Creative Writing and Translation
Escritura creativa y traducción

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Abstract: Creative writing and translation have an intricate relation in writing, scholarship, the classroom and beyond. The philosophical context of mimesis and anti-mimesis affects writers, translators, critics, scholars, teachers and students. Imitation, innovation, originality, copying all become part of the debate over translation and creativity. From Plato through Roger Ascham to Immanuel Kant and beyond, this article explores the relation between writing and translation and discusses contributions to this debate East and West before proceeding to the author's experience in those two realms, especially in Canada, England, China and the United States. I argue that translation is creative, for both creative writing and translation are – along with reading – forms of interpretation. Translators of poetry are, or should be, poets who create anew or recreate the poems.

Keywords: Creative Writing. Translation. Philosophy. Poetry. Rhetoric. Interpretation.

Resumen: La creatividad y la traducción tienen una relación intrincada en la escritura, la investigación, la docencia y otras áreas. El contexto filosófico de la mímesis y la anti-mímesis afecta a escritores, traductores, críticos, investigadores, profesores y estudiantes. La imitación, la innovación, la originalidad y la copia tienen su papel en el debate sobre la traducción y la originalidad. Desde Platón, pasando por Roger Ascham e Immanuel Kant hasta el presente, este artículo explora la relación entre la escritura y la traducción y discute aportaciones de Oriente y Occidente, para luego exponer la experiencia del autor en estos campos, especialmente en Canadá, Inglaterra, China y los Estados Unidos de América. Sostengo que la traducción es creativa, pues tanto la escritura creativa como la traducción son –junto con la lectura– formas de interpretación. Los traductores de poesía son, o deberían ser, poetas que crean de nuevo o recrean los poemas.

Palabras clave: Escritura creativa. Traducción. Filosofía. Poesía. Retórica. Interpretación.

The relation between creative writing and translation is intricate and vital, and here I explore that connection and then discuss my own experience in both realms. In school and university, I never took a course in creative writing and translation, but later on I became a professor who taught creative writing and gave readings and who was director of a centre that involved creative writing and translation. I have been a chair professor of a School of Translation Studies as well as translating poetry and non-fiction as part of my research and writing. All this was interdisciplinary, and I was trained in history and literature, so beyond teaching English and comparative literature and history, I have also held appointments in medical humanities and evolutionary biology. Having taught in universities in England, France, the United States, Canada and China, and having given readings in many other countries, I wish, after a discussion of creative writing and translation, to comment on my experience in the field. Like many who study foreign languages and who have written poetry, fiction, drama and other genres, I experienced all this in school, well before university. In fact, when I was a student or even in an early postdoctoral phase, the universities I had been accepted at or studied at – for instance, Toronto, Oxford, Harvard, Chicago and Cambridge – did not, to my knowledge at the time, have creative writing degrees or courses with an emphasis on the relation between creative writing and translation. I had to learn these matters myself and to be part of these fields and comparative literature and comparative history. I am still exploring and I hope this article helps readers to explore, to be part of a heuristics of the relation between creative writing and translation. By providing this context and my experience, this article seeks to contribute to something I have been part of and to which others have contributed to so effectively.

Translation and creativity

Mimesis (imitation, representation) and anti-mimesis and other-than-mimesis are key concepts in classical literature, literary criticism, and philosophy about the arts. All this affects our present notions of creative writing (see Schulte 2001; Bishop/Starkey 2006). The ancient Greek philosophers and writers focused on poetry (tragedy, epic), the foundation of what we might call literature or creative writing, but they were not interested in translation as they considered others who could not speak Greek to be barbarians. Cultural difference in time and space occurs even within languages and cultures and not

simply between them. There can be a liminality within as change and continuity balance and contend. Languages, literatures and cultures are part of a carry across or translation, what might be called, as an umbrella term, cultural translation. Writing, and not just linguistic translation, is part of that translation.

Creative writing is a relatively new discipline although students in the Renaissance like Shakespeare would be exposed to double translation in school. That is Shakespeare, as we surmise, would translate Ovid into English and back into Latin verse despite the differences in metre between the two languages (see Baldwin 1943; 1944). In 1549, Joachim Du Bellay, stressed that a translator should admit differences in style between languages (Boase-Beier 2014, 10; see Robinson 2002, 102; Lefevere 1992, 22). In 1570, Roger Ascham, writing in Renaissance England, gives a sense of translation:

> Translation, is easie in the beginning for the scholer, and bringeth all moch learning and great iudgement to the Master. It is most common, and most commendable of all other exercises for youth: most common, for all your constructions in Grammer scholes, be nothing els but translations: but because they be not double translations, as I do require, they bring forth but simple and single commoditie, and bicause also they lacke the daily vse of writing, which is the onely thing that bréedeth déepe roote, both in ye witte, for good vnderstanding, and in ye memories, for sure keeping of all that is learned. Most commedable also, & that by ye iudgemet of all authors, which intreate of theis exercises. (Ascham 1570, 33 recto)

Ascham praises double translation, which was in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century grammar schools in England, and students, like Shakespeare and John Milton, were exposed to this practice. Like Ascham, I see translation as part of culture and education, the relation between teacher and student. I agree that translation fosters learning, judgement, understanding and memory and crosses languages and cultures and enriches those exposed to it, teacher and student alike. Translation is also a form of writing and creation, a kind of interpretation.

Genius or creativity may be a thread between Plato and modern ideas about the inexplicability of great poets and their inspiration. For Kant, very originality is a positive attribute of genius. If genius cannot be taught and great art is a work of genius, why would one teach art, for instance why have

a Renaissance artist workshop or a creative writing course? Kirsten Malmkjær argues that in the *Critique of Judgement* (§ 46), Kant says that genius is talent and shows originality, which is the opposite of mimesis or imitation and that learning is mimetic: thus, art cannot be taught, whereas science can be taught. As Kant puts it:

> Newton could make all his steps, from the first elements of geometry to his own great and profound discoveries, intuitively plain and definite as regards consequence, not only to himself but to everyone else. But a Homer or a Wieland cannot show how his ideas, so rich in fancy and yet so full of thought, come together in his head, simply because he does not know and therefore cannot teach others. In science, then, the greatest discoverer only differs in degree from his laborious imitator and pupil, but he differs specifically from him whom nature has gifted for beautiful art. (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* § 47, in Malmkjær 2020, 7-8)

Kant, it seems, would not think that great art could be taught, that creative writing would help to create great artists and he might question the whole enterprise.

Thus, one view is that writing is a craft and can be taught and learned as in a Renaissance artist workshop and the other is that creative writing is a gift and not something that those not writers can ever learn. Perhaps the theory of imitation or mimesis was the dominant one for writers in the Renaissance, but Baxter Hathaway asks the important question of why that was the case, and he says that antiquity had accepted that doctrine and it was widespread (Hathaway 1962, 7). One of the forms is «rhetorical imitation», or «the process whereby one writer consciously or unconsciously borrows from another text, and that borrowing effects a significant intertextual echo»; McLaughlin goes on to write that «sense of *mimesis* was first applied to literature by Isocrates (*Adversus Sophistas* 14-18), when he added imitation to the three traditional components of Greek rhetoric: nature, theory, and practice» (1995, 5). This was an age of imitation, not simply in literature but many fields, from pedagogy through music to philosophy, an imitation of models and, indirectly, of nature (Greene 1982, 1). In many ways, imitation is creative and not simply reflective of the world, creative and active (see Halliwell 2002).

Translation is also creative and meets with creative writing. Walter Benjamin has many wise things to say about translation. J. Hillis Miller quotes an intriguing passage from Benjamin's «The Task of the Translator»:

> Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. (Benjamin, in Miller 2002, 62)

Miller discusses Benjamin and this passage in relation to the prefaces Henry James wrote to his novels, relating James' idea of the Absolute and Benjamin's notion of pure language (Miller 2002, 60-61). Thus, Miller is comparing a writer who writes and «rewrites» with a theorist of translation who discusses translation as what we might call a «rewriting». This would be, in my terms, a connection between creative writing and translation. Miller says: «To apprehend the Absolute directly, without mediation, in the strange form of an experienced deviation between how James wrote it then and how he would write it now is the source, it is clear from James's description, of an intense pleasure» (2002, 61). The above passage by Benjamin quoted by Miller is something he sees as «analogous», «a celebrated account [...] of what happens when one notes the discrepancy between source text and translation» (2002, 61). Miller's analogy is similar to the one I am using between the writing and rewriting of creative writing and the source text and translated work in translation. Furthermore, Miller observes: «In Henry James's case, the revision of an earlier work is imperiously demanded of him by a new apprehension of its originating matter. This rewriting is like a translation of that work into a new language» (2002, 61-62). Language, made and remade, is the common denominator. Miller elaborates: «Just as, for James, the difference between old version and new version allows an apprehension of the Absolute, so Benjamin's account of the relation of a translation to its original affirms that the discrepancies between the two allow a glimpse of a "pure language (*reine Sprache*)"» (2002, 62; see also Benjamin 1980; Berman and others 2018). Moreover, Miller, having stressed the discrepant, amplifies his point and expresses some scepticism: «That pure language is the origin of both. At the same time, in its "absolute" purity, this pure language is the disqualification of both original and translation. I am citing, the reader will note, a translation of Benjamin's essay. The difficulties of translating that essay exemplify the issues of translation the essay is about» (2002, 62). Purity disqualifies the written and rewritten, original and translation, makes translating uneasy. Although remarking

how celebrated Benjamin's essay is, Miller is less satisfied with the passage: «In a powerful, though by no means entirely perspicuous figure, Benjamin compares the original and the translation to adjacent pieces of a broken pot. These need not be similar but must fit together in order to reassemble the whole vessel» (62). In these words, I see not simply the reassembling of the whole, but also the two fragments being side by side, broken and apart, related but not in one piece. Miller gives a close reading that focuses on the phrases «In the same way» and «the original's mode of signification» and questions whether Benjamin can «match the assertion that original and translation must fit one another like adjacent fragments of a broken pot», and asks how «those jagged edges» are «like the original's mode of signification», and what, as the reader might ask, «is the force of that "in the same way"» (Miller 2002, 62).

Miller then concentrates on the translation from the German, focusing on «So» between the original language and English. Among Miller's analysis is his explanation of relations: «The "greater language" is that "pure language" that encompasses both original and translation, and of which they give news, though always inadequate news» (Miller 2002, 63). Then Miller explores the relation between meaning and meaninglessness in James and Benjamin and interprets and quotes Benjamin, whose words relate creation to translation: «"In this pure language," writes Benjamin, or rather writes his translator, "– which no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages – all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished"» (Benjamin, in Miller 2002, 63). This is a kind of paradox.

Pan also discusses Benjamin and addresses some of the issues that Miller has also raised years before: «Written as a preface to his translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*, "The Task of the Translator" presents this vision of integration by addressing the perennial debate among translators between faithfulness to the letter of the original and the freedom to reproduce the spirit of that original in the translation» (Pan 2017, 35; see Benjamin 1996). After setting up this longstanding «debate», Pan sets out what he thinks Benjamin's contribution is: «Benjamin clearly comes down on the side of the faithfulness to the word, preferring to construct a broken or dissonant translation in order to preserve the words and syntax of the original at the expense of a straightforward meaning in the translation» (Pan 2017, 35). The image of brokenness or fragments is key here. Pan comments on the passage Miller quoted, also here discussed: «This image of the broken vessel, while it captures the frag-

mentation of languages that their differences in ways of meaning create, nevertheless retains the idea of a work of art as the guiding form» (Pan 2017, 42). The meeting of languages, like French and German, allow for growth for each. This, for Pan, is an analogy between vessel and language: «Benjamin argues that the different languages might supplement each other in their alternative ways of meaning so that their simultaneous existence could create a harmony that resembles this single vessel» (Pan 2017, 42).

We are between languages in a liminal state, on a fulcrum, both also on either and both sides. Victor Turner takes up Arnold van Gennep's liminality (the Latin *limen* means threshold), which is a transition, a ritual passage. Turner focuses on «liminality» as a margin, between separation and reaggregation, I relate liminality to poetry, exploring poetics of culture, an interpoetics, as I have called it elsewhere (see van Gennep 1909; Turner [1974] 2018, 231). There is a gain in translation but also a loss. It is what I might deem asymptotic desire, hoping to translate and reach some meaning or harmony or beauty, to create that from an original, in a world on the horizon. Facing Marcel Proust's words, Benjamin also shows the sense of not quite reaching, not quite making some liminal or vanishing «it»: «In the midst of translating, I cannot hope to achieve any real clarity about the profound and ambiguous impressions with which Proust fills me» (Benjamin 1994, 291). The work of Proust affects Benjamin in way he cannot state clearly.

As I tend to see translation and creative writing as being connected through interpretation, I find a kindred view to that of Benjamin, George Steiner and Lawrence Venuti. Steiner, whose *After Babel* was a key work on translation when I was an undergraduate, later stresses translation as hermeneutics that begins with trust and moves through aggression, incorporation and restitution (Steiner 1998b, 109; see Steiner 1998a). In *Teaching Translation*, Venuti stresses a hermeneutic view of translation as an act of interpretation, a key to education in ancient Rome (Venuti 2016, 10).

In discussing workshops, Margarida Vale de Gato asks whether creative writing may work in teaching literary translation, translation and the profession of the translator and, based on her experience and reading, she sets out three reasons why it helps: unfinishedness; the translator as writer; the possibility of continuity among self-translation, writing the self and translating (Vale de Gato 2020, 197-98). Vale de Gato finds helpful the work of Paschalis Nikolaou on writing, autobiography and literary ventriloquy and sees the literary translator as a writer (2020, 197-98; see Nikolaou 2006). Moreover,

she plans to include creative writing as part of her literary translation course (English and Portuguese) and explores the implications in that connection (2020, 199; see Hyde 2009; Grossman 2010; Baer 2018).

The relation between creative writing and translation is an important topic prompting many points of view. For instance, Mircea Pricăjan expresses his surprise at how widespread the subject is:

> The other day I searched the Internet for this exact phrase: «literary translation workshop for creative writing». I got back more than 1 million search results. All the major Western universities, English-speaking Western universities seem to have some form of this topic in their curricula. Which is kind of weird. Because why would someone coming from a dominant culture think of linking creative writing (an honest subject matter, by comparison) to translation? Such an exotic concept! (Pricăjan 2018, 196)

Pricăjan seems to be ironic in saying that creative writing is a more honest subject than is translation, as if the one expresses honesty whereas the other, exoticism. Translation involves otherness, what I have called elsewhere the poetics of otherness, so, I would say that both activities express otherness to self and to culture. Creating writing and translation involve a liminality or betweenness and an otherness within and between self and other, one person and another, one language and another, one literature and another, one culture and another. Translation mediates between writing and reading, author and reader. The translator learns, informs, mediates, creates. Literary translators are writers and interpreters: writing, translating, reading are all connected as acts of interpretation. They are heuristic: they lead to discovery in the very exploration. There is a teaching, learning, interpretative, heuristic element acting together in creative writing and translation (see Wilson/Gerber 2012; Washbourne 2013; Woodsworth 2017; Whetter 2022).

Poetry, philosophy and rhetoric are all in play in these relations. They can also have specific historical contexts as Derek R. Peterson shows in relation to colonial Kenya when he uses the term «creative writing» in a different and broader way in relation to translation, bookkeeping and imagination (see Peterson 2004; Ricard 2009). Another context can be that of figures in different cultures who are both writers and translators. For example, Luigi Gussago discusses Cesare De Marchi, equally a writer and translator, but De Marchi is sceptical about translation, which he views as a negative influence

on creative writing (Gussago 2013, 73). This relation between creative and translation can be viewed positively, negatively or ambivalently, but the connection is important however one sees it. I have given readings, been involved in centres and schools of translation, had students from around the world and have had an active relation with China and Asia more widely for more than three decades. In these international and multicultural contexts, I stress linguistic and cultural diversity and so do so in my discussion of creative writing and translation in the work of others and in my own work.

The role of difference

Another aspect of the connection between creative writing and translation has to do with difference (see Kussmaul 2000; Nikolaou 2006; Kemble/O'Sullivan 2006; Fischer/Vassen 2011). For instance, Nelly Rosario speaks of translation as seeing double, creative writing as translation, and raises the cultural aspect of this relation: «Fellow writer Maaza Mengiste asks what it means to write a love story set in an area of strife. "What is it that [Afro-Diasporic writers] can do, with words, with our imagination, to become true reflectors of our world? What can we do as writers to make ourselves transformers rather than simply translators? And what is it that we change?"» (Rosario 2012, 1002). Cultural and historical contexts are significant for writing and translation.

Maaza Mengiste, born in Addis Ababa, lives in New York and begins by telling of an exhibit of the winners of the 2011 World Press Photo competition, their photographs taken in 2010, and observes: «These photographs told a kind of story that I think writers of color are all too familiar with: they are interpretations of our tragedies and triumphs, of our struggles and our fears» (Mengiste 2012, 939). Cultural difference cannot be ignored. Writing can do something that photographs cannot do in representation and interpretation. Mengiste asks an insightful question and provides some thoughtful responses:

> What does this have to do with creative writing and the topic of translation? I have tried to discard this moment from memory, but as I begin to think of what we do as creative writers and the world from which we create and re-create context, I cannot help but think of the exhibit. I cannot help but make a connection between *what* we see and *how* we interpret it. When we write, we pull from our experiences and we take it all in – sight, sound, scent, emotion – and we find the words to make these real on the page. We use words but we don't function in a world of words

> alone. Every day, when we sit down to write, we must wade through the debris of old memories and emotions and reconstruct them. I want to try to consider what is reflected in the moving screen of our imagination, and what it is we then go on to transmit, and why. (Mengiste 2012, 939)

This is a poetic and metaphorical view of writing in terms of memory, creation, recreation, the senses, the relation between word and world, wading through memorial and emotional debris, reconstruction, images moving on an imaginative screen, the reason for transmission. Thus, images and ideas mix, and soon Mengiste seems to value the original writer more than the translator:

> What interests me in this discussion of translation is how far we move away from an initial source. Sometimes it seems that the landscape has been dominated for so long by the voice of the Other, it is hard to hear ourselves or distinguish where one ends and the other starts. What is it that we can do, with words, with our imagination, to become true reflectors of our world? What can we do as writers to make ourselves transformers rather than simply translators? (Mengiste 2012, 941-42)

Otherness can make it hard to listen to ourselves and the relation between original and translation. She aims to have words reflect the world in a realistic or mimetic (representational) theory of writing and art. Still, she wishes writers of colour to transform and not translate. Mengiste's use of «simply» shows that «translators» do not measure up to writers, perhaps the one being simple and the other being intricate.

While acknowledging how hard it must be for some creative writers of colour and those cultures from which they come to be heard or read, I am not so apt to place the creative writer above the translator. Whatever cultural differences, and these need to be acknowledged and taken seriously, I would also argue that, like creative writing, translation is imaginative, reflexive, transformative. It is, however, possible that members of some groups do not think, in exile or on the margins or for another reason, they are making changes or being effective in the world. Mengiste is concerned with authenticity and who sets those standards, which is a fair concern (Mengiste 2012, 942). It is important to have languages and cultures and people meet in a liminal space as equal sides on a linguistic, literary, cultural aspect in this creative and translational relation. I hope that this is a practical as well as an ideal or utopian hope.

The many languages

Other historical elements bear on the connection between creative writing and translation, for instance the relation between the monolingual and multilingual. After the Second World War, as Jennifer Quist (2023, 359) notes, creative writing workshops, as they were developed in Departments of English in universities in the United States, spread internationally. Quist calls attention to Loren Glass' view of the genesis of the creative writing workshop, which she sees as formulated in the Cold War as an institution that stressed the individual and could be exported from the nation internationally as a buttress against the Soviet Union with its stress on the collective and supposed global domination (see Quist 2023, 359; Glass 2017; McGurl 2009). For Quist, these origins were monolingual and may create barriers still for multilingual students and she proposes an offsetting of this anglophone and homogeneous history of creative writing by using the practices of multilingual writers, such as Yoko Tawada, and argues «that all writers, whether they have full mastery of more than one language or not, may participate in shifting creative writing education away from the field's original monolingual anglophone biases» (Quist 2023, 360). Language, for Quist, becomes a central issue in creative writing as it is in comparative literature, and she discusses this poet, novelist, short story writer, translator whose first language is Japanese but who also writes in German while skimming languages such as Vietnamese, Russian, French English, and Afrikaans, achieving something not to be attained in one language.

Quist maintains that Tawada's translingual practice is a precursor to David Damrosch's idea of language study on a sliding scale in comparative literature and not simply expert knowledge for each language, akin to what Ofelia Garcia and Hugo Baetens Beardsmore deem «dynamic bilingualism» (Quist 2023, 360; see Damrosch/Spivak 2013; García/Baetens Beardsmore 2009). In an interesting interpretation, Quist examines Tawada's surface translation in which Tawada supplements with lines from Hamlet's soliloquy («To be or not to be») her poem in Japanese, «Hamlet No See», about the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident at Fukushima in 2011, creating a dance across languages or a translingualism (Quist 2023, 360-61; see Tawada). Quist presents her own practice, as she is not proficient in Japanese, in reading Tawada and appeals to Pound's use of Chinese in *Cathay* (as a poem and as a translation). She mentions the fine work of Ming Xie, whose book appeared

in a series I edited for a publisher in New York, in which Xie calls Pound's poetry «simulacra» while maintaining that his poem may have contributed to a revitalization of English poetry (Quist 2023, 361; see Xie 1999). Zhan Bing, a Hakka speaker in Taiwan who first wrote only in Japanese then composed poetry based on characters shared by Mandarin and Japanese, is, unlike the unhumble Pound, an inspiring example of translingual creative writing, which Tawada shares, facing new languages with questions, of openness and humility (Quist 2023, 361-62; see Bing 2008). Moreover, Quist appeals to Tawada's short story «*Erzähler ohne Seelen*/Storytellers Without Souls», which alludes to sound in *Hamlet*, detaching it from speech, and, likewise, Tawada employs a defamiliarization in the poem, «Hamlet No See» in which «English sounds are audible in what the anglophone reader knows is not English, but Japanese speech» (Quist 2023, 362). Tawada seems to use an estrangement or alienation effect, although not exactly as Bertolt Brecht would have employed it in the theatre.

Here, Quist gathers many intriguing strands and, owing to space, I should not linger, but she aptly observes: «In addition to surface translation achieved through sound and homophones, Tawada's "microscopic reading" of scripts is another of her practical translingual strategies» (2023, 363). Furthermore, taking her own risk, which is one of the themes she explores, Quist presents an excerpt of her own *Spring of Clay Men*, her «own experiment in Tawada's method of microscopic reading of scripts» (2023, 366). These creative writers, including Quist, use translation in their very creation, so that, as I have argued, creating and translation are connected in making and in interpreting. Readers, writers, translators interpret, which is not surprising as humans are interpreting animals.

In China, scholars have discussed the benefits of creative writing as translation. In examining self-translation and creative writing in English in China, Fan Dai and Wei Zheng explore the teaching and practice of creative writing in English as a foreign language at Sun Yat-sen University by analyzing extracts from the cultural and linguistic elements of the creative work in English by Fan Dai and from the creative writing assignments by her students. Dai and Zheng argue that creative writing in a foreign language, performed «with cultural and linguistic sensitivity, has the potential for greater impact than works translated from a writer's "native" language» and they maintain «that the "source text" (written or unwritten) is intended for an audience from the source culture, while the translated work is for readers from the target cultu-

re» while suggesting «that writing or learning to write in a foreign language not only makes the writer more aware of cultural differences but is also a very important aspect in the teaching of creative writing in a foreign language» (2019, 659).

Self-awareness of distinctions between cultures affects teaching writing in another language. In an interesting analysis, Dai and Zheng reach some suggestive conclusions. They speak about having explored self-translation in this context and «the freedom that self-translation allows in rendering a text into another language, as the writer/translator knows what he/she wants to convey to the target readers» and they consider even more significant that «the content that demands flexibility in self-translation is culture-loaded, and self-translation here refers to a Chinese text that is often unconsciously inchoate, existing in a liminal space, half-imagined, but not expressed, not written» (2019, 668). Self-translation can be something imagined or spoken and not a written work so it is less defined but has other potential. None the less, Dai and Zheng raise the matter of being true to the original, an old concern in translation. They maintain that «A culturally appropriate self-translation has the potential to produce texts that are true to the original in ways beyond linguistic equivalence» and they see that the excerpts of Dai and her students set out in their article exemplify this point (Dai/Zheng 2019, 668). Self-translation may make texts beyond equivalence in language. Moreover, Dai and Zheng continue to sing the praises of the possibilities of self-translation:

> This is the privilege of self-translation over translation by a translator who is likely to be inhibited by adherence to the original text. When it comes to creative writing in English, or by extension, in a language that is not the writer's mother tongue, the cultural aspects of the writing require the writer's awareness when something in the home culture is taken for granted but may be unheard of in the target culture. (2019, 668)

Thus, self-translation allows for a fuller and more sensitive education and cultural experience: it is a form of, or is at least related to, cultural translation. Dai and Zheng make some important observations, for instance, concerning

> cosmopolitan English, or rather cosmopolitan Chinese English, which is a term that might be applied to a creative writer expressing themselves through English in the context of contemporary China. It is a form of English that can convey the identity of the user at many levels, an En-

> glish that renders the writer a proud English user who brings new cultural elements into the arena of world literature in English. (2019, 668)

To use my own term, used elsewhere, this is an interpoetics of culture and language. Dai and Zheng maintain something that makes sense, that «cosmopolitan Chinese English of this kind can express Chinese culture through creative writing, especially when the writer or translator takes distinctive cultural expressions from one culture and introduces them to audiences from other cultures» (2019, 668). For Dai and Zheng, creative writing and the different modes of translation, such as self-translation, are all one: there is an identity between writing and translation: «Creative writing in a foreign language involves not only writing creatively and expressively in that language, but also involves subtle processes of transcultural and translingual translation, not least in the often half visible processes of self-translation» (2019, 668). This kind of translation carries across into the creativity of the individual. Chinese English is a significant expression of World Englishes. It enriches the thinking of English speakers, native and not native, as well as enriching English and the world of the students who are speakers of Chinese English.

This work builds on Fan Dai's earlier scholarship. In 2010, she published on creative writing at her university, for example, exploring «the teaching of creative writing in English to sophomores» at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou and arguing that the «course is unique in the Chinese context in that it combines methods developed in western creative writing programs such as participation in workshops with a focus on using English as a second language» (Dai 2010, 546). Dai concludes that the students learn to write English, narrative techniques, learn about themselves, the last of which she expresses with particular aptness: «The creative writing course allowed students the freedom to explore different aspects of their lives. They wrote stories that otherwise would not have been written, and in doing so learned a lot about themselves and those around them» (2010, 555). Later on, Dai also reiterates themes that she examines before and after, concluding: «Over the last three years, the creative writing course at Sun Yat-sen University has been evolving to motivate students to write their own stories instead of writing for the sake of an assignment» (2012, 26). The course encourages language learning and self-expression and self-knowledge in an individual, familial and social context: «It is a platform for students to improve their proficiency in English, but also to showcase their ability to write creatively. It has also become a way for students to understand not only themselves but also their friends and families,

and, hopefully, to change their lives for the better» (26). Self-improvement is a goal of learning a language, creating in it. Creative writing in a second language involves creativity and translation, implicitly or not, a kind of interpoetics and liminality.

Xia Fang has also done work on the relation between creative writing and translation in class in China, and observes something significant in this context:

> Translation adopted in the process of creative writing skill acquisition places students in a situation of identity negotiation. Where translation becomes involved in a creative writing class, students are likely to face the issue of struggling with their identity and may have to decide whether they view themselves more as translators, or as poets. (2023, 16)

Translation in creative writing causes students to raise the question of identity, to choose between being a poet or a translator (see Bassnett/Bush 2005). The teacher's emphasis affects the response of the students. Fang amplifies this point: «At creative writing classes dominated by writing exercises, students generally consider themselves more as creative writers» (2023, 16). She sees translation as standing in the way of goals in a specific context: «Based on my observation of creative writing classes at my university, either at the undergraduate or at the graduate level, the student-writers generally saw the role of translation as counteracting the learning motivations they expected from an English creative writing class» (16). Implicitly, Fang raises a point that comparative fields, like comparative literature, explore, that is comparison and contrast teach more about a language, literature, culture or discipline. She finishes by addressing the milieu of China: «For the Chinese writers, cross-linguistic and cross-cultural dilemmas in writing are unavoidable issues to be reckoned with. In such a case, the assertion of the uniqueness of one's own culture and literature demarcates the primary responsibility being undertaken in creative writing in a Chinese context» (17). Chinese writers come to learn in this situation, of creativity and translation, about how distinct their language and literature are (Ruihong and others 2019).

Xia Fang makes key observations about the connection between creative writing and translation. For instance, she observes: «Translation has become a means for creative writing, rather than a phenomenon for study as is commonly perceived in the field of translation studies» (2021, 162; see also Fang 2019). Creative writing has transformed the role of translation and she

looks at the practical significance of translation in creative writing and pushes back against the view that translation is secondary and derivative because this opinion «runs counter to the liberating, unbound nature of creative writing» (Fang 2021, 163). Fang proposes something clear and productive: «The continuum of rewriting practices, loosely built upon mistranslation, self-translation and open response, is introduced in this essay to explore the function of translation in creative writing. This continuum demonstrates a blurred distinction between translation and creative writing» (163). Translation can be at angles to itself or erroneous, be related to the self and can be open and responsive. It is not one thing. Aptly, Fang refers to David Morley's idea of translation in creative writing as representing «otherness-translation» (163; see Morley 2007, 72), Otherness, as I have noted elsewhere, is something key to defining self and in writing, reading, translating, cultural exchange. Morley also elaborates on the relation between creative writing and translation: «For creative writers, translation shares the continent of writing. For a growing number of professional literary translators, it is another form of creative writing; after all, they own the process» (2007, 72). Morley also refers to Robert Frost's view of poetry as being what is lost in translation and interpretation (72).

Experience in creative writing and translation

What is my context? I went to school and worked in French and English. My grandfather went to school in London and in Poissy just west of Paris on the Seine and my father worked and wrote in English and French, so it was hard to inhabit a monolingual world even when I was ostensibly surrounded by one language in a community. In school, I came across translation but I was also taught to think in one language at a time. I also studied classical and modern languages, but whatever languages I learnt for research or out of interest, they were never the same as English and French, which I was exposed to early in childhood. All of us in literate cultures with general education begin to write and read early and we translate our experience into images and words. We translate between word and world. We create our sense of other through our interaction with nature and culture, other people and plants and animals. And then there is school. Vocabulary, verbs, grammar, translation are all part of the study of the mother tongue and other languages. Even though English has over a quarter of its words related to French, the languages were always diffe-

rent and drifted more apart, at least in my sense of them, from the early seventeenth century.

The first poetry workshop I remember was when I was invited with other high school students to a university. I had been writing poetry regularly since I was thirteen. Thus, translation and creative writing were part of my life and studies, my identity. In time, I came to publish poetry, fiction and non-fiction and to teach, among other things, creative writing and comparative literature.

As a poet and writer, I gave lectures and readings in Australia, Canada, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Poland, Estonia, Slovenia, Romania, China, Singapore and elsewhere and my poetry was translated into, and sometimes published in Greek, German, French, Estonian, Polish, Romanian, Slovenian and Chinese. I worked with some of those translators, but I considered them to be poets who were recreating and even creating my poems anew. I would answer questions if they had any and eventually, as in the translation of my sonnets into French, I would sit down with the translator and answer questions in more detail, not as an interference but as a support out of respect for the translator-poets who were making my poems their own. I am pleased to be translated into languages large or small, European or Asian. It is always an honour to be translated. That someone would take the time to translate is a gift. Translators have many choices in their lives and so I never assume that someone will take the time to translate or interpret my work, whether poetry or non-fiction. The translators were students or seasoned poets and translators, some of whom were poet-translators. Poetry and translation are intertwined. My own poetry draws on poetry and other aspects of culture from other countries, ancient and modern European, and Asian, especially Chinese. Poets like Li Bai and Du Fu, even in various translations, have affected many poets in English, most notably Ezra Pound and including others, such as me. Adaptation, translation, cultural translation are part of my own poetic creation, an aspect of creative writing. In my non-fiction, I translate from various languages in documents or rare books in the archive or poetry that has not been translated, for instance, some recent, some ancient, and others, like the part of Victor Hugo's poem on Napoleon's retreat from Moscow as a gloss on Robert Lowell's adaptation of that poem and Hugo's original and I also translated Hugo's son's prose translation of two of Shakespeare's sonnets as a way of comparing then to the originals. I do all this partly for the readers who do not know French and although I write French poetry and prose, I prefer to have my poems translated into French as my French translator does a better job than I could.

Teaching creative writing for me usually means teaching poetry. In my teens and twenties, my poetry found its way into print, and so I could identify studying and writing poetry with my students. In Canada, before I ever taught creative writing, when I was in my twenties, I taught expository prose and there were six essays that the department required and I added an option to write a short-story or fragment of fiction as a seventh assignment. Once a student called me to say what a difference it had made to his life and I thought he was having fun but he insisted this was the case. I thought the fiction might have the students relax and explore themselves if they so wished. For a long time, I was sceptical whether one could teach creative writing or at least courses in it would help students to become writers. Later, when I taught poetry (creative writing) after I had published poetry collections, I was given a course in poetry and I was pleased to have multilingual students in the undergraduate class. There was a portfolio students had to submit to be admitted. Once I let in so many students that the class almost tripled in size. My criterion was if a student had a couple of lines of original or remarkable poetry that was enough to get in. They were ready to create and contribute in their small groups in which I had them exchange and discuss their poetry. I had them read poetry closely – we did close readings – as well as writing. Reading and writing are closely allied to the making of their craft of making. Students had different languages and cultures and most were not so interested in genre and metre, but occasionally there would be a student who wanted to concentrate on technical matters, sometimes to the dismay of fellow students. I tried to encourage students to be themselves and develop their own style, to be accomplished and diverse. I had graduate students who were creative writers and students of literature, including Indigenous and Métis students, one of whom, with my encouragement, published her bilingual book of poetry in English and Cree, which arose out of her critical-creative thesis. When teaching English, history or comparative literature, I try to make my students aware of different languages and the role of translation. I also helped to set up and edit a series in literature, culture and creative writing with a Canadian university press. My assumption was that people anywhere should feel able to write and express themselves, to create locally, and not simply in places far away.

In England I taught history and literature courses but also encouraged students in creative writing even if there were no courses in it. I gave readings and also made translation part of our tutorials, seminars, lectures. In compa-

rative history there, I had to translate Latin, French, Spanish and other languages in my study of empires and colonies. That entered into my teaching. Later, my work on Ted Hughes had to take into account his important contribution to translating and encouraging translation of contemporary poets, for instance from Continental Europe. I read some of that work in the original in the Western Manuscripts Room at the British Library. Although part of my family had left England for the American colonies at the start of colonization or soon after, my grandfathers were both English (on my paternal grandfather's side there was also Welsh). One scratches the surface of Britain and France, which some of my ancestors on both sides left in the Wars of Religion, there are Celtic and other languages. English itself is an amalgam of Germanic and Romance languages, and when we studied Old English and Middle English, we could see the genesis of English, which is a stranger to itself. The students I taught in England were, owing to the system, specialists, so I could assume a deep knowledge early on. When they wrote poetry and fiction, they were already steeped in literary tradition. In time, creative writing, as it did at the University of East Anglia, seemed to gather strength at more and more universities. When I taught Shakespeare, I could stress that double translation and the multilingual nature of Renaissance England and Europe, and something that had been so key in England to the First World War and even, to a lesser extent, until the 1960s. Sometimes informal work in literature classes or in tutorials can help to set the stage for a more formal course or degree in creative writing and literary translation.

I gave readings as well as lectures in Australia in 1994, and those I was visiting, at least in Melbourne, were often creative writers and critics as literature professors. With them, I helped to set up a publisher briefly that published Australia and Canadian writers who were writers and critics. In Singapore I gave a reading and visited classes and tried to encourage writers and students, who were often bilingual or multilingual and certainly diverse. Singapore has different official languages and various dialects, where East meets West. Moreover, over decades, I lectured and discussed translation and creative writing in Korea, Taiwan, Macao, Hong Kong and Mainland China. Here, I will concentrate on two experiences on the Mainland. Besides the conferences on translation and literature I spoke at throughout China over the past three decades or so and having had connections with scholars from East Asia for even longer, I call attention to the following experiences. In Shanghai, I was the director of the Centre for Creative Writing and Literary

Translation and Culture and we were able to have a number of talks, conferences, workshops on these topics, involving students and faculty. The inaugural conference for the centre brought together a leading Chinese-American poet and an accomplished Chinese-American scholar as well as translators, students and professors, including two of my future Chinese translators and a colleague with whom I taught with when we gave a course on the image of China in Beijing a couple of years later. A trip to Guangzhou had me visit the class of an old friend from Nanjing (many of my early friends in China had a connection with that city) whom I had met at the School of Criticism and Theory in 1988 (where I had also met that outstanding Chinese-American scholar, if memory serves me). One of his students in Guangzhou, a writer and scholar, also became one of my translators. We discussed poetry inside and outside of class. The university in Shanghai, through the suggestion and support of the dean, produced, through its press, six volumes about and by me, including a volume of Chinese translations of my poetry.

Research, teaching, creation and poetry in classes, formal and informal, came together over the years. The meeting of my friend in 1988 led to his student coming to conferences I helped to organize and for her to produce an essay for a collection on Shakespeare and Asia and to publish her translation of a whole collection of my poetry because she got carried away. Creative writing and translation, through students and colleagues in our Centre and School, including the editorial leadership of my associate director, came together to produce collaboration and discussions. My research and teaching assistant became an editor of this set of books and a co-teacher of a graduate course in Shakespeare, in which the students would translate and compare translations, of Shakespeare, including sonnets. Sometimes we would go around the seminar table and discuss what would be the best collective translation of Shakespeare. This happened over the years as we taught as a team first in Shanghai and then in northern China. My co-teacher (teaching assistant) would, along with the students, weigh the Chinese and English. Shakespeare was a Chinese as well as an English writer. His translation helped the students with language, understanding English culture and literature as well as their own literature and culture. My teaching and research assistant (now a professor) was really a co-teacher and enriched the class, made it bilingual, as she was. She also helped to encourage a student in our Centre in Shanghai, who liked to discuss and write fantasy fiction. All this was a group effort which certainly enriched my life and my sense of creation and criticism.

Recently, back in Massachusetts, I taught a seminar in creative writing in poetry. The class was diverse and we discussed cultural diversity and translation and, once more, I encouraged the students to be themselves and develop their own style. One student I encouraged to go to graduate school. We read poems closely. The students read their own work aloud if they so chose. Reading aloud helps to bring out the voice of these young poets. Students who had had little exposure to poetry in comparison with music lyrics or other forms in this digital world came to gather strength and confidence and to appreciate poetry in and of itself. I was very pleased with their progress. Decades ago in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I had helped to set up a literary and arts journal mainly for students, *The Kirkland Review*, and I helped to launch and co-edit a new journal in the town, reaching out to students, former students, faculty and members of the community. Some of these artists and students are multicultural and multilingual and we also publish translations of prose and poetry. Some of those we have published are friends and fellow writers I have known there for decades and three of the fine American poets we published I had met in China at some of the conferences I have mentioned. All this shows that cultural translation, translation, interpretation, teaching, reading all come together in a moving and fluid tapestry.

That is my key point: my own role in creative writing and translation across time and space involves serendipity, unpredicted strands and connections well beyond the initial meeting or reading or writing or translation. My role in creative writing and translation is one part in a large endeavour over time that, as I showed throughout, has many theorists and practitioners. Mimesis or anti-mimesis, ancient or modern, here or there, now and then produces a typology, involving philosophy, theory, literature and rhetoric. Poetry and translation and rhetoric all involve speaker and audience, writer and reader, translator and hearer/reader in an overlapping or interwoven way in a world of many tongues and many cultures, ever mixing and meeting, creating and carrying across words, spoken and written.

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