the style – plays an important role require direct translation, as opposed to indirect translation, which, like indirect quotation just gives substance” (Boase-Beier, 2019: 52). What use is it to translate an original text into the conventionally accepted norms of the target language, when the original in the source language is trying to move away from such conventions? Which is precisely what an instrumental or free translation would do. By pursuing a word-for-word, or documentary translation on the other hand, the foreign becomes foregrounded, i.e. the text becomes visible as a translation, and in doing so also creates a strong link with the original: “these reflections of choice in the source text, if carried over to the target text, allow the reader of the target text to similarly engage with the text, creating new meanings and experiencing poetic effects such as changes in mental state” (Boase-Beier, 2019:131)

All of this awareness – about Hermann’s personal and emotional stance towards the story, which have affected her narrative and stylistic choices and become evident as a particular mind-style in the text; evidence from other scholars with regards to the interpretation of her story (Bauer, Stephan) – all of this has greatly affected my reading of the source text, and this reading in turn has also greatly influenced my translation process. Since it was Hermann’s state of mind to stay as close to the text as possible, I too decided to stay as close to the source text as possible, which is why I pursued a word-for-word translation. Luckily, given the proximity between German and English, there was quite a large window of opportunity for this type of translation. And though, whilst the theory behind this seems sound and logical, even ethical to me, in reality my approach is highly idealistic.

I am going to further discuss the applicability of such an approach in the real world – both in relation to implied readership and the publishing industry – in section 4). For now, having outlined important theoretical concepts regarding mind-style, style and the importance of pursuing a stylistically aware translation in the case of RK, in the next section, I will move from theory into practice, illustrating how my approach to respect the author’s mind-style and stylistic choices in the original has led me to make different translation choices in comparison to the existing English translation.

2. Stylistic awareness in practice

In this section, I am going to offer a short synopsis of the source text first, before illustrating some selected passages in my translation *Red Coral* (cf. also appendix), and comparing these with the existing English translation.

2a. Synopsis of *Rote Korallen*

In the first part of the story, the first-person narrator gives an account of her nameless German great-grandparents, who relocate to St. Petersburg at the turn of the twentieth century. While her husband travels through Russia on business, the narrator’s great-grandmother is left alone in the apartment he rents for her on Vasily Island. Isolated and unable to speak the Russian language, she starts to have affairs with several artists and intellectuals. Her only feverish wish though, is to return back to her homeland. When her husband returns after three years in the taiga, he notices a red coral bracelet on her wrist – a gift from one of her lovers. The husband calls upon his friend Isaak Baruw to set up a duel between the rival and himself, in which the husband is shot to death. Seven months after the incident, the narrator’s great-grandmother gives birth to a girl – the narrator’s grandmother – and as the reader suspects, the father is the man who gave her the red coral bracelet. The woman boards one of the last trains leaving Russia amidst the onset of the revolution in late January 1905, returning to Germany for good. As she boards the train, she takes on Isaak Baruw as her loyal servant.

At this point, the story switches to the present, and the narrator describes in detail the relationship with her nameless lover, the great-grandson of Isaak Baruw, whom she meets at the funeral of his parents. Her lover lives in a cold and dusty apartment across from a cemetery in Berlin, where he spends his days lying on the bed staring at the ceiling. He does not talk, but according to the narrator, frequently visits a therapist. The narrator herself describes herself sitting in a corner of the room blowing on dust in the air. Sometimes they have violent sex. The narrator longs to talk about the past with her lover and wants to know what he talks about with his

therapist, but the young man dismisses her. Eventually, the narrator decides to go and visit the therapist herself. The visit is uncomfortable and the narrator pulls on the red coral bracelet, the hand-me-down from her great-grandmother, which she is wearing on her left wrist. The bracelet shatters into pieces, the red coral beads dispersing among the floor in the therapists room. The narrator gets down to her knees to pick them up and when she sees the therapist, throws them at him with force. In that cathartic moment, everything unsaid – past and present – gets released – and free from her past, the narrator leaves the therapist’s office and her lover.

2b. Illustration of selected translation choices

Having offered a short synopsis of RK, I now wish to illustrate how being aware of the stylistic elements in the source text has influenced my translation process. I am going to comment on some of my translation choices, as well as compare these to the existing translation³. The purpose of this analysis, is not to evaluate which translation strategy works or sounds better, but to highlight what we can expect from a stylistically aware translation in the case of RK.

Generally speaking, in my own translation I have tried to adhere to source text syntax as closely as possible, especially with regards to word order. You would think that, given English is my second language, this would be a relatively straight-forward process, but more often than not, this went against my own instinct of wanting to impose a more natural, English word order on the structures in question.

More specifically, at word level, I noticed a register change in examples (a) – (d). The highlighted words and phrases are highly formal expressions in German, example (c) being an extreme case of a dry, bookish, almost bureaucratic German (‘Papierdeutsch’). The stylistic effect here is to evoke a sense of the past.

	Source text	Existing translation	My own translation
(a)	Mein Urgroßvater nahm eine große Wohnung... (11)	My great-grandfather rented a large apartment... (1)	My great-grandfather took a large apartment...
(b)	...und schickte es nach seinem Freund Isaak Baruw. (17)	..and sent her to get his friend Isaak Baruw. (8)	... and sent her for his friend Isaak Baruw.
(c)	Die Künstler und die Gelehrten wurden vorstellig. (13)	The artists and scholars went to see her. (4)	The artists and intellectuals applied to her.
(d)	...und so erklohm Isaak Baruw in letzter Sekunde den deutschen Zug. (18)	...so, at the very last second, Isaak Baruw climbed aboard the German train.	... and so Isaak Baruw, at the last second, scaled the German train.

As the comparison shows, lexical choices in both translations differ. The existing translation captures the meaning very clearly, however, sacrifices the choice of register made by the author. The register is no longer formal, it is casual. In my own translation, I have tried to capture both meaning and register.

Another example that highlights a stylistic choice made by the author at word level (and at textual level for that matter), is the reiteration of the word *Dämmerlicht*, illustrated in examples (e) to (h):

	Source text	Existing translation	My own translation
(e)	Das Licht in der großen Wohnung auf dem Malyj-Prospekt war ein Dämmerlicht (...) (12)	The light in the large apartment on Maly Prospekt was dim , (...) (2)	The light in the big apartment on Maliy Prospekt was a half-light ...

³ *Summerhouse*, later first appeared in 2001 under New-York based publisher Ecco, an imprint of HarperCollins. The text has been translated by the deceased Margot Bettauer Dembo, a prolific translator of both literature and film (NYRB, 2019), who also translated all of Judith Hermann’s subsequent works. The title of her English translation of RK is ‘The Red Coral Bracelet’.



(f)	Sie ließ das Zimmer zurücktauchen ins Dämmerlicht (...) (13)	She let the room subside once more into its twilight (...) (3)	She let the room submerge once more into its half-light (...)
(g)	(...), und meine Urgroßmutter verschmolz mit dem Dämmerlicht zu etwas Traurigem, Schönem, Fremden. (14)	(...), and my great-grandmother melted into the dusk and became something melancholy, beautiful, and foreign. (4)	(...) and my great-grandmother melted with the half-light into something melancholy, beautiful, foreign.
(h)	(...) daß ganz Rußland nichts sei al sein tiefer, dämmriger Traum, aus dem sie bald erwachen werde.	(...), that all of Russia was nothing but a deep, twilight dream from which she would soon awaken. (2)	(...) that all of Russia was nothing more than a deep, half-lit dream from which she would awaken soon.

Since the author uses the word to describe the atmosphere inside an apartment, I did not feel like the words ‘dusk’ and ‘twilight’ – which in their meaning point to the sky, quite capture the meaning. Furthermore, I believe that the reiteration of the word is a stylistic choice that foregrounds not only the atmosphere in the apartment, but through its repetitive usage also becomes a strong metaphor for the great-grandmother’s emotional state, hence I decided to follow the author and chose one consistent word throughout the text, even when the category changed as illustrated in example (h).

At sentence and textual level, we observe that sentence length in *RK* varies considerably. Extremely long, paratactic sentences occur frequently, conjunctions are used rarely. Parataxis, of course, is a stylistic choice. Since the author makes very limited use of conjunctions and subordinate structures, she has to rely on punctuation instead to organise the flow of information. Stylistically, this technique creates a lot of rhythm and pace, and I would argue that it is quite unconventional in German. To illustrate the tension this may cause for translation, let us take a look at the following passages:

	Source text	Existing translation	My own translation
(i)	Mein Urgroßvater sagte auf russisch, er müsse noch einmal nach Wladiwostok fahren, er aß die Pelmeni mit den Händen, während er das sagte, er wischte sich mit den Händen das Fett vom Mund, er sagte, Wladiwostok sei die letzte Station, dann wäre es Zeit zurückzugehen, nach Deutschland. (16)	My great-grandfather told her in Russian that he had to leave once more to go to Vladivostok, he was eating pelmeni with his fingers as he said it; he wiped the grease from his lips with his hands. He said that Vladivostok was his last stop; then it would be time to return to Germany. (7)	My great-grandfather said in Russian that he needed to go to Wladiwostok one more time, he ate the pelmeni with his hands while he said that, he wiped the grease from his mouth with his hands, he said, Wladiwostok would be the last stop, then it would be time to go back, to Germany.

In example (i), indirect speech and action are interlinked through the use of interdependent sentences, creating a vivid scene. Dembo’s strategy is to use semicolons and break up the sentence with a full stop. Since this string of sentences through the use of commas is already unconventional in German, I decided to stick to the unconventionality in my own translation, letting the importance of preserving the pace override the need for grammaticality.

Example (j) further illustrates the problems posed by Hermann’s sentence structures. She omits full stops and subordinate clauses, instead letting short sentences run into each other. Again, in my strategy, I decided to transfer these choices into the target text:



(j)	Ich hatte, seitdem ich bei meinem Geliebten war, schon lange nicht mehr wirklich gesprochen, ich sprach kaum mit ihm, und er sprach so gut wie nie mit mir, immer nur sagte er diesen einen Satz, und es gab Augenblicke, in denen ich dachte, die Sprache besteht einzig und allein aus diesen sieben Worten: Ich interessiere mich nicht für mich selbst. (21)	I hadn't really talked for a long time; for as long as I had been with my lover I'd hardly ever spoken to him, he practically never talked to me, saying only this one sentence. There were times when I thought the language consisted solely and exclusively of six words: "I am not interested in myself." (13)	I had, ever since being at my lover's, for quite some time not spoken really, I hardly spoke with him, and he virtually never spoke with me, all he ever said was this one sentence, and there were moments in which I thought, language solely consists of these six words: "I am not interested in myself."
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Omitting full stops however, is not the only peculiarity in Hermann's use of punctuation. Hermann also omits the use of a question mark in two instances to convey phonological information, i.e. the tone of the speaker (see examples (l) and (m) below). In these instances, I believe that being a native speaker of German has been of great advantage. Although subtle, the omission of the question mark in both instances is very meaningful and adds a lot more depth to the text and characters. It is almost ironic that the sentence before the question in example (l) is "he said in German" – it is perfectly conveyed in omitting the question mark. Equally, the cool, professional tone of the therapist that one would expect out of his character and office description is candidly conveyed in the use of a full-stop.

	Source text	Existing translation	My own translation
(l)	Er sagte auf deutsch: "Was ist das." (16)	In German, he said, „What's that?" (7)	He said in German: "What's that."
(m)	Ich hob den Kopf, er tippte mit der nadelspitzen Mine seines Bleistifts auf die glänzende Schreibtischplatte, ich lächelte verlegen, er sagte: „Worum geht es Ihnen denn.“ (26)	I raised my head, and he tapped the gleaming desktop with the needle-sharp point of his pencil. I smiled in embarrassment, and he said, "What is it that's worrying you?" (18)	I raised my head, he tapped with the needle-sharp lead of his pencil on the shiny desktop, I smiled bashfully, he said: "What is this about for you then."

Examples (a) and (m) by far do not constitute the whole list of translation choices I have made. However, I hope that having illustrated some of the more interesting examples, I provided a good overview of my approach in practice, which highly values integrity with the source text.

In the following section I would now like to move away from the theoretical discussions of style in translation, and examples of a stylistically aware translation in practice, to the notions of readership, fluency and visibility.

3. Reader-responses and issues regarding fluency and visibility of the translator

This chapter dedicates itself to the complex relationship between author, translator and reader. Whether a translation such as my own, which has put the need to preserve mind-style and source text elements before the needs of a possible target audience, succeeds in the real world, is an entirely different matter. Would anyone want to read my translation, and more importantly, would anyone consider publishing it? To illustrate issues surrounding readership, and in order to reflect on some of the challenges translators of literary texts might experience in the real world, I shared my translation with German native speakers fluent in English, and also with one native speaker of English. Their responses are recorded and discussed here, and will lead me to briefly discuss questions surrounding visibility of the translator, and the regime of fluency prevalent in the Anglo-American publishing industry (Venuti, 2018).

Reading is a cognitive process, and every reader is different. If author's have their own mind-style from which they write, so readers have their own mind-style from which they read, receive and interpret the what they are reading. However, the overall function of literature it can be argued, is to achieve a change in cognitive state (Boase-Beier, 2019).

Evidently, the translator of a text is also, first and foremost a reader – a notion that I have come across first in Spivak's *Politics of Translation* (1993) – reading is an intimate act of surrendering to a text. In my process of translating RK, I have done just that. I have read beyond what was on the page, and I have tried to honour and respect stylistic choices in the source text as choices made by the author that ought to be preserved and transferred into the target text. But just because I was able to surrender to RK, and surrendered to the story in the process of translation, I cannot assume that other readers can and will do the same. Most readers have high expectations – individually, but also collectively – and when it comes to literary translations, most readers have one expectation in particular – fluency, i.e. they do not want to be made aware of the fact that they are reading a translation.

The following three reader responses from German native speakers with an excellent understanding of English illustrate just that. All three were asked to read *Rote Korallen* first, followed by both English translations, which were unnamed, and to provide a short commentary on their reading experience. Their responses are as follows:

- a) Reader 1 was not familiar with Hermann and read my translation *Red Coral* first. Reader 1 preferred *Red Coral*, observing not only some of the stylistic elements in the source text, but also pointing out that my translation worked very hard at preserving those elements and the syntax. The reader also found that some of my lexical choices in *Red Coral* were more “charismatic”.
- b) Reader 2 was familiar with Hermann, and read Dembo's translation *The Red Coral Bracelet* first. Reader 2 commented that it was “emotionally very close” to the original. Rhythm and flow were easy to follow, just like in the original, except for the last scene in the therapist's office, which the reader felt was not as intense as in the original. With *Red Coral*, the reader felt they were “tripping up” more often, and that it was not as fluent in comparison. The reader said the text felt more like information, but also noted that several passages managed to carry over meaning and intensity better than *The Red Coral Bracelet*.
- c) Reader 3 was not familiar with Hermann and read both translations side by side. Reader 3 pointed out that *Red Coral* was a word-for-word translation on both word and sentence level, and labelled the translation as “problematic” and “confusing”, e.g. the reader did not know what to imagine under the term ‘half-light’, and felt that ‘dim’ in the existing translation was a better and more direct choice. Overall the reader felt that the *The Red Coral Bracelet* was vivid, sounded English and preserved the literary function of the text. According to this reader, it was obvious that *Red Coral* had not been translated by a native speaker of English. Whilst the text carried over the meaning, it sounded stiff and unnatural, and did not create any atmosphere.

As noted, these three readers read the translations in relation to the source text. However, it was also in my interest to share my translation with a handful of native speakers of English in isolation from the source text and the other existing translation. Unfortunately, I only managed to get feedback from one reader, who said that although my translation sounded ‘foreign’, it was coherent, endearing and at times brilliantly to the point. Although the reader did have to pause several times to consider the ‘foreignness’ of the text, they did not detect anything grammatically wrong.

There are a few things here that I wish to comment on with regards to these reader responses. Firstly, there is the issue of whether my translation ‘worked’. Did I achieve to create a translation that remains faithful to the source text? According to Reader 1, I did.

Reader 1 was the only one who commented on stylistic elements in the source text, and affirmed that these were carried over into the target text, and also that I had created a stronger link between source and target text in the selection of certain lexical items. However, given that other readers labelled my translation as ‘foreign’, ‘unnatural’, ‘stiff’, ‘problematic’ ‘not as fluent’ and ‘unnatural’, my translation did not meet most readers expectation of a literary translation.

To be fair, English is my second language, and even if I had pursued a more liberal translation, it would have been highly unlikely for me to create a literary text that sounded 100% natural without the help of a native speaker collaborator or editor. By translating into my second language, I have worked against the common belief that one should only translate into one's native language (Bellos, 2002). But I also managed to work against a far greater paradigm – that a translation ought to sound like an original, should not draw attention to itself, and that a translator should be mindful not to alienate her readers.

According to Lawrence Venuti, “fluency” is the pre-dominant paradigm in the Anglo-American publishing industry, and has been for some time (Venuti, 2018: 1-15). Fluency demands that translators make themselves invisible in their translations, ‘domesticate’ the work in question and erase the ‘foreign’ in it. Of course the question is, how can we say we have produced a faithful translation of an author's work, when we have to adapt it to the expectations of a publishing industry, who – over the course of several decades – has groomed target audiences in the Anglophone world to read something foreign and exotic in a way that sounds largely familiar? It is a paradox, and yet, it is the norm. Venuti's call to action is to foreignise translation, and for translators to make themselves visible, which is precisely what my translation of RK has done.

As outlined in Section 1), Hermann's short story RK draws attention to itself by foregrounding certain stylistic elements. My translation seeks to foreground the foreignness of the text, thus creating a strong parallel. The existing translation by Margot Bauer Dembo on the other hand masks some of Hermann's stylistic choices in her translation, quite possibly to make it more palatable for the target audience and increase its circulation. Its success is measured in terms of fluency. As such, it meets the publishing industry's expectations and reader expectations. However, from my personal stance, Dembo's translation does not really make it clear, why Hermann's work stands out in German literature. Hermann's debut, *Sommerhaus, später* continues to stand the test of time and is well under way in achieving a classical status in its country of origin. In fact, some of her stories are used as pedagogical material at German High Schools⁴. Although my translation may be at odds with what is currently the predominant norm in the publishing industry, I see this a loophole for an alternative translation that may perhaps one day be considered for a wider audience. Boase-Beier (2019), but also the scholar Juliane House (2015) argue, that a shift in status of the original can free the translator from the constraints of target audience expectations: “When the work is strong, a translator does not have to adopt target language models and can adhere more closely to source text” (Boase-Beier, 2019:). House (2015:65-68) classifies this type of translation as an ‘overt’ translation, one that enables readers “access to the function the original has in its discourse world or frame”. Of course more work, and collaboration with a native speaker and editor would be required to pursue this project on a larger scale.

Conclusion

I undertook this translation, not because the existing translation is faulty, or needs re-doing, but out of curiosity to apply a different translation strategy, one that is aware of the stylistic features in the source text, and seeks to render these faithfully into the target language. In doing so, I have examined the concepts of style and mind-style in translation, and adopted them for this project. The resulting translation, *Red Coral* is a literal translation that shows high integrity with the source text. German and English are linguistically very close, therefore it only seemed fitting to pursue a literal translation, i.e. translate word for word, sentence for sentence. In order to illustrate my approach, I contrasted examples from my translation with the existing translation. As a final step, and in order to highlight issues surrounding fluency and visibility, I shared my translation with both German and English native speakers.

In pursuing a literal translation of RK, I have made myself highly visible in the target language, which is at odds with the translation paradigm currently prevalent in the Anglo-American publishing industry. Although this project does not draw on any definite conclusions, I hope that I have illustrated some of the challenges literary translators are faced with. Naturally, I would have liked to gather more reader responses from native speakers and test my translation in a wider audience. One reader-response, who labelled my translation “foreign but

⁴ Cf. Ministry for School and Education North-Rhine Westfalia
<https://www.standardsicherung.schulministerium.nrw.de/cms/zentralabitur-wbk/faecher/getfile.php?file=2625>

nonetheless endearing”, is encouraging but not indicative enough of the issue regarding fluency and visibility in translation.

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Appendix

Judith Hermann

Red coral

My first and only visit to a therapist cost me the red coral bracelet and my lover.

The red coral bracelet came from Russia. It came, to be more precise, from St. Petersburg, it was over a hundred years old, my great-grandmother had worn it around the left wrist, my great-grandfather it had killed. Is this the story that I want to tell? I'm not sure. Not really sure:

My great-grandmother was beautiful. She came with my great-grandfather to Russia, because my great-grandfather built kilns there for the Russian people. My great-grandfather took a large apartment for my great-grandmother on the St. Petersburg island of Vasily Ostrov. The island of Vasily Ostrov gets lapped by the Lesser and by the Greater Neva, and if my great-grandmother, in the apartment on Maliy Prospect, had stood on the tips of her toes and looked out the window, she would have been able to see the river and the great Kronstadt Bay. My great-grandmother, however, did not want to see the river and not Kronstadt Bay and not the tall, beautiful buildings of Maliy Prospect. My great-grandmother did not want to look out the window into a foreign land. She drew together the heavy, red velvet curtains and shut the doors, the rugs swallowed every sound, and my great-grandmother sat around on the sofas, the armchairs, the canopy beds and swayed back and forth, and was homesick for Germany. The light in the large apartment on Maliy Prospect was a half-light, it was a light like the one at the bottom of the sea, and my great-grandmother might have thought that the foreign land, that St. Petersburg, that all of Russia was nothing more than a deep, half-lit dream from which she were to awaken soon.

My great-grandfather, however, travelled through the country and built kilns for the Russian people. He built shaft furnaces and roasting furnaces and air furnaces and reverberatory furnaces and Livermore furnaces. He stayed away for a long time. He wrote letters to my great-grandmother, and when those letters came, my great-grandmother would pull back the heavy red velvet curtains from the windows a little, and read by a narrow chink of daylight:

I want to explain to you that the Hasenclever furnace that we are building here, consists of muffles, which are connected to each other through vertical channels and which become heated through the flame of a stoker-fired furnace – you remember, the retort furnace that I built in Blomesche Wildnis in Holstein and that you liked so much back then – well, with the Hasenclever furnace too the ore gets loaded through the openings into the topmost muffle and...

My great-grandmother became very tired from the reading of those letters. She could no longer recall the retort furnace in Blomesche Wildnis, but she could remember the Blomesche Wildnis, the pastures and the flat country, the bales of hay in the fields and the taste of sweet, cold apple must in summer. She let the room submerge once more into its half-light and lay down wearily on one of the sofas, she said: “Blomesche Wildnis, Blomesche Wildnis”; it sounded like a nursery rhyme, it sounded like a lullaby, it sounded nice.

On the St. Petersburg island of Vasily Ostrov lived in those years, besides the foreign businessmen and their families, also many Russian artists and intellectuals. It was inevitable that those heard of the German – the beautiful, the pale one with the fair hair – who was said to live up there in Maliy Prospect, almost always alone and in rooms, so dark, soft and cool like the sea. The artists and the intellectuals applied to her. My great-grandmother waved them in with a weary, small hand, she talked little, she hardly understood a thing, under heavy eyelids, her gaze was slow and dreamy. The artists and the intellectuals took place on the deep, soft sofas and armchairs, they sank into the heavy and dark materials, the maids brought black, cinnamon-spiced tea and preserves made of huckleberries and blackberries. My great-grandmother warmed her cold hands on the samovar and was far too tired to ask the artists and the intellectuals to leave again. And so they stayed. And they looked at my great-grandmother, and my great-grandmother melted with the half-light into something melancholy, beautiful, foreign. And since melancholy and beauty and foreignness are the essence of the Russian soul, the artists and the intellectuals fell in love with my great-grandmother and my great-grandmother let herself be loved by them.

My great-grandfather stayed away for a very long time. My great-grandmother thus let herself be loved for a long time. She did this carefully and discreetly, she hardly made a mistake. She warmed her cold hands on the samovar, and her shivering soul on the ardent hearts of her lovers, she learnt to distinguish in the foreign, soft language the words: “You, softest of all birch trees”. She read the letters about the melting furnaces, the Deville furnaces, the tube furnaces, in the small chink of daylight, and she burnt them all in the fireplace. She let herself be loved, she sang at night, before falling asleep, the song about the Blomesche Wildnis, to herself, and when her lovers looked enquiringly at her, then she smiled and was silent.

My great-grandfather promised, soon to come back, soon to return with her to Germany. But he did not come.

The first and the second and the third St. Petersburg winter came and went, and still my great-grandfather was busy in the Russian vastness with the building of furnaces, and still my great-grandmother waited so that she could return home to Germany. She wrote to him in the taiga. He wrote back, he would be coming soon, then he would only have to go one more time, just one last time – but then, but then, he promised, they could travel.

On the evening of his arrival my great-grandmother sat in front of the mirror in her bedroom and brushed her fair hair. In a small box in front of the mirror lay the gifts of her lovers, the brooch from Grigorij, the ring from Nikita, the pearls and velvet ribbons from Alexej, the locks from Jemeljan, the locket, amulets and silver bracelets from Michail and Ilja. In the small box lay also the red coral bracelet from Nikolaij Sergejewitsch. Its six hundred and seventy five small pieces of coral were lined up on a thread of silk and they glowed, red as the rage. My great-grandmother lay the brush down into her lap. She closed her eyes for a very long time. She opened her eyes again, took the red coral bracelet out of the small box and tied it around her left wrist. Her skin was very white.

On this evening, she ate with my great-grandfather for the first time in three years. My great-grandfather spoke Russian and smiled at my great-grandmother. My great-grandmother folded her hands in her lap and smiled back. My great-grandfather talked about the steppe, about the wilderness, about the bright, Russian nights; he talked about the furnaces and called them by their German names, and then my great-grandmother nodded as if she had understood. My great-grandfather said in Russian that he needed to drive to Wladiwostok one more time, he ate the pelmeni with his hands, while he said that, he wiped off the grease from his mouth with his hands, Wladiwostok was the last stop, then it would be time to return to Germany. Or did she want to stay?

My great-grandmother did not understand him. But she understood the word Wladiwostok. And she put her hands on the table, and the coral bracelet glowed red as the rage, on her left white wrist.



My great-grandfather stared at the coral bracelet. He put the rest of his pelmeni back on his plate, wiped his hands on the linen napkin and waved the maid out of the room. He said in German: “What’s that.”

My great-grandmother said: “A bracelet.”

My great-grandfather said: “And where did you get that from, if I may ask?”

My great-grandmother said very quietly and softly: “I was hoping, you would ask. It is a gift from Nikolaj Sergejewitsch.”

My great-grandfather called the maid back in and sent her for his friend Isaak Baruw. Isaak Baruw came, he was hunchbacked and crooked, he looked sleepy and confused, it was already late in the night, and he ran his fingers through his uncombed hair, again and again, embarrassed. My great-grandfather and Isaak Baruw walked up and down the room agitated and arguing, Isaak Baruw spoke in vain reassuring words, words that reminded my great-grandmother of her lovers. My great-grandmother exhausted, sank into one of the soft armchairs and put her cold hands to the samovar. My great-grandfather and Isaak Baruw spoke Russian, my great-grandmother did not understand more than the words “second” and “Petrowskij Park”. The maid was sent with a letter forth into the darkness. When day broke, my great-grandfather and Isaak Baruw left the house. My great-grandmother on the soft armchair had fallen asleep, her small hand, with the red coral bracelet on the wrist, dangled wearily from the arm of the chair; in the room it was as dark and silent as on the bottom of the sea.

Isaak Baruw came back around noon and told my great-grandmother amidst plenty of scrapes and condolences, that my great-grandfather had passed away at eight a.m. Nikolaj Sergejewitsch, on the hill in Petrowskij Park, had shot him straight into the heart.

My great-grandmother waited for seven months. Then, on January 20 of the year 1905, during the first days of the revolution, she gave birth to my grandmother, packed her suitcase and returned to Germany. Her train to Berlin was to be the last train that left St. Petersburg before the railwaymen commenced their strike, and Russia’s traffic with foreign countries was suspended. When the doors closed, and the railroad engine blew its white smoke into the winter air, at the far end of the platform the hunchbacked, crooked figure of Isaak Baruw appeared. My great-grandmother saw him coming, she commanded the train conductor to wait, and so Isaak Baruw, at the last second, scaled the German train. He accompanied my great-grandmother on her long journey to Berlin, he carried her suitcases and hat boxes and handbags, and he did not fail to reassure her over and over of his lifelong gratitude to her. My great-grandmother smiled at him calmly and was silent; she was wearing the red coral bracelet around her left wrist, and my tiny grandmother in the wicker basket even then, resembled Nikolaj Sergejewitsch more than my great-grandfather.

My first and only visit to a therapist cost me the red coral bracelet and my lover.

My lover was ten years older than I, and he was like a fish. He had fish-grey eyes, and fish-grey skin, he was like a dead fish, he lay, the whole day, on his bed, cold and mute, he was doing very badly, he lay around on the bed and said, if anything, only this one sentence: “I am not interested in myself.” Is this the story that I want to tell?

I don’t know. I don’t know really:

My lover was the great-grandchild of Isaak Baruw, and through his thin veins flowed Russian German blood. Isaak Baruw remained true to my great-grandmother his whole life, but marry he did a Pomeranian chambermaid. He fathered seven children with her, and these seven children gifted him seven grandchildren, and one of these grandchildren gifted him his only great-grandchild – my lover. The parents of my lover drowned in a summer storm on a lake, and my great-grandmother instructed me to go to their funeral – the last witnesses of the St. Petersburg past were to be lowered down there into the Brandenburg earth, and with them stories she no longer wanted to speak about herself. And so I went to the funeral of Isaak Baruw’s grandson and his wife, and next to their grave stood my lover and shed three grey tears. I took his cold hand into mine, and when he went home, I went with him; I thought, I could console him with the St. Petersburg stories, I thought, he could tell them to me, once more as new.

But my lover did not speak. And he did not want hear anything, and neither did he know anything about the winter morning in the year 1905, on which my great-grandmother had halted the train so that his great-



grandfather could get away, at the last second. So my lover lay around on his bed and said, if anything, only this one sentence: “I am not interested in myself.” His room was cold and dusty, it looked on to the cemetery, on the cemetery the death bells rang constantly. When I stood on the tips of my toes and looked out the window, I could see the freshly dug graves, the carnation bouquets and the mourners. I often sat on the floor in one corner of the room, I had the knees pulled up to my body and gently blew specks of dust through the room; I found it astonishing to not be interested in oneself. I was interested exclusively in myself. I looked at my lover, my lover looked at his body as though it were dead already, sometimes we made love in a hostile way, and I bit him into his salty mouth. I felt as though I were lean and skinny, even though I wasn’t, I could pretend as though I were not myself. The light fell green through the trees in front of the window, it was watery light, a light like it is along lakes, and the specks of dust were floating through the room like algae and seaweed.

My lover was sad. I asked him sympathetically whether I should not tell him a small, Russian story, and my lover answered cryptically: the stories were over, he did not want to hear them, and actually, I ought not confuse my own story with other stories. I asked: “Do you even have your own story?”, and my lover said no, he didn’t have one. But twice a week he went to a doctor, a therapist. He forbade me to accompany him, he refused to tell me anything about the therapist, he said: “I speak about myself. That’s all”, and when I asked him, whether he talked about how he is not interested in himself, he looked at me full of scorn and was silent.

So my lover was silent then, or said that sentence, I was silent too and began to think about the therapist, my face was always just as dusty as the soles of my feet. I imagined to be sitting inside the room of the therapist, and to be talking about myself. I did not have any notion of what I should be talking about. I had, ever since being at my lover’s, for quite some time not spoken really, I hardly spoke with him, and he virtually never spoke with me, all he ever said was that one sentence, and there were moments in which I thought, language solely consists of these six words: “I am not interested in myself.”

I began to think a lot about the therapist. I thought only about this speaking in his unfamiliar room, and that was pleasant. I was twenty years old, I had nothing to do, I was wearing the red coral bracelet on my left wrist. I knew the story of my great-grandmother, I could, in my mind’s eye, walk through the dark, half-lit apartment on Maliy Prospekt, I had seen *the* Nikolai Sergejwitsch in the eyes of my grandmother. The past was so tightly interwoven with me that at times, it struck me as my own life. The story of my great-grandmother was my story. But where was my story without my great-grandmother? I didn’t know.

The days were silent and like under the water. I sat in the room of my lover, and the dust wove itself around my ankles, I sat, knees pulled up to my body, head on my knees, I drew signs with my index finger on the grey floor, I was lost in thought, in I don’t know what, and so the years passed, it seemed, in that manner, me just floating away. Could I talk about it? From time to time my great-grandmother came, and knocked on the door of the apartment with a bony hand, she called, I ought to come out and go home with her, her voice coming through the dust that had spun around the door, as if from a far distance. I didn’t move and I didn’t answer her, my lover too lay on his bed and stared with dead eyes at the ceiling, without stirring himself. My great-grandmother called and lured me with the pet names of my childhood – heart’s dearest, little nut tree, heart’s eye – she ticked insistently and doggedly on the door, and only when I called in triumph: “You sent me to him, now you have to wait, until it is done!”, only then did she leave.

I heard her step on the stairs become softer and softer, the specks of dust on the door, that had been set in motion through her knocking, settled themselves and folded themselves together into a thick fuzz. I looked at my lover and said: “Are you sure you don’t want to hear the story of the red coral bracelet?”

My lover, lying on the bed, turned towards me with an agonised face. He stretched out his fish-grey hands away from himself and slowly spread his fingers, his fish grey eyes protruded a little from their sockets. The silence of the room trembled like the surface of a lake, into which one had thrown a rock. I showed my lover my arm and the red coral on my wrist, my lover said: “These belong to the family of Coralliidae. They tend to form little stems that can grow up to one metre, and they have a red skeleton made of calcium. Calcium.”

My lover spoke with a lisp, he spoke slowly and slurred his speech, as if he were drunk. He said: “They grow along the coastlines of Sardinia and Sicily. In Tripoli, Tunis and Algeria. In places, where the sea is so blue like



a turquoise, very deep, one can swim and dive, and the water is warm...” He turned away again from me and deeply sighed, he kicked the wall with his feet twice, then he lay still.

I said: “I want to tell those stories, do you hear! The St. Petersburg stories, the old stories, I want to tell them so I can walk out of them, and walk away.”

My lover said: “I don’t want to hear them”.

I said: “Well, then I am going to tell them to your therapist,” and my lover straightened himself up, he took such a deep breath that a few specks of dust vanished in a small current inside his wide open mouth, he said: “You are not going to tell my therapist a thing, go to somebody, but not to my therapist”, he coughed and pounded his naked, grey chest, I had to laugh, because never before had my lover spoken this much in one stretch. He said: “You are not going to speak to someone about me, with whom I also speak about myself, that is not possible”, and I said: “I don’t want to talk about you, I want to tell the story, and my story is your story too.” Really, we were fighting with one another. My lover threatened to leave me, he held on to me and pulled my hair, he bit me into my hand and scratched, a wind was blowing through the room, the windows sprang open, the death bells on the cemetery were ringing furiously, and the specks of dust drifted out like soap bubbles. I pushed my lover away from me and ripped the door open, I really felt so lean and skinny; when I left, I could hear the specks of dust softly sink to the floor, my lover stood silent next to his bed, with his fish-grey eyes and fish-grey skin.

The therapist, who caused me to lose the red coral bracelet and my lover, sat in a large room behind his desk. The room was really very large, it was almost empty, except for that desk, the therapist behind it and the small chair in front of it. On the floor of the room lay a soft, sea blue, deep blue rug. The therapist looked straight at me with solemn, when I entered his room. I walked towards him, I felt as though I had to walk towards him for a very long time, before I finally reached this chair in front of his desk. I thought about the fact that normally my lover sat on this chair and talked – what, about himself? – I felt a minuscule sadness. I sat down. The therapist nodded towards me, I nodded too and stared at him, I waited for it to start, for the beginning of the conversation, for his first question. The therapist stared back, until I lowered my gaze, but he said nothing. He was silent. His silence reminded me of something. It was very quiet. Somewhere a clock, that I could not see, was ticking; around the tall building the wind wove itself, I looked down at the sea blue, deep blue rug between my feet, and pulled nervously and diffidently on the silk thread of the coral bracelet. The therapist sighed. I raised my head, he tapped with the needle-sharp lead of his pencil on the shiny desktop, I smiled bashfully, he said: “What is this about for you then.”

I breathed in, I raised my hands and let them sink again, I wanted to say, I am not interested in myself, I thought that’s a lie, I’m interested exclusively in myself, and is that it? that in reality, nothing’s there? only the tiredness, and the empty, quiet days, a life like that of fish under water, and a laughter without bottom, without reason? I wanted to say, I have too many stories in me, they burden my life, I thought, I might as well have stayed at my lover’s, I breathed in, and the therapist ripped mouth and eyes open, and I pulled on the silk thread of the red coral bracelet and the silk thread ripped and the six hundred and seventy five little red as the rage coral beads burst in sparkling glory from my lean and skinny wrist.

I stared at my wrist, astounded, the wrist was white and naked. I stared at the therapist, the therapist had leaned back in his chair, the pencil now lay parallel to the desktop edge in front of him, he had folded his hands in his lap. I buried my face in my hands. I slid off the chair onto the sea blue, deep blue rug, the six hundred and fifty seven coral beads lay across the whole room dispersed. They glowed red with the rage like never before, I crawled around on the floor and picked them up, they lay under the desk, under the toe of the therapist, he pulled back the foot a teeny tiny bit when I touched him, underneath the desk it was dark, but the red coral glowed.

I thought about Nikolaij Sergejewitsch, I thought, had he not gifted the red coral to my great-grandmother, had he not shot my great-grandfather straight into the heart. I thought about the hunchbacked, crooked Isaak Baruw, I thought, had he not left Russia, had my great-grandmother not stopped the train because of him. I thought about my lover, the fish, I thought if he had not always been silent, I would not have to crawl around underneath the desk of a therapist; I saw the trouser legs of the therapist, his folded hands, I could smell him, I bumped my head on the desktop. I collected the red coral beads underneath the desk, I crawled back into the light and further



through the room, I picked up the coral with the right hand and collected them in the left one, I started to cry. I was kneeling on the soft, sea blue, deep blue rug, I looked at the therapist, the therapist looked at me from his chair, with his folded hands. My left hand was full of coral, but still they were glowing and blinking all around me, I thought, I might need my entire life, in order to pick up all this coral; I thought, I might never succeed, not in my entire life. I stood up. The therapist leaned forward, took his pencil from the desk and said: “The meeting is finished for today.”

I was pouring the red coral from the left into the right hand, they made a beautiful, tender sound, almost like a tiny laughter. I raised the right hand and flung the red coral at the therapist. The therapist ducked his head. The red coral pelted down on to his desk, and with them pelted all of St. Petersburg, the Greater and the Lesser Neva, the great-grandmother, Isaak Baruw and Nikolaj Sergejewitsch, the grandmother in the wicker basket and the lover the fish, the Wolga, the Luga, the Narowa, the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and the Agais, the Gulf, the Atlantic Ocean.

The waters of the earth’s oceans surged in a huge green wave over the desk of the therapist and ripped him from his chair, the water quickly rose higher and lifted up the desk, out of its crest of waves the therapist’s face appeared once more, then it vanished, the water swooshed, surged, sang and rose and with it washed away the stories, the silence and the coral, washed them back into the algae forests, and the mussel beds, to the bottom of the ocean. I took a breath.

I went once more to look in on my lover. He was floating, I already knew, pale belly up on the water-wet bed. The light was so grey, like it is with the light on the bottom of a lake, in his hair the sprinkles of dust had gotten themselves entangled, they were shivering gently. I said: “You know that coral turns black, don’t you, when it lies on the bottom of the sea for too long,” I said: “Was this the story I had been wanting to tell”, but my lover could no longer hear me.

Translated by Jana Loorparg