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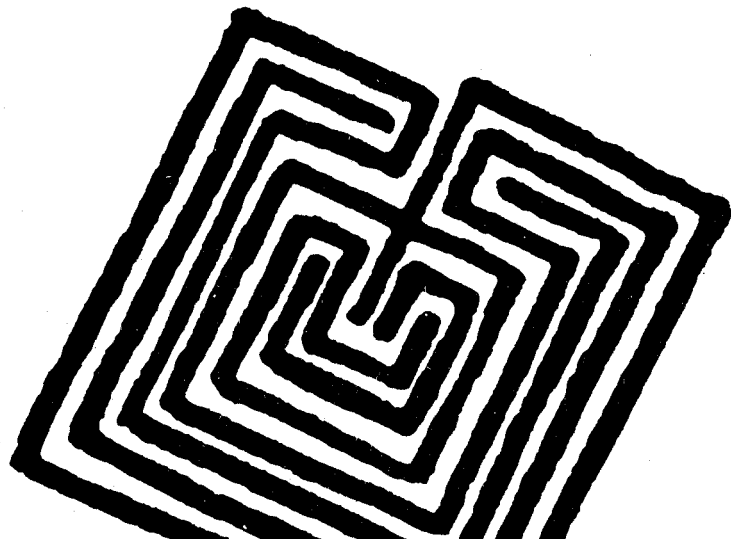
Dipartimento di Filosofia, Storia e Beni culturali
Dipartimento di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Filologici

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Postcolonial Studies: Changing Perceptions

edited by Oriana Palusci



Postcolonial Studies: Changing Perceptions deals with postcolonial studies following the golden thread of cultural memory (remembering, forgetting, dis-remembering, nostalgia) and with the ways in which the theoretical assumptions of a young, but well-established field of studies have germinated a discursive post-Eurocentric map focused on the representations of memory. The proceedings collected in this volume conjugate postcolonial studies and cultural memory in a wide range of contemporary texts belonging to literature, and also to visual arts and cinema, outlining the need to reconsider the notions of remembering/forgetting both from a theoretical perspective and from a range of social, historical and linguistic points of view.

Postcolonial Studies: Changing Perceptions collects the papers of the Trento Conference (30 June- 2 July 2005), sponsored by ACUME, an interdisciplinary European Project on 'Cultural Memory', coordinated by Vita Fortunati.

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**POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES:
CHANGING PERCEPTIONS**

edited by Oriana Palusci

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VITA FORTUNATI

CULTURAL MEMORY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY
EUROPEAN PROJECT

I would like to start my preface to the volume by quoting Nietzsche as it seems to me to be emblematic for analysing the profound and complex implications of cultural memory:

Imagine a man who does not possess the power of forgetting. [...] Such a person would no longer believe in his own being, no longer believe in himself. Forgetting belongs to all action, just as both light and darkness belong in the life of all organic things [...] it is almost possible to live without any memory [...] but it is absolutely impossible to live, in general, without forgetting. In other words [...] there is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of historical sense, through which living comes to harm and finally is destroyed, whether it is a person, a nation or or a culture.¹

It has been a great pleasure to be at the conference in Trento and to present the Project on Cultural Memory. The project on Cultural Memory which I coordinate, ACUME,² is a three-year European thematic network and is characterised by its interdisciplinary and comparative methodology. It accounts for as many as 85 European universities and various 'associated partners' in Europe, North and South America. This Thematic Network has been structured into five main research areas: 1. Cultural Amnesia; 2. Bearing Witness; 3. Places and Memory; 4. Oral and Written History; 5. Foundation Texts and Mythology.

¹ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy. Untimely Meditations* I-III (1873-76), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999.

² <http://www.lingue.unibo.it/acume/>.

the 'proper' order between words and things, in Foucault's terms.²⁴ He eventually manages to revenge his father for the betrayal perpetrated by language. Apparently, the memory of the father is not only exorcised but exploited in its potential benefits.

Anyhow, as already observed, this morbid obsession will imprison him and prevent him from experiencing meaningful relationships. In Sukhdev Sandhu's words, his «inability to sense and experience the word freshly» is also due to the fact that «he lives among signs and signatures more easily than he does among real people».²⁵

More than a fight against the loss of the father, Smith here represents a fake struggle, a wrestling match the protagonist plays with words and with memory, with an identity whose traits are obsessively displayed through immediate evidence. She overcomes the cliché of the poor child of ethnic origins, persecuted by an evil society, a cruel family, a bad destiny. The writer even avoids the stereotype of the victim of the contemporary mediatic system, since the protagonist eventually takes part in the system and earns his living as autograph collector.

To conclude, Alex's identity problems are not clearly imputable to a 'label' which could univocally codify his role – and which tend to univocally codify post-colonial interpretations of texts. As Bruce King highlights in the already quoted *The Internationalisation of English Literature*: «Smith's aim was to break down the racial categories and representations of victims and complicities that dominated interpretations of the 'postcolonial'».²⁶ Such labels risk denying people's individuality and dignity to become only precious business items. Besides having lost his father, besides being a man of mixed ethnic origins, Alex is partly *homo faber*, partly responsible for his own solitude and dissatisfaction. But these prismatic aspects of his identity do not fluidly interact throughout the pages. Alex's wrestling match is statically cornered in the Mountjoy ring, to be consumed by the reader's gaze.

²⁴ M. Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, Gallimard, Paris 1966 (*The Order of Things*, Vintage, New York 1973).

²⁵ Sandhu, *The Pornography...*

²⁶ King, *The Internationalisation...*, p. 291.

ELEONORA FEDERICI

REMEMBERING THE MOTHER TONGUE IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE:
POSTCOLONIAL TRANSLATION STUDIES

Language may be one of the elements that allow us to make sense of things, of ourselves. [...] Making sense of ourselves is what produces identity.¹

Defining the 'politics of translation' or, it would be better to say, translation as a political act, G. C. Spivak emphasises the connection between language, identity and the process of translating oneself both in writing and translation. Widely speaking, the term 'translation' has become a central metaphor within both postcolonial and translation studies, it has been used and abused as a catachresis not only by scholars but also by contemporary authors developing it into a key-term connecting these two theoretical fields. Many authors have stated that they are linguistically and culturally 'marked' by plural cultural backgrounds and have used the notion of 'writing as translation' as a metaphor for a definition of an 'identity in-between'; for example, the Anglo-French poet and novelist Michèle Roberts has highlighted the importance in writing of the term translation seen as the activity of carrying across from one linguistic and cultural context to another enriching both of them. Translation is a way to cross the water between England and the Continent, since «the

¹ G. C. Spivak, *The Politics of Translation*, in M. Barrett, A. Philips (eds.), *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1992, p. 177.

word 'translation' comes from the Latin *trans*, across, and *latum*, from the supine of the verb *ferre*, to carry: a translation, a carrying across». ² Defining the notion of crossing geographical and cultural borders, Salman Rushdie has defined migrant writers as «translated men borne across the world» talking about «old tales in new tongues»: «having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation: I cling obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained». ³

For these writers the act of writing as translation shapes the notions of identity and self-representation and the use of English, the translation into 'another language', is a choice resulting from historical reasons and a process that brings positive results. In many cases the linguistic struggle is a reflection of the Empire that has brought them to 'embrace' the English language while at the same time, reshaping it; as Rushdie affirms, «we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; [...] it needs remaking for our own purposes; [...] to conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. [...] It must be embraced». ⁴

Writing in another language is not an act of betrayal but the recognition of the hybrid status and the decision of the author to be his/her own translator into English. From this perspective the writer reverses the aphorism 'traduttore/traditore' (translator/ traitor) and takes in his/her own hands the possibility of text 'manipulation' by others. Playing with etymologies and multi-layered words Rushdie unveils English as a stratified language and introduces new words and cultural associations, unfamiliar meanings and different sounds and rhythms borrowed from his mother-tongue, Urdu. ⁵ Thanks to a renewing of the English language and the insertion of words which reveal layers of linguistic and cultural memories, the author carefully works in between the lines of his novels, full of echoes from another world.

Interestingly, this act of self-translation recalls Homi Bhabha's theories about a 'translational culture' and imagined communities for which the process of translation is connected to the notion of

'displacement', and of 'third space'. Referring to Walter Benjamin's essay «The Task of the Translator» (1923) ⁶ Bhabha states that translation exists in conjunction with the original, it comes to existence and gives to the original a 'continued life'. If for Benjamin any translation should be transparent and allow 'the pure language' to surface in the text, for Bhabha hybridisation becomes a positive element from which the subjugated subject can speak aloud forming his identity core. ⁷ Similarly, in *Siting Translations: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context*, Tejaswini Niranjana describes hybridity as a position of 'living in translation', i.e. translation as a process of re-reading and re-writing from a postcolonial perspective and the task of the translator as a juggling between politics and poetics. ⁸ So, if Benjamin's fragments are utilised as a metaphor for the translating practice, from being a containing force translation is transformed into a disruptive and disseminating one.

If we consider translation as one of the ideological discourses of the coloniser, a practice that takes shape within the asymmetrical relation of power that operates under colonialism, we need to carefully evaluate the revisioning act carried on by contemporary authors through rewriting and self-translation and the subsequent opening up of a postcolonial space where the deconstruction of images of otherness in counter-discourses is achieved through the reshaping of the coloniser's language and the insertion of other idioms. If language is what gives meaning to these writers and their works, the notion of translation as a metaphor for postcolonial writing outlines a metaphorical usage of the term itself while broadening the horizon of translation studies, an interdisciplinary field from its very beginning. As a consequence, the act of writing in one or more languages intended as a translation of the self undermines the concept of a stable source/target text and questions once again the relentless search for equivalence in favour of a more pronounced agency of the translator and his/her translating choices when confronted with a linguistically hybrid text.

² M. Roberts, *Food, Sex and God: Inspiration and Writing*, Virago, London 1998, p. 141.

³ S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, Penguin, London 1991, p. 17.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁵ Rushdie's grandfather was a well-known Urdu poet.

⁶ «Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers» first published as an introduction to Benjamin's translation of Charles Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*.

⁷ H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, New York 1994.

⁸ T. Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1992.

If for Niranjana it is necessary to read «existing translations against the grain» uncovering what Bhabha defines as an ‘act of remembering’, a painful remembering «a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present»,⁹ for Rushdie memory is recovered searching for ‘shards of memory’ and ‘remains’ through an archaeological process of recovering one’s own past. Both scholar and writer highlight how the postcolonial text is a surface where the intermingling of languages and cultures, set layer after layer, is evident. Difference is made visible through an act of remembering one’s own mother-tongue, emerging through a text written in a foreign language, which has been acquired and reshaped giving birth to a hybrid idiom. The author’s self-translation in English embodies a cultural encounter where through a ‘perspective of the edge’ national/historical/cultural memories of the mother-tongue continuously intersect with the linguistic codes of standard English. From this standpoint, texts are important social documents of the culture(s) of dislocation and function as condensed archives of national, ethnic and linguistic memories, records that must be transferred to the target language for readers who belong to a different cultural context.

If postcolonial writers are transposing a culture to be understood as a language, a literature, a material culture, a social system, a history, then translating a postcolonial text implies translating a postcolonial culture where culture acts as a meta-text which is rewritten in the act of literary (re)creation. Therefore, acknowledging metaphors of appropriation, rewriting, transfer and exchanges between languages and cultures,¹⁰ my analysis of the Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif wants to pinpoint the importance of a metaphorical utilisation of the term translation for identity re-definition. Soueif uses the English language to reinvent and reformulate patterns of cultural and political ideologies, she reshapes it through another language, her mother-tongue, whose rhythms and syntax intermingle with the coloniser’s tongue deeply forging it. Similarly to what Jaina C. Sanga highlights in analysing

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 172.

¹⁰ R. Ribeiro Pires Vieira, *Liberating Calibans: Readings of Antropofagia and Haroldo de Campos’ Poetics of Transcreation*, in S. Bassnett, H. Trivedi, *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London 1999, pp. 95-113; A. Lefevere, *Composing the Other*, in Bassnett, Trivedi, *Postcolonial Translation ...*, pp. 75-94.

Salman Rushdie’s novels, here «the writing moulds the English language, by a complex process of acculturation, into a distinctively new version of English».¹¹ The authors’ self-translation into English becomes a first stage of the translation process, an identity process in which language is moulded and shaped, and that must be unveiled when the text is translated from English into a target language. From here the keywords of my title: ‘remembering’ intended as the act of recalling memories, ‘mother-tongue’ that is to say, the first language spoken by the subject and the reference to ‘another language’, the acquired language and coloniser’s tongue, English.

However, before any textual example aimed at demonstrating that translation is nourished by the dynamics of cultural representation that can be deconstructed through a search for the many textual traces present in any translated text, it is necessary to outline the many links between translation studies and postcolonial studies from a broader perspective. Because postcolonial cultural products are embedded in hybridity, they are texts between two worlds which outline the question of displacement and untranslatability, a key notion in translation studies,¹² being open to various choices in the translating process. In these texts the translator’s ability as an inter/cultural decoder should bring to the surface a kernel structural element, the fact that cultural texts involve recycling old materials and these materials envision the challenging multiplicity of languages and the cross-breeding between cultures. The translator’s acknowledgment of the interconnection between translation studies and postcolonial studies becomes central for his transfer from source language to target language of texts which are deeply embedded in another language/culture.

As many scholars such as Niranjana Teswajni, Eric Cheyfitz, Douglas Robinson, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi¹³ have

¹¹ J. C. Sanga, *Salman Rushdie’s Postcolonial Metaphors. Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy and Globalisation*, Greenwood Press, Westport (Conn.) 2001, p. 48.

¹² See S. Budick, W. Iser (eds.), *The Translatability of Cultures*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1996.

¹³ E. Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991; D. Robinson, *Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Theories Explained*, St. Jerome, Manchester 1997; S. Bassnett, A. Lefevere (eds.), *Translation, History*

underlined, there are various links between postcolonial studies and translation practices. First of all, translation is part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer where the agency of the translator and the ideological standpoint has been widely problematised analysing postcolonial texts and contexts. Since translation does not take place in a vacuum, it cannot be analysed as an isolated act. As Bassnett and Trivedi have stressed, «translations are always embedded in cultural and political systems, and in history» and «the strategies employed by translators reflect the context in which the texts are produced».¹⁴ Secondly, translation has been considered as a battleground of the postcolonial context where the terms 'translational' and 'transnational' are strictly linked together and where the 'location' of the writer assumes a central role in the process of writing within both disciplines. In the history of translation, Europe has been regarded as the 'original' and the colonies considered as copies, translations of a European world they should replicate while acknowledging the 'inferior' value of their own culture and outlining the implicit ideological judgement. In the well-known essay *The Politics of Translation* G. C. Spivak criticises the ideological bias that has always accompanied the act of translating texts into English. From this perspective, translation is seen as a further means to colonise other languages and cultures, to eliminate cultural differences and it is considered as a means which has played a central role in the colonization process and in the representation of other cultures within the Western context. The scholar states that the translator should surrender to the text and the rhetoricity of language, he or she should engage with the text; but how should a translator engage with a text? And up to which point should he struggle with it?

In Soueif's writings language is the result of a history of code-mixing and language reshaping. It is a new English that the translator faces, a language that changes according to the post/colonial context and to the author who utilises it, in this case the Egyptian one. The translator should always take into account that his work is not merely a linguistic transfer but a cultural one

and Culture, Pinter Publishers, London and New York 1990; S. Bassnett, A. Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, Clevedon, Philadelphia 1998.

¹⁴ Bassnett, Trivedi, *Postcolonial Translation...*, p. 6.

that implies a history, ideology and relation of power implicit in the dominant language.¹⁵ While translating into the target language, the translator deals with linguistic features related to the source culture such as, for example, dialects or unfamiliar lexical items, which are the most visible signs of a mother-tongue surfacing in-between the English language and he must decide if he wants to highlight them as defamiliarized elements or domesticate them and erase the difference they embody. In this moulding of the text which are the elements to be preserved and which are not? And how will the reader of the target text understand these linguistic/cultural features if left untouched?

As Maria Tymoczko affirms, «in obscuring or muting the cultural disjunctions, the translator ceases to be 'faithful' to the source text».¹⁶ Faced with the dilemma of faithfulness, the translator must choose to underline the foreign linguistic features of the source text or not.¹⁷ Moreover, «the use of rare or untranslated words in translations and the inclusion of unfamiliar cultural material are not necessarily defects of translated texts: translation is one of the activities of a culture in which cultural expansion occurs and in which linguistic options are expanded through the importation of loan transfers, calques, and the like».¹⁸

Similarly, discussing the Indian English novel G.J. Prasad asserts that «language is always a part of human culture and its use is alike a lived practice, coercive, and a means of choice».¹⁹ Shifts between languages in texts, code-mixing and code-switching are to be understood and then translated as a reflection of social meanings and communicative strategies; but they are also identity markers signalling the geographical, cultural and social positions of the speakers: they are signs of the 'foreign', the 'otherness' to be translated, the hybridity of the source text.

¹⁵ An interesting concept of 'reversion' can be found in O. Carbonell, *Postcolonial (Re)Versions. The Theory and Practice of Postcolonial Translation*, «Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses», 35 (1997), pp. 245-54.

¹⁶ M. Tymoczko, *Post-Colonial Writing and Literary Translation*, in Bassnett, Trivedi, *Postcolonial Translation...*, p. 21.

¹⁷ See L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, Routledge, London 1995.

¹⁸ M. Tymoczko, *Post-Colonial Writing and Literary Translation...*, p. 25.

¹⁹ G. J. V. Prasad, *The Case of the Indian English Novel*, in Bassnett, Trivedi, *Postcolonial Translation...*, p. 47.

In the transfer into a target text these markers of 'difference' must be explained and decoded for the reader. First of all, the translator has a range of paratextual commentary to use like an introduction or a preface, footnotes, and even a glossary that can be included at the end of the volume in order to explain the non-English lexical items in the source text. This commentary is the translator's encoding of the text where he describes the unfamiliar features to the reader. It is the translator who decides how to handle characteristics of the source text, such as, customs, historical and literary allusions that he believes to be unknown and unclear for the receiving audience. These features can be lexical anomalies which carry with them layers of other languages or terms which identify the source text culture, local speech rhythms, idioms and culture-specificities that are not easy to translate and should be maintained to render difference visible, as signs of the writer's identity, in the case of Soueif's self-translation into English, while leaving the mother-tongue surfacing in-between the lines. A hybrid text resulting from a translation shows unusual features for the receiving culture but these elements are kept by the translator to make 'difference' perceptible, to underline the untranslatability of cultures and its richness in the text.

Discussing the concept of 'translatability' Wolfgang Iser affirms that this notion aims at,

[...] comprehension whereas encounters between cultures or interactions between levels of culture involve either assimilation or appropriation by making inroads into one another trying to get out of a different culture or the different intra-cultural levels what seems attractive, useful, or what has to be combated or suppressed.²⁰

More recently, Rainer Guldin has re-analysed this issue coining the title of his essay from Iser, and discussing the (un)translatability of cultures.²¹ In this paper Guldin explores the in-between spaces of translation and intercultural studies proposing a redefinition of the term 'translation' in relationship to cultural

²⁰ W. Iser, *Coda to the Discussion* in W. Iser, S. Budick (eds.), *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1996, p. 296.

²¹ R. Guldin, *The (Un)translatability of Culture*, «Studies in Communication Sciences», 3/2 (2003), pp. 109-34.

contexts. The connection between translation and intercultural communication is based on the idea of the translator as a mediator and agent of culture and to the notion previously mentioned of the ethical responsibility of this role; in fact, as already stressed, the translating subject makes choices that imply ethical-political acts. Moreover, as Venuti has demonstrated, the illusion of transparency should be avoided and questioned and cross-fertilised texts should emerge also in their translated version. If translation is «an asymmetrical act of communication»²² the translated text should counteract this problematic axis and communicate the hybridity of the target culture showing its linguistic and cultural specificities and demonstrating that the translating process is a route through cross-fertilization between different languages and cultures. From this perspective, the practice of translating postcolonial texts problematises the basic impossibility of achieving the complete translatability of the target culture and its intercultural references. Translation «does not fill in a 'linguistic void' but changes 'the relation of linguistic forces, at the institutional and symbolic levels [...]'. Translation becomes an act of reclaiming, of recentring of the identity, a reterritorializing operation».²³ From this standpoint the translator carries on a transcultural interaction/communication focalising on issues such as difference, ideology, power and hybridity, following the strategy of resistance so well explained by the postcolonial scholars here mentioned. Moreover, as Christina Schaffner rightly underlines, «language and culture are not stable concepts or closed systems, but rather dynamic, flexible, open systems».²⁴ To decode them the translator needs to possess a linguistic and cultural competence of the source text, to translate them he should be able to recognize the literary and cultural web and reproduce it in the target text.

Therefore, going back to our first quote in the essay, translating a postcolonial text means taking into account «the history of the language, the history of the author's moment, the history of the language-in-and-as-translation».²⁵ It also implies the desire to respect cultural specificity and at the same time question the

²² L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, Routledge, London 2000, p. 470.

²³ Guldin, *The (Un)translatability of Culture...*, p. 127.

²⁴ C. Schaffner, *Translation and Intercultural Communication: Similarities and Differences*, «Studies in Communication Sciences», 3/2 (2003), p. 90.

²⁵ Spivak, *The Politics of Translation...*, p. 184.

relationship between languages in contact and their inequality of status and presupposes an ethics of translation, that is to say the responsibility of the translating subject, a major fact that deserves more attention.²⁶

We have already outlined how the act of translation is a complex task of decoding linguistic and cultural elements envisioning a multiplicity of linguistic codes in the cross-breeding between cultures and how the metaphor of self-translation has been borrowed by postcolonial writers in order to portray the complexities of an authorial in-between identity. In order to explain the act of unveiling memories of the mother-tongue in another language (English) we will refer to Soueif's novel *The Map of Love*, published in 1999, where linguistic and cultural memories are strictly intermingled and where the translator's task becomes a difficult one in a path of choices he has to make in order to maintain the author's voice in the target language.²⁷

In this text, a very incisive map of linguistic and cultural identity, the question of language and translation is central. The author, born in Egypt, has studied in England, has taught as a university professor in her country and has gone back to London. Soueif's mother-tongue is Arabic but she writes in English about the Arabic world. This enables her more freedom because, as she affirms, «I can use English in literary terms better than I can use Arabic and so I can make the language do what I want with more ease».²⁸ While representing the colonial story of Egypt, the author focuses on language, the assumptions, beliefs and obstacles of communicating in different languages, rooted in the daily process of negotiation between Egyptianness and the English language, the language of imperialism and occupation which the author forges for her own aims. While writing in 'another language' the author feels the burden of the English literary tradition: «When one writes in English, one is writing against a background of a body of English Literature which is what one is seen against».²⁹ Not only the English language but the whole English canon is behind the words printed on the pages, and it is a narrative world that

²⁶ A. Pym (ed.), *The Return to Ethics*, special issue of «The Translator», 7/2 (2001).

²⁷ A. Soueif, *The Map of Love*, Bloomsbury, London 1999.

²⁸ A. Soueif, *Two Writers Speak about their Work* (online at: <http://www.africacentre.org.uk/habari2.htm>, [visited 20 June 2005]).

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

connects a Western culture to an Eastern one. As Daphne Grace underlines, the novel aims at visualising a cultural reconciliation, it is «a multilayered depiction of both English and Egyptian hegemonies, which offers a new postcolonial perspective on Egypt».³⁰ Notwithstanding the choice of writing in the colonial language, a language completely forged by the author's skill, Soueif forces her point of view on colonial history that she presents from an Egyptian perspective. This rewriting of the colonial history is outlined through the depiction of different characters that embody literary, cultural and political values of both sides. As she says, «When I'm writing Anna, I'm 19th century English; when I'm writing an English character, I'm English; when I'm writing anything else, I'm Egyptian. [...] my literary roots are English; my consciousness is Egyptian».³¹

Soueif's English is peculiar, because as she states, «I need to fashion an English that will express an Arab reality. I have found English an extremely hospitable and wonderful language».³² In her discussion on 'transcultural writing' Hechmi Trabelsi has outlined that,

[...] though Ahdaf Soueif's command of English is impeccable, ranging from the highly idiomatic to the elegantly formal, she has transfused ethnic, Arab blood into it. Arab people reading her can actually hear the Arabic as it comes through the English words. Even non-Arabophones can sense the presence of another tongue underlying the printed English words.³³

The author herself admits that her intent was «to render Arabic into English, not just to translate phrases, but to render something of the dynamic of Arabic, how it works, into English [...] to open a window into another culture».³⁴ Amin Malak outlines how Soueif's attempt is to «capture the linguistic patterns of the fellaheen of

³⁰ D. Grace, *The Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature*, Pluto Press, London 2004, p. 76.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² A. Soueif, *Developing a Euro-Arab Literature* (online at: www.qantara.de/webcome/show_article.php [visited 30 June 2005]).

³³ H. Trabelsi, *Transcultural Writing: Ahdaf Soueif's Aisha as a Case Study*, «Jouvert. A Journal of Postcolonial Studies», 7/2 (2003), pp. 54-67.

³⁴ Soueif quoted in L. Shao-Pin, *Rewriting Travel: Ahdaf Soueif's The Map of Love and Bharati Mukherjee's The Holder of the World*, «Journal of Commonwealth Literature», 38/2 (2003), p. 82.

Upper Egypt»,³⁵ the different registers of class, gender and chronological periods. Rhythm and sounds of the mother-tongue surface and to a Western reader this language sounds as Arabic English, a 'translated language' through which the author pushes back the frontiers of the language to express her own experience. It is a very skilful kind of cultural translation where the insertion of Arabic words and sentences permeate the coloniser's language and where the Egyptian eye on English enables the writer to deconstruct it. Surely, the Arabic is evident in the utilisation of code-mixing when the author interspaces words of one language in sentences written in another one spoken in the colonial environment of Egypt. In Soueif's novel code-mixing is not only an interference but acts as an intersection where languages meet. Moreover, the insertion of code-mixing in a written text emphasises orality, an important component of a text structured through the complex interweaving of cultures. Arab names, expressions, metaphors, greetings and forms of address flow into her English-language dialogues. All through the text the author plays with word etymologies, like for example in a conversation between two characters, Amal and Isabel, talking about learning Arabic where Isabel says «I've learned the alphabet, and they're giving me lists of words [...] but I haven't got a handle on it. How it works»³⁶ to which Amal replies:

Everything stems from a root. And the root is mostly made up of three consonants - or two. And then the word takes different forms. Look [...] take the root q-l-b, qalb. [...] Qalb: the heart, the heart that beats, the heart at the heart of things [...] Then there's a number of forms [...] that any root can take. So in the case of 'qalb' you get 'qalab': to overturn, overthrow, turn upside down, make into the opposite; hence 'maqlab': a dirty trick, a turning of the tables and also a rubbish dump. 'Maqloub': upsidedown.³⁷

The mother-tongue is explained through the other language while the language question becomes more and more central through characters who are interpreters and translators of cultures. For example, after marrying the high-profile nationalist, Sharif Al-

Barouni, Lady Anna Winterbourne becomes for him the interpreter of her world and translates Western political pamphlets and news articles. Refusing to speak, or even to learn English, Sharif and his family communicate with Anna in French, which apparently seems a more neutral language than English even if it is a colonial one. In Sharif's words about the use of French which, «makes foreigners us both. It's good that I should have to come some way to meet you»,³⁸ the author sends a clear message to the reader: a third language stands here between the characters as a means of communication, as a bridge made of words between two cultures. The author, however, while telling the reader that the characters are speaking in French does not insert dialogues in this language but only a few words, it is mainly English to be printed in these pages, so that the reader imagines Anna and Sharif communicating in French but through English words. Probably not to burden the text with a third language, Soueif includes only short sentences in French and not the entire dialogues and in so-doing she envisions another process of translation between the two characters to be understood as an act of communication in none of their mother-tongues. In this novel shifts from one language to another are to be understood both as a reflection of social meanings and communicative strategies, identity markers signalling the geographical, cultural and social positions of the speakers. Moreover, the words in Arabic are transliterated into the Roman alphabet for the benefit of the Western reader.

Utilising a translator's technique, Soueif includes a glossary at the end of the novel, enabling the reader to understand the expressions in Arabic which are not clearly explained in the text. The glossary contains titles of respect, idiomatic expressions, forms of address, geographic, historical and cultural references, stereotypical and derogatory terms for foreigners but also explanations about Arabic morphology. It is a list of key terms to involve the Western reader in the Arabic culture. Another technique used by the author is paraphrase used to explain words or sentences in Arabic. She also translates into English idiomatic expressions or cultural references of her own culture, for example, religious references to the Koran are presented with a commentary together with allusions to important Egyptian historical events and information about the Arab year or the Arabic script.

³⁵ A. Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2005, p. 146.

³⁶ Soueif, *The Map of Love...*, p. 81.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 81-82.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

While all these expressions remain as signs of her own culture, the use of English enables the author to focus on issues such as sexuality, female desire and politics connected to the colonial period, «English here accords a liberating lexical storehouse and semantic sanctuary».³⁹ As a writer in-between languages and cultures Soueif evaluates the reception of her work for an Anglophone audience together with an attention towards Arab readers and the appropriateness of the translation into Arabic:

When my work goes into Arabic, what matters to me above all is the integrity of the work and that I should not appear to be a foreign writer in translation. I would want the work to flow as smoothly as it does in English and to be true to the fact that it was written by an Arab. That's really my top consideration. If I'm translated into German or Dutch, I don't read those languages and I don't know what they sound like. But Arabic is my language, therefore it matters to me what I am like in Arabic.⁴⁰

Clearly, the translation of her text into Arabic is a central concern and not by chance, *The Map of Love* was translated by Soueif's mother, professor of English literature at Cairo University. Probably thinking about the possibility of a wider audience the writer opts for English, but this is not the only reason, this choice is certainly due to her own deep immersion in English culture. English becomes the language of writing, of higher education, of her professional role and the author decides not to translate herself into Arabic. The novel born in 'another language' has to be translated by someone else, and not by the writer.

Referring to Roman Jakobson's theory, the novel also presents what has been defined as intersemiotic translation,⁴¹ referred here with its most recent semiotic definition, as 'transmutation', not only transposition or adaptation from one medium to another but as translation between different sign systems.⁴² From this point of view in the novel we assist to a cross-cultural event, a dynamic

³⁹ Malak, *Muslim Narratives* ..., p. 150.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ R. Jakobson, *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, in R. Bower (ed.), *On Translation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1959, pp. 232-39.

⁴² N. Dusi, *Il cinema come traduzione. Da un medium all'altro: letteratura, cinema, pittura*, UTET, Torino 2003; N. Dusi, *Introduzione*, in N. Dusi, S. Nergaard (a cura di), *Sulla traduzione intersemiotica*, «Versus. Quaderni di studi semiotici», 85/86/87 (2000), pp. 3-54.

process between a visual system and a verbal one. The author transforms, thus translating, visual texts into verbal images. The novel is full of references to and descriptions of well-known Orientalist painters' masterpieces such as John Frederick Lewis's *Harem Life in Constantinople* (c. 1857), *The Reception* (1873); *The Midday Meal, Cairo* (1875) and Frederick Arthur Bridgman's *The Siesta* (1878) and *The Bath* (1890).⁴³ Soueif recalls and translates for the reader a whole visual cultural world, the Western Orientalist vision so deeply criticised by Edward Said,⁴⁴ but she reinterprets it through her own gaze and Eastern eyes. The author re-reads and re-presents a whole cultural baggage of Western conceptions on the Orient and introduces it in her writing forging it. All through the novel images from famous movies about the Orient are interpreted, transformed and translated in-between the lines.⁴⁵

For Soueif 'cultural translation' becomes an act of reclaiming and recentering linguistic and cultural identity. From this standpoint, the author-translator carries on a transcultural interaction focalising on issues such as difference, ideology, power and plurality of languages, and following a strategy of resistance so well explained by postcolonial and translation studies scholars. Soueif's utilisation of translating techniques enables us to connect this typology of writing to translation studies: the author-translator is faced with the dilemma of faithfulness to the mother-tongue while transferring her cultural features to another language. The 'theoretical shadows' about the methodology of translation and the debate on the translator's role as a linguistic and cultural mediator juggling between many linguistic and cultural references seem to have been appropriated by the author-translator and symbolised by their characters. For Soueif the dilemma of faithfulness to the mother-tongue is revealed through another language, a social system and a specific history. For this author, writing means translating a postcolonial culture through the intersection of

⁴³ John Frederick Lewis (1804-1876) British painter who lived in Egypt for ten years; Frederick Arthur Bridgman (1847-1928) American painter.

⁴⁴ E. Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge, London 1978.

⁴⁵ If Anna's story recalls in some moments T. E. Lawrence's life and the movie adaptation *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) directed by David Lean, the novel is full of images from *Arabian Nights* (1942) directed by John Rawlins. The author refers also to Egyptian movies such as *The Land* (1969) directed by Yusuf Chahine, a classic of Egyptian cinema mentioned in the glossary.

languages and producing a meta-text which is rewritten in the act of literary (re)creation carried on by memories of the mother-tongue. It is this complex and multilayered narrative world that the translator faces and his/her main task is how to recreate this process of linguistic erasure and reconstitution in the transfer from source language to target language. The translation of the writer's self-translation is a further step of the translator's enterprise which should keep the author's memories of the mother-tongue unveiled through another language here used as the source language to be translated.

TOBIAS DÖRING

DISREMEMBERING SHERLOCK HOLMES: KAZUO ISHIGURO'S
WHEN WE WERE ORPHANS

In many debates in and about postcolonial writing, issues of memory and recollection have found great attention. How present-day experience has been shaped by the past, while our notion of this past, in turn, is constantly reshaped by present-day interpretations – this double process has often concerned writers, readers and critics of postcolonial literatures alike. In many cases, the effects of colonialism have been seen as the violent erasure of collective memories, or rather, as the attempt to cut off local and indigenous routes into cultural history and memory, and replace them with pre-formed imperial narratives about the colonised as «people without history», to cite the title of Eric Wolf's study.¹ For this reason, several postcolonial writers, especially among the pioneering generation pressing towards decolonisation, have described their literary project, in the words of Chinua Achebe,² as «teaching» their own people about local history and culture and thus reconnect them with the kind of memories that used to be so long denied, suppressed or just ignored. More recently, however, this agenda has been questioned, as memories may well be felt to be a burden or a limitation by which the present, potentially, continues to be conceived or confined in terms of the past. Writers like Derek Walcott or David Dabydeen have therefore tried to formulate an alternative agenda for their work, suggesting that

¹ Cfr. E. R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1982.

² Cfr. C. Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays*, Heinemann, London 1975, p. 44.