Translations in the Yard of Africa

Zoë Wicomb

Summary

In his account of the style in which Pauline Smith represents Afrikaners, her "faux-naïef" translation or transfer from Afrikaans to English, J.M. Coetzee identifies the grammatical error of aspect as evidence that there is no actual Afrikaans original behind the archaic-sounding, ethnicised English: "no-one speaking his own language makes errors of aspect: the time-system of the verb is too fundamental to language, and therefore to conceptualisation for that to happen". Two issues in this position relate to my argument about *Disgrace* as a text that struggles with translation as concept-metaphor for the postapartheid condition: firstly, the question of an original language Coetzee expects to find behind the English "translation" that claims to retain its trace; and secondly, the grammatical aspect of the perfective that not only preoccupies Lurie, the novel's central character, but also in terms of cultural translation marks the arrival at the target language/culture. In the following examination of the ways in which cultural translation is figured in the text, I also consider the relationship between translation and what has been called the period of transition in South Africa.

Opsomming

In sy relaas van die styl wat Pauline Smith gebruik om Afrikaners voor te stel, haar "faux-naïef" vertaling of oordrag vanaf Afrikaans na Engels, identifiseer J.M. Coetzee die grammatikale fout van aspek as bewys dat daar geen werklike Afrikaanse oorspronklike agter dié argaïese, geëtniseerde Engels is nie: "no-one speaking his own language makes errors of aspect: the time system of the verb is too fundamental to language, and therefore to conceptualisations for that to happen". Twee kwessies in hierdie verband sluit aan by my argument oor *Disgrace* as 'n teks wat spook met vertaling as konsep-metafoor vir die postapartheid toestand: eerstens, die kwessie van 'n oorspronklike taal wat Coetzee verwag om agter die Engelse "vertaling" te vind, wat aanspraak maak daarop om sy spoor te behou; en tweedens, die grammatikale aspek van die perfektief wat nie slegs vir Lurie, die sentrale karakter in die roman, preokkupeer nie, maar ook in terme van kulturele oordrag die bereiking van die teikentaal/-kultuur kenskets. In die volgende ondersoek van die wyses waarop kulturele vertaling in die teks vergestalt word, neem ek ook die verband tussen vertaling en die sogenaamde oorgangsfase in Suid-Afrika in ag.

In his account of the style in which Pauline Smith represents Afrikaners, her "faux-naïf" translation or transfer from Afrikaans to English, J.M.Coetzee identifies the grammatical error of aspect as evidence that there is no actual Afrikaans original behind the archaic-sounding, ethnicised English: "no-one speaking his own language makes errors of aspect: the time-system of the verb is too fundamental to language, and therefore to conceptualisation for that to happen"(Coetzee 1988: 122). Two issues in this position relate to my argument about *Disgrace* as a text that struggles with translation as concept-metaphor for the postapartheid condition: firstly, the question of an original language Coetzee expects to find behind the English "translation" that claims to retain its trace; and secondly, the grammatical aspect of the perfective that not only preoccupies Lurie, the novel's central character, but also in terms of cultural translation marks the arrival at the target language/culture (Coetzee 1999). In the following examination of the ways in which cultural translation is figured in the text, I also consider the relationship between translation and what has been called the period of transition in South Africa.

Translation is widely used as metaphor for the postcolonial condition, another example of theory's turn to the linguistic in order to engage with subjectivity; however, before testing the correspondences between vehicle and tenor, I want to start by looking at some of the postulates of interlingual translation. Taking their cue from poststructuralist theory, translationists question the old common-sensical notions of fluency, fidelity to the source text, equivalence between languages and the illusion of transparency, as well as consider the power relations at play between languages. Walter Benjamin's idea of a residue of the source text retained in translation or Derrida's double bind of a text being both translatable and untranslatable – these have readily lent themselves to theorising postcolonial identity, and in particular that of the migrant. But contemporary practice also foregrounds the notion of an original text as questionable. Andrew Benjamin, in his investigation of Freud's definition of repression as "a failure of translation", concludes that there is no such thing as an "original event": the event of translation is always already at work within translation (Benjamin 1992: 18-41). Venuti, in describing his own practice as both reproducing and supplementing the text, claims that his

> interpretive translation exceeds the source-language text, supplementing it with research that indicates its contradictory origins and thereby puts into question its status as an original, the perfect and consistent expression of authorial meaning of which the translation is always the copy.
>
> (Venuti 1995: 295)

An "abusive fidelity" aims at freeing reader and translator from "the cultural constraints that ordinarily govern their reading and writing and threaten to

overpower and domesticate the foreign text, annihilating its foreignness" (Venuti 1995: 305). And from the retention of a foreignness in English-language translation, Venuti makes an inferential leap to describing his practice as a dissident cultural politics.

Homi Bhabha employs the translation metaphor specifically in terms of migration: "the liminality of migrant experience is no less a transitional phenomenon than a translational one; there is no resolution to it because the two conditions are ambivalently enjoined in the 'survival' of migrant life" (Bhabha 1994: 224). It is the ambiguity of "survival" – the migrant must be transformed into a new culture, yet at the same time something of the original must survive – that renders Venuti's denial of origins difficult to accommodate, and his dissident politics impossible to map on to the condition of migrancy. What is omitted in Bhabha's description is the question of agency. Translation would always seem to be a self-translation, although the very appeal to survival surely raises the question of volition. In his discussion of blasphemy in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Bhabha addresses the concept of limits within cultural translation: "blasphemy is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular, it is a moment when the subject matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation" (Bhabha 1994: 227). Whilst agency again is effaced through the use of the passive voice, inequity and loss are hinted at. And here Venuti's notion of supplementing the text would seem to be anything but politically radical; instead, it could be seen to contribute to the process of exceeding and thus overwhelming a cultural tradition.

As for the period of colonisation itself where violence, both physical and ontological, marks the erasure of indigenous cultures, the benign translation metaphor seems more than inappropriate. George Steiner refers to loss as a necessary aspect of translation, and the following description raises obvious problems for its use in theorising the colonised:

> The enactment of reciprocity in order to restore balance is the crux of the metier and morals of translation. The appropriative "rapture" of the translator ... leaves the original with a dialectically enigmatic residue. Unquestionably there is a dimension of loss, of breakage ... but the residue is also, and decisively, positive. The work translated is enhanced ... to class a source text as worth translating is to dignify it immediately and to involve it in a dynamic of magnification.
>
> (Steiner 1975: 300)

This ethical dimension is of course missing from the colonial project, characterised by the asymmetry of domination, which by definition deletes the possibility of dignity, magnification or enhancement. The act of reproduction that constitutes translation readily lends itself to a sexual metaphor. If Spivak,

in the role of textual translator, asserts that one can only translate out of a language in which one can speak intimacies, and that the "surrender" to the text is "more erotic than ethical" (Spivak 1993: 183), Steiner emphasises the ethical. His description echoes that of a sexual encounter between equals: the "appropriative rapture" of the act of translation can be seen as "a hermeneutic of trust, of penetration, of embodiment, and of restitution" (Steiner 1975: 303). The ethical lies in Steiner's chronology: the framing of the acts of penetration and embodiment within a reciprocity of trust and restitution offers an ethical intersubjectivity which does not correspond with the asymmetrical relationship between coloniser and colonised.

In the period of transition the liberatory people according to Fanon "construct their culture from a national text translated into modern western forms of information technology, language, dress" (Fanon quoted by Bhabha 1994: 119), in other words, assume agency in the process of translation. Here translation is a necessary, self-imposed adaptation, a condition for liberation, so that the literal act of sartorial transformation does not compromise the native's cultural integrity. Removing a traditional costume and donning a Western suit that retains the trace of the former is in any case not the punctual act that it appears to be; instead, the native has over a period of time been acculturated into a transformed world. The question of agency interposes itself in the timelag between the initial violence of colonial contact and the transformed native, the acculturated agent who necessarily undergoes a self-translation. And the process of racial subject formation is crucially implicated in such a temporality.

Before discussing the appropriateness of the translation metaphor in a post-apartheid context, I wish to start with the arrival of Europeans at the Cape, a historical moment where the denial of origins in translation theory constitutes an obvious problem. The story of the indigenous Khoikhoi woman, Krotoa, and her exertions in the matter of dress is an exemplary case in which translation can be examined as a figure within the narrative of racial subject formation and in terms of its relationship with transition. In 1652 within months of Van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape, Krotoa, then aged ten, lived in the Dutch fort where, on conversion to Christianity, her name was "translated" into Eva. With her aptitude for languages which soon gained her fluency in Dutch and Portuguese her role became that of translator and unofficial diplomat; she is repeatedly referred to in Van Riebeeck's journals as "Eva, the interpreter". Related to the Cochoqua chief, Oedasoa, Eva's influence among the Khoikhoi made her an advisor and mediator between the Dutch and the indigenous people. Her much vaunted assimilation in the European fort must, however, be questioned not only because she went off frequently in search of the sociability of the tribe, but because of the manner in which she left: "outside the fort [she] dressed herself in hides and sent her clothes home"

(Thom 1952: 343). This cumbersome procedure marks out the strict boundaries of cultural difference and the circumscribed nature of her translation. Elphick writes of her transculturation, of her moving "back and forth between the fort and the Cochoqua, exchanging her Batavian dress for Khoikhoi hides each time she went" (Elphick 1985: 108). Significantly, a prior history of colonial rupture is already present in the Batavian dress that replaces the Dutch costume; in other words, the Khoi is translated into an already hybridised Dutch/Batavian culture. And all that restless coming and going, dressing and undressing between ethnic wardrobes, marks the process of fashioning a new fidgety self.

Studies of early settler society as racially inclusive and encouraging of mixed marriages (Du Prè 1993: 14) do not take into account the psychic violence that characterises the history of Krotoa's translation. That such a translation was incomplete is suggested in the Van Riebeeck journals in which she is accused of duplicity in her role as interpreter and is "caught out telling untruths occasionally"(Thom 1952: 266). Steiner's description of translation as reciprocal and imbued with trust is absent in the case of Krotoa. In 1664 her marriage to Pieter van Meerhoff, a surgeon who became superintendent of the convicts on Robben Island, was the first between native and settler. The early death of Van Meerhoff, and Krotoa's subsequent degeneration into drunkenness and prostitution on the mainland led to their offspring being orphaned and absorbed into Dutch colonial society whilst she was properly banished to Robben Island. In the 1990s, however, Krotoa was symbolically rescued from the Island and rehabilitated as originary Mother of the Afrikaner. Carli Coetzee, tracing the ways in which Krotoa had been represented in twentieth-century South African writing to serve various ideological projects, focuses on Antoinette Pienaar's 1995 one-woman show "*Krotoä Š*", in which she is reclaimed as founding mother of the Afrikaner. ("In amateur genealogical circles, white people compete to discover that they are descended from Krotoa"). Carli Coetzee's concluding injunction to Afrikaners, "better to remember that her silence is not a forgiveness" (Coetzee 1998: 112-119), overlooks the significant speech-act that earns Krotoa her banishment to the island. Her story climaxes in an exquisite moment on February 8, 1669, at a grand colonial gathering where, in a classic Calibanesque gesture, she hurls drunken abuse "within the hearing of the Commander" (Elphick 1985: 202). Who her abuse is directed at or the actual words she uses is not recorded; indeed, what is of significance is the breach of etiquette, the inopportune language used in an inappropriate space which earns her admonishment and subsequent banishment to Robben Island. Eva-Krotoa offends and transgresses precisely through speech that proclaims her difference, and so asserts her resistance to translation. The scandalous speech-act falls in the space between her two names, pushing them asunder: the assimilated Eva who is admitted to

the Governor's presence, and Krotoa, the indigene who asserts her otherness by disturbing the grand event. The disturbance already present in the protocolony of the Cape is also an exemplary instance of colonial ambivalence, or the basic contradiction that constitutes colonialism's translation of natives: "the making of 'savages' into 'citizens' and at the same time fabricating ethnic, racialised subjects" (Comaroff 1998: 330). In the case of Krotoa, the contradiction that lurks within the coloniser's project is mirrored back at him, magnified through the translated Eva's rude speech which proclaims loudly the fissure already-there in the respectability of the gathering: the fact that colonial occupation constitutes a fundamental breach of civility. In terms of the translation metaphor, Krotoa the "savage" asserts her untranslatability, refusing to be the source text for Eva, the "citizen".

The contemporary Afrikaner claim to Krotoa as founding mother would, in accordance with the translation metaphor, seem to be an act of restitution. The gesture may well be the disavowal of a stigmatised whiteness, but its appeal is to the symbolic nature of her translated name, Eva, originary woman, a name that may be suitable for a revised identity but one that also embodies the violence of colonial translation. In other words the white refiguration of itself as coloured is to return Krotoa to the status of translatable source text, to drown her verbal abuse in a counterassertion of her translatability.

In Homi Bhabha's discussion of migrant subjectivity and the interrelatedness of transition and translation, it is the residual in the source text that is of value, and it is paradoxically through that which is retained in translation that "newness comes into the world". Thus translation produces the productive Third Space of culture's hybridity, the site where self/other polarities can be eluded although the "'present' of translation may not be a smooth transition, a consensual continuity, but the configuration of the disjunctive rewriting of the transcultural migrant experience" (Bhabha 1994: 226). This interrelation of transition, which operates on a progressive continuum towards a goal, and translation, with its punctual nature, does, however, disrupt temporality itself, a destabilisation that can be seen in the narrative of Eva-Krotoa. The space between Krotoa and Eva, between self and other, is manifestly not a liberatory space, and this raises a number of questions: How appropriate is the translation model for the South African situation where apartheid has to be translated into democracy? If an element of untranslatability is axiomatic, then are we necessarily doomed to the residue of apartheid? How helpful is the conflation of transition and translation?

For Andrew Benjamin who eschews the notion of origins there need be no temporal disruption or distinction between transition and the event of translation. He introduces the idea of a "pragma", by which he both allows for the specificity of the event and refuses a homological relation between source text and translation, or a specific interpretation and the object of interpretation

(Benjamin 1989: 148). The co-presence of both pragma and the event means that it is possible to think being within becoming. Such a healthy sounding condition is not only difficult to read into Eva-Krotoa's history, but the underplaying of transition, and in particular its goal-directedness, is politically dubious. Conflation of transition and translation would seem to lose the sense of transformation into something recognisably different that is not a reproduction of the old. Here it reduces Krotoa's condition to costume changes, confers on it a literality, so that Bhabha's "newness" turns out to be limited to a matter of style, a modality that Andrew Benjamin sees as crucial to the operation of translation: "the displacement that, in part, is style is the enactment of the process of translation"(Benjamin 1992: 21). What I go on to investigate is the ways in which *Disgrace* (Coetzee 1999) could be seen to explore the relationship between the original and the translated, between transition and translation, and how this is underpinned by temporality and the role of the perfective in the text.

Rather than deny origins, *Disgrace* invites the reader to consider the source text and intertexts, and through the perfective asserts the role of history in the articulation of the new order, or rather, disorder in South Africa. You do not make errors of aspect when you translate: in translation the perfective is the site where the original is effaced and the time system of a new language takes over. Thus it is through the perfective, an act carried through to its conclusion, that translation is asserted and the relationship between source text and translation, or apartheid and post-apartheid is articulated. Temporality in *Disgrace* is described through key verbs – "burnt up"; "driven"; "usurp"; "drink up" – that connect the pedagogical explanations of the perfective to events in the narrative. The first example of the perfective comes from Lurie's Wordsworth class: "usurp completes the act of usurping upon" (Coetzee 1999: 21), a verb connected with the coloniser's illegal assumption of power. He goes on to explain to the bored youth of the country the distinction between drink and drink up, burned and burnt.

Lurie, the sophisticated, liberal, English academic, is typically immersed in European high culture, his moral and aesthetic anchors being Byron, but also amongst others, Wordsworth, Hardy, Yeats, Flaubert, traceable sources for the canonical citations made in his name. But he finds himself in "Darkest Africa" where English, for instance, is an unfit medium for communication with Petrus, the black farm worker. His students are postliterate and immune to the language of poetry. For them he has to translate, both geoculturally and in terms of register, Wordsworth's response to Mont Blanc:

> Wordsworth is writing about the Alps .... We don't have Alps in this country, but we have the Drakensberg, or on a smaller scale, Table Mountain, which we climb

> in the wake of the poets, hoping for one of those revelatory, Wordsworthian moments we have all heard about.
>
> (Coetzee 1999: 23)

The point is that we have not all heard about it, that we do not climb the mountain in the wake of English poets, that revelatory moments are perfectly possible without having heard of Wordsworth, which is to say that our feelings and experience of nature need not be structured by poetic discourses from the metropolis. That, after all, is what necessitates Lurie's translation of the European landscape into the native one.

Lurie is absorbed by the Byron story; he revels in the parallels with his own loss of love. But the Byron story, in spite of Lurie's affiliation with European culture translates into the absurd, finding its expression in the accompaniment of the crude banjo. Finally he understands his project to be ludicrous and specifically so in the African context: "plink-plunk squawks the banjo in the desolate yard in Africa" (Coetzee 1999: 214), to which the doomed dog of his closing affections smacks its lips and prepares to howl, a dog with whose demise, "burned, burnt", the novel ends. David Lurie represents the white colonial condition that looks to Europe as the centre of reference, and for whom the need to match up, the reminder of an inevitable cultural hybridity, is always a humiliation, a reduction, and in terms of translation, a failure.

As for the central action carried through to its conclusion it is Lurie who articulates the condition of the perfective through interracial sex. Of Lucy's rapists he says: "it was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs bulging with seed aching to perfect itself" (p. 199). This analysis is preceded by a scene in the theatre with Melanie's boyfriend,who tells him to stay with his own kind:

> who is this boy to tell him who his kind are? What does he know of the force that drives the utmost strangers into each other's arms, making them kin, kind, beyond all prudence? The seed of generation, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman's body, driving to bring the future into being. Drive, driven.
>
> (Coetzee 1999: 199)

But Melanie was never driven into the arms of this unreliable focaliser. The reciprocity with which this passage starts is spurious, and is soon glossed as a one-sided male drive to procreate. The parallel descriptions link Lurie with the rapists, and in his desire to penetrate the black female body, is shown to simply re-enact the old colonial appropriation. Thus he represents a culture that remains in a crucial sense untranslated, marked by the old values of apartheid. If Lurie represents the untranslated, the narrative events nevertheless trade in translations. Internally topological, they offer crucial repetitions and rewritings

that figure a culture of pathologies. The father's disgrace for seducing one of his students is repeated in the daughter's "disgrace" (Lurie's word) in being raped. On one of his sexual encounters with Melanie, "she does not resist ... not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (p. 25). The Committee of Inquiry's Dr Rassool speaks of the incident as "the long history of exploitation of which this is part" (p. 53) and we are told that "in a case with overtones like this, the wider community is entitled to know" (p. 50). The colouredness of the student, Melanie, is never named, neither in the account of events focalised through Lurie, nor in the reports of the Commission of Enquiry; Rassool uses the deictic "this" to imply a given, shared knowledge; similarly, the blackness of the rapists is not named. But conspicuously unnamed as race may be, the mixing of races functions as hermeneutic key to the translation of culture. The colouredness of Melanie will be morphologically repeated in the mixed-race child to whom Lucy will give birth, and so the transition from apartheid, an ideology based on race, to melanisation will be achieved biologically through the violated female body. The topologies spiral into the given intertext and the self-reflexivity of the novel: Lurie tries to write an opera about Byron whilst Melanie, the drama student, acts in a postapartheid play; like Byron's abandoned mistress, Lurie is concerned about ageing and sexuality. These repetitions are foregrounded as rewordings bound up with a colonial history that shapes the present.

In reply to his question to what extent culture is the translation and rewording of previous meaning, Steiner expounds a theory of intracultural translation in which the novel too, for all its contingency and freedom from stylisation, is subject to metamorphic repetition and critical revision. (Thus echoes of Dorothea Brooke in Isabel Archer exemplify topological translation.) Steiner contends that "these metamorphic relations have as their underlying deep structure a process of translation" (Steiner 1975: 461), a topological view of culture that can be seen to be superseded by Bakhtinian dialogics and Kristevan intertextuality. Steiner's examples are all from the texts of high culture, but translation can also be seen to be exemplified in popular cultural practices of the resistance period, although such acts of violation of the human body – necklacing or rape – cannot with any measure of decency be cast as texts (cf Wicomb 1993).

Whilst Steiner distinguishes between direct variants and mere collateral links between related texts, intertextuality according to Barthes is a condition of all writing:

> the text [is]... woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages, antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in

> a vast stereophony ... the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas.
> (Barthes 1977: 155-164)

Not only is a text made up of discourses from a variety of fields, but the boundary between literary and nonliterary is dissolved, and its citations being untraceable, it dispenses with notions of origin. The author is dead. Here intertextuality does not so much contribute to the reading process; it is rather a theory of writing, but as such, it stops short of accounting for the postcolonial writer for whom the involuntary references and already-there citations are often oppressive, and for whom value-laden origins are not dispensable. Bakhtin, on the other hand, in addressing the question of reading and the problem of meaning, has a number of illuminating questions to ask of citations: "how does this infiltration occur, how does the receiving context relate to it, in what sorts of intonational quotation marks is it enclosed?" (Bakhtin 1988: 125, 156). Similarly, Kristeva comments on novelistic utterances:

> The functions defined according to the extra-novelistic textual set (Te) take on value within the novelistic textual set (Tn). The ideologeme of the novel is precisely this intertextual function defined according to Te and having value within Tn.
> (Kristeva 1987: 37)

The function of the author then is both junctive (i.e. ties together narrative and citational utterances) and translative (transfers utterances from one textual space into another) which changes its ideologemes. It is precisely because of its translative possibilities that intertextuality as writing strategy has become such a staple of postcolonial discourse, and in *Disgrace* it serves as an internal device to undermine the authority of the narrative voice focalised through Lurie. For instance, if we are tempted to admire Lurie's concern with the disposal of unwanted dogs, the citation of Little Father Time's "because we were too menny" (Coetzee 1999: 146) must surely question our belief in him. The narrative voice describes the site of the incinerator in terms of the same injustice towards humans – social and economic exclusion as well as exclusion from education – that culminates in the death of the children in *Jude the Obscure*:

> By the time the orderlies arrive in the morning with the first bags of hospital waste, there are already numbers of women and children waiting to pick through it for syringes, pins, washable bandages, anything for which there is a market, but

> particularly for pills, which they sell to muti shops or trade in the streets. There are vagrants too, who hang about the hospital grounds by day and sleep by night against the wall of the incinerator, or perhaps even in the tunnel for the warmth.
> (Coetzee 1999: 145)

The short answer to Bahktin's question is through non-naming. The above establishes Lurie's unreliability; it allows him to avoid identifying such people within the specific political context; he need not consider them in terms of inequities produced within a society that has remained unchanged. Instead, and nothing short of an outrage, he refers disgracefully to "the social rehabilitation thing". If his self-marginalisation and professed humility in the company of dogs is not simply a matter of hyperbolic posturing, it certainly escapes ethical engagement with the human condition.

The novel's most enigmatic intertext, one which invokes South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission whose declared aims were of remembering and healing, is Cicero's story of the Art of Memory. Significant non-naming is embedded in the story of memory where history and repetition are most dramatically figured in the role of Pollux, the rapist. In the Greek story, the poet Simonides, famous for his odes to victory, is asked by a rich patron, Scopas, to perform at his banquet. Instead of a praise-song to his host, Simonides spends much time praising Castor and Pollux, twin sons of Leda. The slighted Scopas refuses to pay the full fee, and at that moment Simonides is told that two unnamed young men wish to see him outside. No sooner does he leave than the roof of the banqueting hall collapses and all the guests die, their bodies horribly disfigured and unrecognisable. It is Simonides who through reimagining the space of the banquet and positioning each person at the table is able to identify the dead. Thus mnemotechnics, the art of memory, is born (Yates 1966).

Embedded in the story are not only a concern with verbal art, visual imagination and spatiality, but also the themes of revenge and reversal. Simonides may not get his money, but Scopas pays a heavy price for diddling him out of his fee. Like the unnamed race in Coetzee's Pollux, the rapist, the enigmatic young men whom we assume to be Castor and Pollux are unnamed in Cicero's story. They are neither characters nor actants in the narrative, but nevertheless perform the Proppian function of helper. They introduce into the story the concern with a hybrid identity: as the twin sons of Leda but born of two fathers, one mortal, the other immortal, they are marked by indeterminacy and burdened with the politics of location. Pollux spent half his days in Hades and half with the gods in Olympus; his father, Zeus, had raped Leda in the guise of a swan, thus the name in *Disgrace* represents a metamorphic repetition of historical violence, doubling not only the theme of revenge but characterising the culture as one of translative recursions. The history of the twins, Castor

and Pollux, can be seen as an allegorical condition of postcoloniality: figuration of hybridity (their twoness within an inseparable unity) is also achieved by the rapists in *Disgrace* – literally through rape and miscegenation. Thus what the novel also proclaims through the intertext of Pollux and the story of memory is the failure of the project of public memorialising, the naivety and inadequacy of that Christian discourse of remembering, forgiving and healing.

The question of reversal then, narrativised in the overturning of power relations between poet and patron, is to be read with caution. Victory is indeed achieved not only for the disinterested Simonides, but for poetry itself, for the integrity of art which refuses the sycophancy demanded by a patron. (Lurie, the would-be artist, assumes the same disinterestedness in his dealings with the Committee of Enquiry; Lucy's disinteredness in seeking justice for her violation is bound up with reversal.) But such victory for the independence of art would seem also to partake of paradox: in the Simonides story of power and revenge, the poet comes up trumps, but the physically obliterated enemy, in being identified, is resurrected through the art of memory. The non-naming of race, for instance, may seem to constitute an achromatism which reverses apartheid, but that would be a politically naive definition of apartheid as purely prohibition of interracial sex. Such reversal manifestly does not constitute democratic transformation; it is a vulgar reading of translation.

As significant as the foregrounded translations and intertexts are the metamorphic repetitions bound up with history. Lurie sees his daughter as a throwback who has returned to the land, a sturdy young settler or "boervrou". He is able to use the word in its benign colonial sense, and fails to see her attempts at translation from settler into something new, even if it does retain a residue of the old. Lucy sees herself not as "boervrou" who exercises power over her farmworker, but rather as one who is prepared to co-farm the land with Petrus. To answer Bakhtin's question: here the receiving context confirms a resistance to the citation, where "boervrou" as already read is the liberal intellectual's ameliorative translation. Lurie's language that articulates the topological is reinforced by the syntactic repetitions of parallelism:

> A frontier farmer of the new breed. In the old days, maize and cattle. Today, dogs and daffodils. The more things change, the more they remain the same. History repeating itself, though in a more modest vein.
>
> (Coetzee 1999: 62)

But the narrative events are not repeated in a more modest vein; instead the metamorphosis is that of intensification. Lucy's rape is a magnification of her father's seduction of a student, gang rape an intensification of the violation, the blackness of the rapists an intensification of Melanie's colouredness,

illustrating Steiner's "magnification" of the original text. Walter Benjamin's simile is pertinent:

> while content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds. For it signifies a more exalted language than its own and thus remains unsuited to its content, overpowering and alien.
>
> (Benjamin 1973: 75)

Such amplitude or excess is figured in the improbable extravagant gestures on the part of the central characters such as David's visit to the home of the coloured girl's petit bourgeois parents in George where he expounds inappropriately to the father about the fire Melanie kindled in him, about his own lack of the lyrical, before stumbling into the bedroom of the mother and prostrating himself before her. These hyperbolic gestures, aimed at overturning the past, in Lurie's case a personal, unhistoricised past, border on the bizarre.

Cultural translation in Coetzee's text is thus figured as departing from the merely topological in its excess and magnification. Lucy's acceptance of the child in her womb is an excessive expression of white guilt, of remembering and making restitution. Petrus's bizarre offer of marriage translates the previous taboos of apartheid legislation, whether the Immorality Act or Land Act, into an appropriative entitlement. These extravagant gestures are patently pathological; they also demonstrate the failure of post-apartheid culture, translations that hardly constitute an emancipatory politics, that certainly do not bring newness into the world. The pathologies can be read as elements of the untranslatable, the residue of apartheid – an overarching intertext – that continues its vulgar influence on its subjects. Lucy will not acknowledge the rape, will not speak about it, and will not report it to the police: behaviour which could be read in terms of Freud's statement: "a failure of translation, that is what is known as repression". She is also a victim of what Andrew Benjamin calls the overdetermination of the term translation. Translation, he says, involves a process of disambiguation which means giving a single determination, and "literality, or literal meaning emerges therefore as a secondary effect" (Benjamin 1989: 22). Her literal interpretation of making amends, of accepting violence and humiliation, constitutes a kind of public memorialising, since for all her silence on the rape itself she decides to bear the mixed-race offspring. Thus the lesbian too is translated into progenitor through violation of the nondiscursive female body. One of Lurie's key verbs for explaining the perfective is here demonstrated: his daughter is driven to drink up, to drain the cup of white guilt.

Disgrace declares South African culture to be at the end of its appeal to transition with its progressive aspect, as a movement from old to new. The

new – product of violence, racially mixed, ethically skewed – which is about to be born turns out to be not so new. With the invariants of the old regime horribly present in the new translations, progressive transition has come to a stuttering halt, and in this moral stasis Bhabha's conflation of translation and an emancipatory transition is unthinkable. Lurie's brooding over the perfective, "signifying an action carried through to its conclusion" (Coetzee 1999: 71), declares the failure of transition as a crossing over to democracy. It is not only the vulgar reading of translation as reversal that triumphs (Lurie replacing Petrus as dog-man; Petrus offering Lucy paternalistic protection), but where translation does appear to operate, as in Lucy's lifestyle or Petrus's attempts at farming his own land, it inevitably carries the residue of apartheid. We are then according to *Disgrace* hamstrung by the double bind of translatability and untranslatability, and the modalities of the past – sex, race, violence – continue to prevail, carrying with them the echo of Eva-Krotoa's curses.

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