

The language of violence in Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and its translation into English.

Griseldis W. Crowhurst-Bond

Summary

The article concentrates on the language of violence as the novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by the German author Alfred Döblin manifests it, and the difficulties of translating these signs into the English language which has its own ritualised codes of action, ideologies and cultural associations as signs. Traditional imagery in the form of metaphor or personification is more or less transferable, but next to this Döblin works with song motifs which by means of association underpin the signs of violence and aggression inherent in everyday language. These motifs are autonomous images of substantiated figurativeness, to which the other images and metaphors are referred. The associative fields are very specific manifestations of the historical experience structures of the German language, whereas similar codifications, conventionalisations and typifications inherent in the English language are linked to different functions and significations. As a result the problem arises for the translator that, before actually starting to translate the novel, the code operating throughout has to be found.

Opsomming

Die artikel konsentreer op die taal van geweld as realiteit in die roman *Berlin Alexanderplatz* van die skrywer, Alfred Döblin, asook die vertalingsprobleme wat opduik as 'n mens dit in Engels, 'n taal met sy eie geritualiseerde kodestelsels en aksiestelsel, ideologieë en kulturele assosiasies en tekens, wil vertaal. Tradisionele beelde in die vorm van metafore en persoonifikasie is min of meer oordraagbaar, maar daarbenewens werk Döblin ook met sangmotiewe wat d.m.v. assosiasies dien as versterking van die tekens van geweld en aggressie wat eie is aan alledaagse taalgebruik.

Hierdie motiewe is outonome beelde van gesubstantiveerde beeldrykheid waarna die ander beelde en metafore verwys. Die assosiatiewe velde is baie spesifieke manifestasies van die historiese ondervinding van die Duitse taal, terwyl soortgelyke kodifikasies en gemeenskaplikhede en tiperings wat inherent aan Engels is, met ander funksies en tiperings verbind is. Die probleem waarmee die vertaler opgesaai is, is om die kode wat deurgaans gebruik word te vind voordat daar met die vertaling begin word.

1. Introduction

What is translation? The debate on this is still not closed: is it an art as Theodore Savory wants it defined, a craft according to Eric Jacobson, or rather a science in the understanding of the translation of the German word 'Wissenschaft'? And with this cue we are right in the middle of our topic. In my understanding of the word 'Wissenschaft', the English translation as 'science' is somewhat inadequate. Although the word 'science' derives from the Latin 'scire' meaning to know, to have knowledge of, to have experience of or to know in the sense of knowing how to, to be able, 'scientia' entails

knowledge as the understanding of something, and as 'Wissenschaft' it is understood subjectively as the sum of what somebody knows, or understands. That is the original meaning. The word 'science' today seems more mechanically craft-directed, that is, a methodology, independent of knowledge or the accumulation of knowledge. 'Wissenschaft' in itself is an abstract noun; 'knowledgeship' would render it better, if there were such a word.

In fact, translation seems to demand all four aspects mentioned.

In German I would suggest a combination of 'wissen' and 'kennen', i.e. expertise and knowledge.

Translation cannot operate without having recourse to the placing of culture in the time-space coordinates of a given historical period. Literature being one manifestation, one code of the cultural network of a given period, it shows evidence of the historical context in typical behaviour patterns of the time. According to Lotman and Uspensky, culture is the 'non-hereditary memory of the community, a memory expressing itself in a system of constraints and prescriptions' (Lotman; Uspensky, 1978:213). 'Culture is *memory* or, in other words, a record in the memory of what the community has experienced, it is, of necessity, connected to *past* historical experience' (Lotman, Uspensky, 1978:214). This direct experience is translated into text. That is, the facts get implanted into the collective memory, into the language of culture.

The more sophisticated and demanding a piece of literature is, the more such facts will be formative in its production. As cultural processes can be understood semiotically as processes of communication, each of which is made possible by an underlying system of signification, the translation of a text, any text in fact, adds a further dimension to a communication process. The ritualised codes of action, ideologies and cultural associations that manifest themselves as signs have to be translated from the Source language into the Target language, which has its own codifications, conventionalisations and typifications. Language in any case is never static, but is active and effects something in the reader. In the light of this, the translation of a novel like *Berlin Alexanderplatz* must strike one as a particularly difficult, if not courageous undertaking. The only English translation of this novel was done by Eugene Jolas and it dates back to 1930. I am not concerned with evaluating Jolas' translation, but it does present us with a good example of the central issues of translation, particularly of prose: namely, the problem of meaning, signification, and translatability or equivalence of signification. Another interesting feature of this translation is that it belongs to the same period as the novel which appeared in 1929. This means that they should reflect the same reality, albeit of two different cultural and political environments. In fact it seems that Jolas was basically and innocently unaware of the enormous difficulties and decision processes that are involved. For him apparently everything was translatable, and so the danger of a 'monistic composition' technique instead of 'an interpenetration and conglomerate of two structures' (Bassnet-McGuire, 1980: 5-6) is a very real one.

This is symptomatic of the concept of translation prevalent at that time. The function and role of the translator have radically changed due to shifts in

the cultural awareness in international terms. One must bear in mind here that Döblin's text is being reproduced for readers with no knowledge either of the German language or the socio-literary conventions that determined the writing of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Readers today have become perhaps more sophisticated with regard to novels, having been 'trained' as it were by the modern genre of the novel in general, so that a translator today can make his readers more conscious of the subtleties of the original text. The technique of literary montage or collage is no longer surprising and certainly not new to us anymore. Where quotations are involved which, as in the case of the Bible, where both Source and Target language (here German and English) themselves are translations, they have become imbedded in the memory of the community; in such cases the translation finds true equivalence. However in such cases where the Target language does not supply correspondences (and in the case of Döblin it is the montage of songs that largely have become folk-songs), some means has to be found by the translator to convey a corresponding set of signs. These songs that function increasingly as leitmotifs within the novel are at the same time imbedded in a tight and widespread net of linked motifs and/or allusions.

2. The novel and reality

The crucial factor in the relationship of novel and reality as we see it today is not how the novel presents reality, but how reality constitutes itself in the novel. For this, language as an instrument to produce a text and contexts, is both prerequisite and target. Reality constitutes itself linguistically, and the language of the novel in its fictionality nevertheless feeds on the practical application of language in real life.

A central aspect of the reality of the novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is the reality of violence and war; the norms and rules of violence at the end of the novel lead to the war, and Döblin shows these norms and rules to be imbedded in everyday life. Geppert (1982:235) points out how frequently the mounted linguistic elements are in the form of commands, legal prescriptions, proverbs, value judgements etc., and how frequently in one way or another these are injunctions for violence. This verbal violence is linked to various norms and patterns of behaviour which in their functionality are variants of violence, be it the functioning of a jail, economic distributional struggles, a working life that literally destroys a man, political slogans and discussions that lead to fury and hate, rape, attitudes towards ownership, jealousy in love and the whole field of crime. In fact an enormous amount of material is incorporated in the novel in order to bring to the critical consciousness of the reader the many forms of unconscious, conventional, matter-of-fact forms of violence.

The novel presents us with a learning process in which an outsider gradually arrives at an engaged understanding of humanity. To realise this, the productive co-operation of the reader is essential, and it is the reader who is constantly confronted with problems of concretely presented reality. And a

dimension of this reality between the two World Wars was the phenomenon of violence in the Weimar Republic.

3. Introduction of the code indicators and their translation

Usually the opening passages of a novel are particularly revealing and significant because here the reader finds the indicators for the code or codes operating throughout the novel. With Döblin's novel, however, these indicators appear already with the table of contents and the prologue, which shows itself to be in fact a synopsis. In the translation by Jolas the table of contents merely lists the nine books and the relevant pages, whereas the original shows all the subtitles of each book thereby presenting a synopsis of each chapter, as yet independent of the contents of the novel, but clearly showing the main features of each chapter. Furthermore the reader has at that point a first impression of the subtle structure and the different linguistic codes operating throughout: colloquialisms, idiomatic expressions, the language of the stock exchange, of boxing, of weather reports, quotations of soldiers' or marching songs, of children's songs, of the Bible, apart from the images and the nomenclature of battle.

Already with the first unlisted sub-title in the table of contents – 'Mit der 41 in die Stadt' – the translation presents a shift in perspective when, later, at the beginning of the novel proper, it states: 'Tram 41 into town', to be followed by the next sub-title 'Still not there' (JBA: 15), which will be taken up again in the beginning of the second book: 'Franz Biberkopf enters Berlin' (JBA: 45). Placed next to each other like that, the continuity is lost, which of course the English reader probably does not notice. The original states: 'To town on the 41', thereby stressing the journey aspect and not the object, (the tram), as the translation does.

The synopsis at the end of the table of contents and before the novel proper also sets accents, and again the translation presents shifts which have consequences, when it begins with: 'This book reports the story of Franz Biberkopf, an erstwhile cement- and transport-worker in Berlin', whereas the German text actually says: 'This book reports about an ex-cement- and transport-worker Franz Biberkopf in Berlin.' By introducing the concept of story at this point, Jolas stresses fictional narrative where the original refers to the verb 'berichten', which means 'report', the documentary element that plays such an important structuring role. In the second paragraph subtle changes again misdirect the thrust of the original text: what Franz Biberkopf has to grapple with is not 'fortuitous', nor is it 'unaccountable'. It is unpredictable, it is something that comes from outside and looks like a destiny: 'mit etwas, das von außen kommt, das unberechenbar ist und wie ein Schicksal aussieht'. Fate and destiny may look synonymous, but they carry different signs. Destiny is perhaps more personalised, as opposed to the more abstract concept of fate. The external agency factor is stressed repeatedly in the novel: Biberkopf experiences his destiny as being determined by external forces, not internal or inner elements. It is therefore not coincidental when later the

Furies of classical Greek tragedy appear, because there too the concept of externalisation of destiny is apparent: Fate can appear as a goddess because one's destiny is determined outside one's self. In the novel it is stated explicitly: 'Man soll sich nicht dicke tun mit seinem Schicksal. Ich bin Gegner des Fatums. Ich bin kein Grieche, ich bin Berliner' (BA: 45). Jolas translates this as: 'We shouldn't brag about our fate. I'm an enemy of Destiny, I'm not a Greek, I'm a Berliner' (JBA: 52). The context makes it quite clear that it should be 'our destiny' and 'an enemy of Fate'! Linked to the externalisation of destiny is the theme of force and violence, in the form of actual violence when Biberkopf goes berserk, or the violence that is directed against him when he loses his arm, the violence that becomes particularly concentrated in the war-theme, and the violence that expresses itself in everyday language in a metaphoric manner. But it only looks like, appears to be an external agency, and here again a small change in the translation sets wrong accents: 'am Schluß', in the end (and not 'at last'), Biberkopf can be seen on the Alexanderplatz, greatly changed, battered, but, nevertheless bent into shape, 'zurechtgebogen', not 'straightened out again', which implies that at some stage before Biberkopf had been in correct shape. The story of Franz Biberkopf, reveals the exact opposite. The last paragraph of the 'synopsis' which characterises the direct involvement of the reader, again introduces a meaning which is alien to the Döblin novel: we are not asked to meditate on the fate of Biberkopf, but to observe, look at it, be informed about it and hear it: 'Dies zu betrachten und zu hören wird sich für viele lohnen' is not 'To listen to this, and to meditate on it, will be of benefit to many'. Again an element of externalisation is lost and with that the link with the earlier verb 'berichten' (report).

4. Shifts of accent in the opening chapter of the translation

The opening chapter of the translation in particular shows that here content was stressed at the expense of the total structure: a series of clues as to the codes operating throughout disappears. Firstly the mixture of different narrative stances, i.e. the variety of modalities, that co-exist, gets blurred: e.g. 'His punishment was only beginning' for 'Die Strafe beginnt' (The punishment begins). Substituting the preterite for the present tense makes the sentence part of the story, which it is not. It introduces a temporal element and loses the spatial one. Here the English translation introduces an external perspective where the German original does not. Similarly 'Los.' (Go.) is not definitive like 'Off they went'. The mixture of authorial and personal narrative stances, the sudden switches from external to internal perspective have thereby been eliminated in the translation. The double perspective of internal and external, of saying and knowing steers the reader's perception process: one moment we hear and see and the next moment we are told something. Through the personalisation of the narrator, in particular the colloquialisms of his language, we are sometimes unable to specify the narrative voice. For the translator this poses another very real difficulty as Döblin uses genuinely spoken language, 'Umgangssprache', not slang or vocabulary of milieu, but a

language with a syntax containing all the rests and residues, the counter-logical spontaneities constituting spoken language. The English translation in general does not offer an equivalent style and only seems to retain colloquialisms when they are clearly identifiable as those of the fictional figure Franz Biberkopf. But this cannot always be easily specified, the direct immediacy of the original, e.g. where the exclamation stands for the description of a process which the following sentence illustrates: 'Oh, krampfte sich sein Leib zusammen' (Oh, his body tensed up) (BA: 9) becomes a distanced description of a state: 'Oh, how cramped his body felt' (JBA: 12). The limited point of view within the original makes us, the readers, hear and feel, whereas the translation gives an information. Sometimes, however, the colloquialisms of the original do not conveyed in the translation. It is not apparent why Jolas gives us 'Head up, you measly object, you' and later 'My brain needs oiling, it's probably dried up', when the original says: 'Haltung, ausgehungertes Schwein' and 'Mein Brägen hat wohl kein Schmalz mehr, der ist wohl ganz ausgetrocknet' (Stand to attention, you starved pig . . . My brains need lard). The German word specifically refers to brains as a dish, and you do not cook them in oil! By this small change,¹ which seems really quite harmless, Jolas has eliminated the first introduction of the slaughterhouse-motif, a variant to the violence-theme; likewise the command is the first subtle intimation of the war or military theme, both of them linked together, which is of fundamental importance for the novel. Directly connected to this is the motif of smashing up, which again is a central theme: Biberkopf was in jail because he 'smashed up' Ida, his girl, thereby killing her; it tends to be his immediate reaction whenever he gets confronted with a situation with which he cannot cope. Physical violence is part of his mental make-up. At this point the narrator merely translates what Biberkopf feels indistinctly, which illustrates his disturbed relationship to the environment. In contrast, jail-life, in its clearly delineated functions and regulations, is felt by Biberkopf to present a form of order, where in fact it functions as an exercise of power with the threat of violence. In this way the first chapter already introduces the theme of violence and at this point provides first impressions of the various facets of violence: physical violence directed internally and externally at people, violence in the form of the slaughtering of animals, and violence in the exercise of power as reflected in the prison code.

5. The collage of songs and their translation

At the end of this first section of the first book, another aspect of violence is introduced through the medium of a song which the translation characterises as 'Martially hard and pithy' (JBA: 15), which refers the violence of battle and war. However, it is extremely unlikely that an English-speaking reader will associate 'There comes a call like thunder's peal' (JBA: 15), the translation of the German 'Es braust ein Ruf wie Donnerhall' (BA 11), with the famous song 'Die Wacht am Rhein'. Still less will this reader be aware of the entire associative field evoked by the line. The German 'Juvivallerallera' comes from a different song, and in fact is frequently found as a refrain of joy

and jubilation at the end of a folksong, while the English 'Tra-la-la-la-la-la' is usually a substitute for words and therefore can take the place of the quoted song-line, which it cannot do in the case of the German song. For German ears the two song snatches are irreconcilable. 'Die Wacht am Rhein' is the product of a patriotic national upsurge of emotion as a reaction against a feared French encroachment, when in 1840 the French laid claim to the left bank of the Rhine. It became what Friedrich Engels called a negating national and folk-song which articulated its own patriotism in a polemical stance against another nationality. In fact, it came to be representative of a chauvinistic, reactionary attitude, and whenever it was in the interests of the powers that be, it was re-activated against the so-called hereditary enemy, the 'Erbfeind', France, as was done in 1870/71, 1914/18 and again in 1939.

In the original novel this song is characterised as 'Kriegerisch fest und markig' (BA: 11); later it is called a warsong. 'Fest' does not mean 'hard', but steadfast and solid; and is in fact an echo of the refrain of the song: 'Fest steht und treu die Wacht am Rhein'. When in the second book the exact wording of the song is given, 'Firm stands and true the watch on the Rhine' (JBA: 90), the translation 'firm' for 'fest' cannot establish a link to the first book because of the choice of different words. The English transcription is colourless, tame and certainly not martially hard and pithy, which sounds rather quaint, where the more direct phrase 'warlike and gutsy' points in the direction of the innate aggressiveness and unreflectedness that the original implies. This is also reflected in the pubbrawl in the second book which evolves out of a dispute about the consequences of the First World War and Franz Biberkopf's selling rightwing papers. The reader will pick up the motif aspect, but will be unable to fully understand the implications connected with it.

Within the context of the novel this song acts as a negative sign, and is further elaborated and underpinned by other soldiers' and marching songs which, with different accents, indicate the same ideological direction. In the opening chapter, however, linking the 'Wacht am Rhein'-motif to the jubilant 'Juivallerallera' shows the utter naiveté of Biberkopf who remains completely unaware of the implications of his own actions and reactions; he lacks any form of selfreflection, or in the words of in the opening synopsis: his scheme of life, 'der wie nichts aussah, aber jetzt plötzlich ganz anders aussieht, nicht einfach und fast selbstverständlich, sondern hochmütig und ahnungslos, frech, dabei feige und voller Schwäche' (BA: 7) (that looked like nothing, but now suddenly looks completely different, not simple and almost self-evident, but rather arrogant and clueless, impudent, at the same time cowardly and full of weakness). Jolas' translation has a preterite ('... now stands revealed for what it was'), instead of a present tense, and it leaves out 'clueless'. The second book brings the exact wording of a second song which acts as an important motif, that of the faithful comrade, 'Ich hatt einen Kameraden', before the brawl really starts, and the cue for Biberkopf's homicidal rage is introduced: 'Achtung, Gefahr im Verzug, Straße frei, Laden, Feuer, Feuer, Feuer' (BA: 81). The English version, 'Danger ahead, clear the streets, load, fire, fire, fire' (JBA: 93), fails to include 'Attention',

and so no link can be established to the beginning, where in any case the wrong signal had been given with 'Head up'. By ignoring the military context of the sequence which typographically stands on its own, as well as ignoring the comma after 'Achtung', the translation literally 'defuses' the original.

The faithful comrade-song, 'Der gute Kamerad', was written by Ludwig Uhland and appeared in 1809. It refers, for the discerning reader of the original text, to the liberation struggle against Napoleon. In 1805 England had been victorious against Napoleon at Trafalgar, but in the same year Russia and Austria were defeated at Austerlitz, in 1806 the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation was terminated and in the same year Prussia suffered the annihilating defeat of Jena and Auerstedt, and any Prussian resistance was ended with the Battle of Friedland in June 1807. In 1808 Spain rose against Napoleon and, encouraged by this, Austria followed suit in 1809. Despite the defeat at Wagram, in Prussia the concept of a national war gathered impetus, and out of this national spirit came Uhland's song. It has become a folk-song and the actual historical context has wellnigh been forgotten. This by no means implies that this context is no longer there, but it has been pushed into the background of cultural memory, and people no longer consciously reflect its connotations. And it is in this very way that Döblin uses the song in his novel.

This historical memory of the liberation struggle against Napoleon appears already in the first book of the novel, however so hidden as a collage, that it could very easily not be noticed. It illustrates Biberkopf's frame of mind, the moment when he manages to release himself from the cramp and fear of the outer world into which he has been pushed after his prison sentence. The English line, 'The trumpets are blowing, hussars ride forth, hallelujah' (JBA: 37), does reflect something of the rhythm of the original: 'Was blasen die Trompeten, Husaren heraus, halleluja!' (BA: 32), but the inference is lost. Döblin here mounts the so-called 'Blücherlied' by Ernst Moritz Arndt ('Des Lied vom Feldmarschall 1813') into the text, thereby recalling again a very specific patriotic feeling which led to the liberation from French rule under Napoleon. Only a page previously, at the beginning of the chapter, another song-montage occurs which was obviously not recognized by Jolas, although sufficient pointers are supplied: 'Das ist also die Stube, das Paneelsofa, der Kaiser hängt an der Wand, ein Franzose in roten Hosen gibt ihm den Degen, ich hab mich ergeben . . . Ich hab mich ergeben, der Kaiser überreicht den Degen' (So that's the room, the stiff-backed sofa, the Kaiser hanging on the wall, a Frenchman in red trousers handing him his sword, I have surrendered) (cf. BA 30/JBA: 35). This song, a so-called fatherland-song, was written in 1820. Its almost religious pathos made it popular for particularly solemn occasions; in other words, marking the beginning of the permutation of the genuine patriotic and positive national upswing of 1809-1815 into ideologising nationalism, stressing the aspect of sacrifice. Another example for a different kind of national emotion is represented by the song 'Reiters Morgenlied' of which the lines of the second verse supply the chapter headings of the third book. Based on an 18th century Swabian folk-song, it received its famous and extremely popular form by Wilhelm Hauff and was published in 1824. It

obviously also has its point of reference in the liberation struggle against Napoleon, but now it was sung during the Waterloo celebrations or anniversaries which were popular with German student corporations in the 1820's. Not the actual historical event inspired this song, but subsequent memory translated into literary form, highly romanticised, as it dwells on the thoughts of death in the face of the danger on the battle field.² At the same time it becomes evident that such cultural traditions, having been reduced to clichés in the collective consciousness, can subsequently be instrumentalised for political purposes.

The various song-montages mentioned so far illustrate in different forms patriotic emotions of the years 1809, 1813, 1820, 1824 and 1840 and their subtle shifts in emphasis in the course of time. The first great climax of these motifs is to be found towards the end of the sixth book when Biberkopf decides to seek out Reinhold who holds a strange fascination for him, whom he regards as his friend, and who was responsible for Biberkopf losing his arm.

6. The function of the war-song system in the novel

The chapter title: 'Vorwärts, Schritt gefaßt, Trommelgerassel und Bataillone' (BA: 262) / 'Forward, in step, roll of drums and battalions' (JBA: 306) refers back to the second book. Again the Uhland song of the faithful comrade becomes significant, here, however, in a very concrete way, namely together with another song-montage 'Wenn die Soldaten durch the Stadt marschieren', translated as 'When the soldiers go marching through the town', a song connected to the Duke of Baden's own grenadier regiment of 1890. This song is not reminiscent of any war-situation or battle, but in a lighthearted vein is about the fascination of the military bands or rather their music. Of course we have here a parallel to the fascination Reinhold holds for Biberkopf. In both instances the real threat and the danger implied, that of becoming a victim, is not realized. In Biberkopf's view he and Reinhold have been comrades, and so the song applies to the relationship between the two men, but in the past tense, again an aspect that Biberkopf does not grasp. Moreover, the image of the bullet of the song is also present in a very concrete sense because Reinhold has a gun. The military commands, the monotony of marching accentuated in the 'one, two, left, right' together with the song-montage suggest a war-situation which gets further enhancement in the breathlessness, tenseness and compressedness of the text itself. The excitement before battle is mirrored in the drumbeat which becomes the rhythm of a heartbeat. In this specific war-scene between Reinhold and Biberkopf, the latter becomes a 'warcripple' (JBA: 307) in a slightly unusual application of the term.

At an earlier occasion another at first highly harmless sounding, somewhat crude drinking song appeared to signal the forthcoming appearance of Reinhold: 'Es geht ein Rundgesang an unserm Tisch herum, wiedebum' (BA: 172) which in the fifth book gets translated as: 'round our table rings a roundelay, hey-dey-dey-hey-dey-dey' (JBA: 202). In the eighth book this line reappears – after the discovery of Mieke's murder: 'Lachen, Heiterkeit, o du

fröhliche, o du selige, es geht ein Rundgesang an unserm Tisch herum, widebum' (BA: 360). For some reason Jolas rewords this, so that the quotation gets lost: 'Laughter and merriment. Oh happy days, oh glorious days, at our table we sing a roundelay, hip-hip-hip-hurray!' (JBA: 419). Shortly after this reprise another one occurs in the text, namely the 'Ich hab mich ergeben mit Herz und mit Hand', however, in somewhat distorted form. Again the translation fails to link up to the beginning because it merely translates in the general word sense quite correctly 'unsere Aufsicht hat sich uns ergeben mit Herz und mit Hand' as 'our guards are devoted heart and hand'. These quotes are further mounted with snatches of two famous German Christmas songs, 'O du fröhliche' and 'O Tannebaum', the latter again slightly distorted: 'O Sonnenburg, wie grün sind deine Blätter'.

Jolas translates this according to the word meaning so that the simultaneity of incongruent elements, drinking song, Christmas carol, and fatherland song, does not come across. The montages have clearly reference function in the original, setting up inner connections between occurrences, revealing set patterns. The roundelay-motif reappears in a changed form in the last book, and here the harmless sounding refrain reveals its true implication. Under the title: 'Absug der bösen Hure, Triumph des großen Opferers, Trommlers und Beilschwingers' (BA: 400) (Exit the evil harlot, triumph of the great sacrificer, drummer and wielder of the hatchet) (cf. JBA: 466), the soldiers' songs get placed within a historical frame: 'The river, the Beresina, marching legions. The legions march along the Beresina . . . the great Napoleon leads them . . . And always the cry: Long live the Emperor! . . . The sacrifice, the sacrifice, that is Death! Rolling of railroads, thunder of guns, bursting hand-grenades, curtain-fire, Chemin des Dames, Langemarck' (JBA: 466-467). This is followed by the beginning of the refrain of 'Die Wacht am Rhein', followed by a song which from then on becomes *the* war-motif: 'Wir ziehen in den Krieg mit festem Schritt', which has been given the refrain of the drinking-song: 'widebum, widebum', mounted with snatches of the Hauff-song 'Morgenrot', and after having listed the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Peasant Wars, the Anabaptists, it ends with the famous 'Brüder, zur Sonne, zur Freiheit'. This traditional workers' song was based on a Russian song by Leonid R. Radin. It was written in 1897 and won new significance in the German context in 1918, evoking the revolution as the last decisive battle for a humane society. Inexplicably the English text here introduces the verb 'march': 'brothers, march towards the sun and freedom' (JBA: 468), thus reducing it within the context of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* to another marching song. The significance of this specific montage is lost to the English reader. In this chapter the 'widebum' is presented by Jolas as 'drumm, brumm, drumm', and it now becomes evident that the highly intricate pattern of sound-motifs linked to the song-montages in the German original are not active in the translated novel. The onomatopoeic leitmotif of 'Wumm/Rumm/ . . . bum/Bumm/rummer di bummer/dummdrummdumm' reveals inner connections. That is why the 'widebum' is significant, because soundwise it is linked to the leitmotif of the pile-driver, and, acting as a metaphoric link, becomes the sound of the storm which is first intonated as the

signal of the bell in the beginning of the novel and the 'wumm' of the hammer in the slaughterhouse, thereby making Mieke's murder a variant of the victim-sacrifice-theme which is also active in the booming of the guns of war and the sound of the drums. The latter aspects cannot be realised in the translation, because 'hip-hip-hip-hurray' or 'hey-dey-dey' or 'tararaboomdeey', 'rumbledly, tumbledly, bee' and 'rumm', 'boom', 'Zoom' remain separate sounds, apart from the fact, that 'zoom' sounds strange for the storm and the hammer in the slaughterhouse. The last chapter of the ninth book takes up the marching-motif of the sixth book – 'Und Schritt gefaßt und rechts und links und rechts und links' (BA: 407) – in the translation, however, an addition: 'Forward march and get in step, left, right, left, right' (JBA: 474), blurs the quotation and at the same time blurs the marching rhythm which is so important. The words of the song 'Die Wacht am Rhein' now get applied in a slightly changed form: 'Lieb Vaterland, kannst ruhig sein' (BA: 410) instead of 'Lieb Vaterland, magst ruhig ein' (BA: 78,403), but the English versions are too divergent: 'Dear Fatherland, don't worry' (JBA: 477, 470) is no variant of 'Dear Fatherland, sweet peace be thine' (JBA: 90). The conclusion in the German text fits exactly into the established motif-patterns: 'Halt das Maul und fasse Schritt, marschiere mit uns andern mit. Wenn ich marschieren soll, muß ich das nachher mit dem Kopf bezahlen, was andere sich ausgedacht haben. Darum rechne ich erst alles nach, und wenn es so weit ist und mir paßt, werde ich mich danach richten. Dem Mensch ist gegeben die Vernunft, die Ochsen bilden statt dessen eine Zunft' (BA: 410). The English text sets different accents: 'Shut your trap, in step, old cuss, march along with the rest of us. But if I march along, I shall have to pay for it later on with my head, pay for the schemes of others. That's why I must first figure out everything, and only if everything's quite O.K., and suits me, will I take action. Reason is the gift of man, jackasses replace it with a clan' (JBA: 477). The final judgement introduces an animal that has no function within the symbolic pattern of the novel, whereas the ox refers back to the slaughterhouse episode. It links up with the concept of the false sacrifice which is only a different form of slaughter and butchery. And with this, the concept of fate or destiny is unmasked: as far as Biberkopf's life is concerned, its more precise determination is violence, represented by the figure of Reinhold, as manifested war, it marches as a guild, uses lying words, wants to silence others and make them conform by means of propaganda, slogans and mass suggestion and manipulation. Destiny shows itself to be within the personal human sphere the result of human actions, it is not a metaphysical power. The ideology of death as sacrificial and heroic death stands in the service of, as the novel puts it, the harlot of Babylon and merely leads to the butcher.

The last paragraph of the novel stands out typographically. The leitmotifs here reach a final climax and their underlying meaning now becomes quite clear. In the face of the levelling marching rhythm of a false collective, trimmed to suit the interest of power, the marching minstrel-motif appears like a summary and reminiscence of the soldiers' songs and the military metaphors. It stands symptomatic for a wrong attitude in general and debunks the pseudo-freedom which it claims to lead to. The German text which

works with the punctuating effect of the rhyme: 'widebum – krumm – stumm – widebum', traces in this way in a reduced form the fundamental message which the English translation cannot recapture, as puns in any language are basically non-transferable.

The detailed analysis of this set of metaphors in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* shows that the translator is faced with an insurmountable problem. Apart from the differing sound-patterns of languages, there are the images that are based on traditional national signs. The German soldiers' songs are the translation of national goals into the language of the people. Particularly the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon have left their mark, and patriotism was one of the strongest political forces in the 19th century wherever the desire for a sovereign national state through the self-determination of the nation was sought, as in Germany, Italy, Poland, to mention a few. The inherent danger in these aspirations was national overestimation and a national will to power which exercised its own nationalism at the expense of other nationalisms. This led to chauvinism and imperialism. The memory of these struggles was later, in the 20th century, manipulated shamelessly and irresponsibly, without the majority becoming aware of it. The difficulty for the translator into the English language lies in the fact that English has no memory of such experiences, as the history of England was largely also determined by its geographic position. There were no liberation struggles, there is no memory of threats, whether imagined or real, for the nation's sovereignty. English in the American medium represents in this another very specific form of cultural memory. Jolas' translation abounds with Americanisms, thereby sometimes introducing a rather alien note, e.g. a saloon in Berlin (JBA: 306). The English language as handed down in the form of folk-songs or just popular songs has no equivalence to offer for the German songs. A possible parallel in the marching rhythm might be found in an Anglo-Irish song like 'Johnny, I hardly knew ye!' with its refrain: 'With drums and guns, and guns and drums', but the connotations as well as the associations are different.

7. Conclusion

The individuality of a text rests on the basis of a code which has validity beyond it. This code can only be verified in various individual manifestation. This means, that the individuality of a text lies in the individual application of material taken from a general repertoire supplied by era-specific patterns of application. These are pre-existent autonomous communication structures that are inherent in the manifest text surface as message. There is a collective memory which is part of a collective consciousness. The verbalisation of personal experience is realised in the need of verbalised objectivations that enable one to span spheres of reality otherwise separate. A symbolic language which makes sub-universa that are removed from everyday reality visible as being everpresent, creates a system of signs that transcends the vis-à-vis-interactions of everyday. This everyday is fed with prefabricated experiences which introduce general orders of meaning on a level of institutionalisations. As a system of signs, language possesses semantic fields. It

differentiates the reservoir of knowledge of the individual and of society respectively. This symbolic language provides the necessary references to make up a meaningful totality. In this way reality gets defined through the medium of knowledge that manifests itself not only in functional actions, but also in the semantic fields of language.

The success of the translation process can be gauged by the success of the text in the Target language, where it in turn functions as a primary text (Koller, 1983: 65; Popovič, 1977: 96) in the communication between sender and receiver, only that in this case the circle of receivers has been expanded by the translation beyond the original one. In the case of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* the reception was rather cool.

The main impression of the novel seemed to be that of grotesqueness, 'a sort of evil smelling, Gargantuan stew', 'frequently dramatic, but just as frequently blurred'. '*Alexanderplatz, Berlin* was hailed in Germany with considerable enthusiasm. Possibly the work has lost something in translation. At all events, as an epic of the Berlin underworld it does not quite come off' (Prangel, 1981: 114–116).

It was only after the showing of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's TV-film *Berlin Alexanderplatz* outside the Federal Republic of Germany that the paperback edition of the translated novel had a reprint in 1982.

The lack of success of the novel in the English-speaking world probably proves the point, that in the translatory communication all communicative functions, from the function of the text to the function of each word, are variables which in each case have to be determined anew with regard to the respective aim. Hönig and Kußmaul (1984: 13) compare this with the strategy of the chess player who has to orientate himself as to the developmental phase of the game, the time still available and the strategy of the opponent. But at the same time one must bear in mind Coseriu's contention (1978: 29) that the theory of translation operates with an abstract concept of optimal invariance, whereas translating as such is a final and historically-determined activity. As Popovič (1977: 104–105) points out, every translation presents only one possibility of the re-coding of the original text. There is no such thing as *the* translation! Ultimately a literary text like *Berlin Alexanderplatz* confronts translation as a theory and as a practice with its limits.

Notes

Aspects of this paper were delivered at the First International Conference on 'Literature in Translation' held in New Delhi (India) on March 15–20, 1984, which I was able to attend with the financial assistance of the HSRC.

1. Interesting here is the fact that Jolas himself with this translated phrase gives a clear indication of his American background, which might explain the choice of words: 'measly' in the 30's was often associated with pork.
2. Hauff himself quotes this song, also omitting the first verse, in his novel *Lichtenstein* which is set in another important German 'liberation'-struggle-period, the Peasant Wars of the 16th century.

References

- Bassnett-McGuire, Susan. 1980. *Translation studies*. London, New York: Methuen.
- Bayerdörfer, Hans-Peter. 1981. Der Wissende und die Gewalt. Alfred Döblins Theorie des epischen Werkes und der Schluß von 'Berlin Alexanderplatz'. In: Prangel, Matthias (ed.). *Materialien zu Alfred Döblin 'Berlin Alexanderplatz'*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, pp. 150–185.
- Coseriu, Eugenio. 1978. Falsche und richtige Fragestellungen in der Übersetzungstheorie. In: Wilss, Wolfram (ed.). 1981. *Übersetzungswissenschaft*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, pp. 27–47.
- Döblin, Alfred. 1980. *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag (abbrev. as BA).
- Döblin, Alfred. 1982. *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Translated from the German by Eugene Jolas. Harmondsworth: Penguin (abbrev. as JBA).
- Geppert, Hans Vilmar. 1982. Roman und Wirklichkeit. In: Ludwig, H.W. (ed.). *Arbeitsbuch Romananalyse*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, pp. 208–243.
- Hönig, Hans G.; Kußmaul, Paul. 1984.² *Strategie der Übersetzung*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Klusen, Ernst (ed.). 1981.² *Deutsche Lieder. Text und Melodien*. 2 vols. Frankfurt: Insel Verlag.
- Koller, Werner. 1983.² *Einführung in die Übersetzungswissenschaft*. Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer.
- Kretschmer, Michael. 1977. Literarische Praxis der Mémoire Collective in Heinrich Bölls Roman 'Billard um halb zehn'. In: Haubrichs, Wolfgang (ed.). 1977. *Erzählforschung 2. Theorien, Modelle und Methoden der Narrativik*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 191–215.
- Lotman Yu. M.; Uspensky, B.A. 1978. On the semiotic mechanism of culture. *New Literary History* IX, 2: 211–232.
- Pinson, Roland W. (ed.). 1979. *Deutscher Liederschatz*. Bayreuth: Gondrom Verlag.
- Popovič, Anton. 1977. Übersetzung als Kommunikation. In: Wilss, Wolfram (ed.). 1981. *Übersetzungswissenschaft*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, pp. 92–111.
- Prangel, Matthias. 1981. *Materialien zu Alfred Döblin 'Berlin Alexanderplatz'*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Zoozmann, Richard (ed.). n.d. *Dichtergarten der Weltpoesie*. Berlin: Globus Verlag.