Introduction

Literary Back-Translations

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While retranslations, pseudotranslations, and self-translations have generated abundant scholarship, this special issue of *Translation and Literature* attends to another phenomenon, one which has yet to be theorized: back-translation. Literary back-translations are created when translations are returned to the language of their source-text. Such back-translations have always been rare but have a long tradition, since some translations into vernacular languages were translated back into Greek and Latin in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.[1] The present issue offers an initial definition and an array of considerations to conceptualize this phenomenon on which scholars working across a range of languages and historical periods will be able to build, but the individual back-translations addressed belong to the modern era. To give two examples explored in the following articles: Antonin Artaud's 1931 French translation of the classic gothic novel *The Monk* by Matthew Gregory Lewis was recently back-translated into English, as was Bernard Frechtman's 1959 English translation of Simone de Beauvoir's text 'Brigitte Bardot and The Lolita Syndrome' into French. Such back-translations differ from retranslations in that they are not competing with other translations. Rather, they accord translations the status of source-texts: they are, that is, translations of translations. As such, their theorization in what follows has the potential to change how the process of translation is mapped within descriptive theory, [2] as well as

[1] Some recent work can be found in *Traduire du vernaculaire en latin au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance: Méthodes et finalités*, edited by Françoise Fery-Hue (Paris, 2013).
[2] Retranslation, pseudotranslation and self-translation are all part of van Doorslaer mapping, but not back-translation, and it would be productive to include it as a new 'mode' in future

how we look upon the creation of translations in terms of ideology. To reflect on literary back-translations indeed requires two discourses that tend to exclude one another in Translation Studies, and it is not the least of this collection's contribution to combine descriptive and ideological approaches in order to reflect on the theoretical, cultural, and ethical implications of this unusual type of translation.

While literary back-translations have understandably been perceived as anomalies, they are becoming more common. Whether sponsored by publishers interested in back-translating celebrated translations of literary works for their original audiences, supported by patrons working for the cultural re-appropriation of texts that first appeared in translation, or inspired by writers whose multilingual poetics include back-translation as a literary device, back-translations continue to be published, and they challenge our understanding of translation both as a cultural practice to be investigated and as a literary product to be interpreted.

The very concept of back-translation is difficult to define because doing so calls into question how we conceive of translation itself. In a recent publication tellingly entitled 'What is (not) translation', Theo Hermans draws attention to problematic aspects of the definition proposed by Gideon Toury: 'any target-language utterance which is presented or regarded as such within the target culture'. 'The claim remains vulnerable', Hermans observes; 'merely "presenting" a text as a translation may not be enough for it to be recognized by others as a translation'.[3] This is an important point, not only because Toury's definition rests on social recognition, but also because if we followed Toury's definition there would simply be no distinction between translations and back-translations, since both can be considered

descriptive maps. See Luc van Doorslaer, 'Risking Conceptual Maps', *Target*, 19 (2007), 217–33.

[3] Theo Hermans, 'What is (not) translation', in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies*, edited by Carmen Millán and Francesca Bartrina (London, 2013), pp. 75–87 (p. 78).

target-texts. Back-translations may still appear peculiar or unusual, then, but recognizing their existence, integrating them in future mappings within descriptive studies, and conceptualizing them as translations in their own right has the potential to transform how we conceive of translation. For acknowledging that back-translations are based on translations rather than on originals – that literary translations are themselves worthy of translation – invites us, forces us even, to rethink the fundamental distinction we are accustomed to drawing between 'source' and 'target' texts, languages, and cultures.

While their retrospective movement seems the clearest way to define back-translations – 'when literary translations are returned to the language of their source-text' – this 'return' should not be seen as limiting, since it opens up several avenues that can enlarge our understanding of translation, challenging as they do the stability of originals which Karen Emmerich invites us to deconstruct, and representing a means to 'manipulate literary fame' which remains unexplored.[4] If publishers are apt to downplay a book's status as a translation, on the contrary, they tend to promote back-translations as emanating from translations. We should beware, however, of considering the publication of back-translations a clear positive sign for the status of literary translations. Through the process of back-translation, literary translations may be enhanced, but that enhancement only establishes translations as new 'originals', new stable entities. What the publication of back-translations emphasizes by way of repetition is the pernicious cycle that leads us to favour not just originals or source-texts, but the source location itself: could it be that the deplorable status of translations has less to do with how we perceive them as literary objects – or even with how we perceive the minor status of the languages and cultures with which translations are often associated – than with how we conceive of translation as a process and a destination;

[4] Karen Emmerich, *Literary Translation and The Making of Originals* (New York, 2017); André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and The Manipulation of Literary Fame*, second edn (London, 2017).

that our reverence for originals hides deep-seated issues with the target location?

Contemplating the trajectory of back-translations inevitably brings such questions and hypotheses to the fore. By challenging our common views of what constitutes a source-text and reflecting on the directions in which it theoretically can, or ethically should, travel, the present collection of essays responds to the call of several scholars for new approaches deconstructing fundamental, yet potentially unhelpful, oppositions such as source-text and target-text. Fluent/resistant, literal/free, formal/dynamic: these form attractive binaries because they appear to designate clearly distinct translation strategies. But as Lawrence Venuti points out in *The Translator's Invisibility*, Translation Studies would certainly benefit from more holistic approaches; rather than apprehending domestication and foreignization as contrasting 'theories', for example, he urges us to see them as 'ethical attitudes' and to study their 'effects'.[5] This collection of essays aligns with Venuti's invitation to adopt less oppositional approaches insofar as literary back-translations problematize the definition, function, and location of source- and target-texts. For once they have been back-translated, literary works do not come full circle: having travelled in both directions, their trajectory does not end but is freed from mono-directionality – and from such freedom, new conceptual questions and possibilities can arise.

One such possibility is the development of the 'contextual reading' advocated by Venuti and Emmerich. Translations, proposes Venuti, 'should be read differently, even if they require the development of a new kind of literacy'; 'readers can increase their appreciation of translations by deciding not to read them as isolated texts. They can rather create their own contexts of interpretation by joining their experience of a particular translation with other translations … as well as with original compositions.'[6] This is exactly

[5] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, third edn (London, 2018), p. 19.
[6] Venuti, p. xvii.

the type of reading undertaken in the ensuing essays, the study of literary back-translations necessitating comparative analysis of a sizeable array of texts. Pragmatic difficulties are of course related to this kind of literacy: time and resources, the mastery of several languages, and knowledge of specific literary corpora since the analysis of back-translations demands awareness of their existence in the first place. The integration of literary back-translations into the 'contextual reading' Venuti refers to would no doubt be facilitated by more digital editions of translations. This essay collection indeed adds one more argument to Karin Littau's case for such editions,[7] since the inclusion of back-translations within the hypertexts of literary translations would certainly be appreciated by readers and scholars. The inherent complexity of the study of back-translations is not unrelated, either, to enduring economic and ethical issues: how should we view the author of a back-translation; when translators translate translations, should their work be approached differently; should the names of back-translators be given on the title pages of the works they have back-translated? By raising such questions, the study of back-translations reactivates from a new perspective concerns that have often been voiced regarding the status of translators and the literary value of translations. This special issue rebuts the idea that writing should be perceived as creatively superior to translating, promotes the appreciation of translations as translations, calls for new theoretical models of translation, and thereby contributes to Maria Tymoczko's exhortation to 'empowering' translators ethically, as well as to 'enlarging' translation conceptually.[8]

On a conceptual level, what is most striking about literary back-translations, of course, remains their reverse itinerary. Their trajectory appears counter-intuitive, since Walter Benjamin, George Steiner, or Antoine Berman have accustomed us to think of the relation between an original and its translations in developmental terms. Despite their

[7] Karin Littau, 'Translation in the Age of Postmodern Production: From Text to Hypertext', *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 33 (1997), 81–96.
[8] Maria Tymoczko's *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (London, 2007).

inevitable betrayal, they ensure the survival of originals: 'Both formally and morally the books must balance', as Steiner puts it.[9] The process of back-translation generates a malaise because it goes against our teleological conception of translation. By introducing a third arrow of meaning, as it were, back-translations disturb our understanding of translation as an 'act of double-entry' with a 'balance of forces' seeking restitution. Dislodging the endpoint of translation from the target location and repositioning the final stage of the translation process as we see it, back-translations are bound to be perceived as dangerous or inauthentic: 'if it is to be authentic', translation 'must mediate into exchange and restore parity'.[10] Steiner's model continues to inspire ethical discourses that aim to recreate an equilibrium between source- and target-texts such that after the inherent violence of translation has taken place, 'order is preserved at both ends of the cycle, source and receptor'.[11] Literary back-translations unsettle our current understanding of translation as competition followed by harmony, which may explain why they haven't been theorized before. While we perceive them as dangerous or inauthentic because they travel the wrong way or in too many ways, these essays suggest that we would benefit from considering the larger conception of translation they entail. That is, literary back-translations are not only interesting cases to analyse: their very existence reveals translation as less teleological a process than has long been assumed, a process that is open-ended and therefore should not be understood in terms of restitution.

If the study of back-translations challenges our assumptions in terms of directionality, it also exposes disciplinary boundaries to which we consciously or unconsciously subscribe in Translation Studies. The prefix 'back-' in 'literary back-

[9] George Steiner, 'The Hermeneutic Motion', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti (London, 2000), pp. 156–61 (p. 160).
[10] Steiner, p. 159.
[11] Steiner, p. 160.

translations', and the odd trajectory it signifies, may be perceived as less disturbing than another explanation for the absence of theoretical scholarship on the topic, namely the suspicion with which we regard '*literary* back-translations'. Back-translation, we tend to assume, might have legitimate pedagogical or professional purposes, but it cannot possibly produce literary texts. In fact, our malaise is such that even viewed as a pedagogical tool, it can prove problematic. When Mona Baker thus explains her use of back-translation in her seminal textbook *In Other Words*, she does so with such caution that her rationale might be seen as discrediting its value:

> Back-translation, as used in this book, involves taking a text (original or translated) which is written in a language with which the reader is assumed to be unfamiliar and translating it as literally as possible into English […] I use the term back-translation because, since the source language is often English, this involves translating the target text back into the source language from which it was originally translated. A back-translation can give some insight into aspects of the structure, if not the meaning of the original, but it is never the same as the original. The use of back-translations is a necessary compromise; it is theoretically unsound and far from ideal, but then we do not live in an ideal world – very few of us speak eight or nine languages – and theoretical criteria cease to be relevant when they become an obstacle to fruitful discussion.[12]

Much could be said about the premises and assumptions lying behind this paragraph. On the one hand, the use of back-translation as a pragmatic means of enabling various readerships to learn about language and translation is appealing. On the other, Baker's presentation of

[12] Mona Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, second edn (London, 2011), p. 7.

back-translation is significantly backhanded: it is given as a 'necessary compromise' that is 'theoretically unsound'. It goes without saying that this special issue argues quite the opposite: that the process of back-translation is theoretically as well as ideologically promising, and therefore worth studying. But we may also wonder, if it doesn't conform to 'theoretical criteria', why use back-translation in a textbook? While an answer reaffirming the division between translation theory and practice could be expected, Baker compellingly suggests a different rationale: 'theoretical criteria cease to be relevant when they become an obstacle to fruitful discussion'. The process of back-translation would seem to enable productive discussion, then. What sort of discussion remains enigmatic, and the warning that back-translations are 'never the same as the original' unhappily implies that translations themselves can be 'the same as the original'. This might seem a harsh critique of Baker, but of course the aim of her textbook was openly pragmatic, not theoretical, and her Introduction does problematize the use of back-translation as a pedagogical method. In Jeremy Munday's *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, back-translation is used to illustrate Vinay and Darbelnet's segmentation model, but without any such explanation.[13] Baker's ambivalent justification is just as striking as Munday's silence in a textbook otherwise so upfront about its methods and abundant in end-of-chapter exercises. Both are nevertheless symptomatic of a distinct malaise surrounding back-translation as a practice and a process, let alone as an object of literary study.

The paragraph quoted above may be found in a textbook, and may amount to a rather odd advocacy of back-translation, but it also contains the first significant series of remarks on back-translation and, as such, it certainly warrants further analysis. That Baker would present back-translation not only as a pedagogical method but as an essentially literal one

[13] Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, fourth edn (London, 2016), pp. 104–5.

('taking a text … and translating it as literally as possible into English') helps uncover further reasons for the lack of scholarship on the topic. While 'literary' back-translations still seem difficult to envisage, 'literal' back-translations have long been considered acceptable. In her textbook, Baker's Introduction is followed by a single footnote, which again proves enlightening precisely where it undermines back-translation: 'It is important to stress that much of the back-translation provided in this book is very literal … The quality of the English that appears in a given back-translation is not meant to reflect the quality of the translation itself.'[14] If this footnote appeared necessary to Baker, it is probably because back-translation has long been used as a method to assess the quality of translations in the context of language learning as well as in the commercial world, whether for subtitles or for legal, medical, or business documents.

London Translations thus advertise their back-translation service: 'Get the quality assurance your translation project needs with our back-translation services. Our expert linguists will give you the peace of mind that your content is completely accurate and fit for purpose.'[15] Back-translation is again presented here as a useful method to test the validity of translations. Interestingly, customers are nevertheless advised that the process might produce translations in their own right:

> You might conclude that if the original English to Italian translation was 'accurate' then the two versions of the English document would be identical – it seems logical but unfortunately that is an unsafe assumption for the following reasons: Language translation is an art not a science which means that individual translators will use slightly different words to try to best capture the essence and nuance of the meaning

[14] Baker, p. 8.
[15] <https://www.londontranslations.co.uk/translation-services/back-translation/> (accessed 11 April 2020).

> the author is trying to convey. In technical terms we say that the mapping between source and target languages is not symmetric.[16]

If the world of business sees the 'art' involved in back-translations so clearly that companies need to warn their customers about it, wouldn't it be timely for Translation Studies to recognize their literary potential?

Whether back-translation should be approached as a literal method or back-translations studied as literary objects has been the subject of much discussion during the compilation of this volume. Byron Taylor's contribution, for example, uses back-translation empirically to reassess the alleged untranslatability of Paul Celan's poetry. Taylor back-translated Michael Hamburger's and Pierre Joris' translations of Celan as literally as possible in support of his argument, and it became progressively clearer to us both that even the most 'literal' back-translation remains, to a certain extent, innovative or 'literary'. Although Baker's *In Other Words* mainly features back-translations of non-literary texts, each and every one of her examples could likewise be said to innovate on their source-texts. That is, the process of back-translation has much more to offer than a way of accommodating readers and learners with various levels of familiarity with the language at hand. 'A back-translation can give some insight into aspects of the structure, if not the meaning of the original', writes Baker. While the insights gained through back-translations are indeed rewarding pedagogically, their value goes beyond enlightening texts at a structural level. For back-translation can also be used to teach literary translation.

In response to the call for papers published at the inception of this issue of *Translation and Literature*, Roger Little kindly shared with me the way he used back-translation in his translation seminars before retiring from Trinity College Dublin. He would

[16] <https://www.londontranslations.co.uk/faq/back-translation/> (accessed 11 April 2020).

occasionally present a literary text in French without saying in advance that it was itself a translation from the English. When handing students' work back, he would distribute copies of the original English text and observe their surprised fascination when learning that, while they thought they had translated a French text, they had in fact back-translated an English text. He would then invite them to critically compare the back-translation they had produced with the English original, a process he found raised students' awareness of style and improved their self-confidence, helping them realize that 'mistakes are relative'.[17]

Why did we have to wait so long for back-translations to be theorized, then? The reasons examined so far point to the necessity, and yet the difficulty, of overcoming conceptual binaries and disciplinary boundaries. Of these two obstacles, the latter appears the greater, perhaps because within the humanities, Translation Studies is a field whose subfields are more distinctly marked than in other disciplines. Reflecting on literary back-translations brings tensions between disciplines to the fore in ways that seem truly irreconcilable, and yet there lies the potential of the following articles and of this special issue as a whole. Studying literary back-translations cannot but call into question boundaries: between general contexts (back-translation as practiced in academic or professional contexts), approaches (literal or literary back-translation), disciplines (translation or literary studies), and subfields within these disciplines (back-translation as a pedagogical method in the context of language learning or as a literary object to be analysed and theorized). Even if we repeatedly stress the need to break with such divisions, it remains a long-term endeavour. While it may appear more abstract, then, in the short term, the most promising contribution of this volume to the field surely lies in its combining descriptive and

[17] I would like to express my gratitude to Roger Little for this email exchange, which prompted me to research the pedagogical aspect of back-translation.

ideological approaches to deconstruct conceptual binaries such as ‘source’ and ‘target’ locations.

When Baker seems to state the obvious by warning that back-translations ‘are never the same as the original’ – since of course neither translations nor back-translations are ever ‘the same’ as the original – she nevertheless indicates an important aspect of back-translations: the oddity of their trajectory exposes difference. Borrowing the concept theorized by Jacques Derrida, I would argue that through their voyage home, back-translations indeed reveal the ‘différance’ inherent in any act of translation, and that, ultimately, this ‘literary difference’ is what we tend to perceive as threatening. We are prepared to admit that dozens of translations might produce different results, all valid in themselves and interesting to compare, but when a back-translation brings a work back home, it competes with what we persist in holding sacred; it confronts the original in its own language. The original has not been adapted or rewritten but translated twice, and when it comes home, comparison makes it all too obvious, undeniable even, that the work is no longer ‘the same’, that it has been transformed to such an extent that ‘home’ is no longer home – and what could be more difficult to conceive?

Back-translations provoke a feeling of ‘unheimlich’ analogous to that produced by the classic telephone game or ‘Chinese Whispers’, but when reading them we feel less that the meaning has been distorted than that the texture has been altered by contact with the sensibilities of translators before returning home. What exactly occurs in the process of translation is always difficult to pinpoint, and may be more complicated when back-translation is at issue. But, as is often the case, complication here has the potential to enlighten: the dual trajectory inherent in back-translation emphasizes fundamental characteristics of translation that we tend to overlook. In short, it is precisely because they

are anomalies that the study of literary back-translations can enlighten the translation process, in the manner a microscope can help us see or grasp what we strive to understand.

Antoine Berman probably came closest to theorizing the structural uncanniness of literary back-translation in his article on retranslation, 'La retraduction comme espace de la traduction'. What we commonly refer to as his 'retranslation hypothesis' comes from this article and features on Andrew Chesterman's list of 'translation universals' in the form 'Later translations tend to be closer to the source text.'[18] This principle has understandably attracted much criticism, but it should be noted that Berman expressed it in very different terms. What was only one premise among several formulated in the context of a conference also got distorted when it became a theoretical claim to be 'universalized' or 'demolished'.[19] The intense critical reception of the 'retranslation hypothesis' stemmed from misunderstandings of a French text that has regrettably never been fully translated, so that everyone referring to it for an English-speaking audience must make their own translation, extracting quotations and translating them to serve specific arguments. For Berman's proposition was not that 'later translations tend to be closer to the source text', but that 'all great translations are retranslations':

> Only retranslations can, at times, produce the 'accomplished' […] If all retranslations are not great translations (!), every great translation is, in fact, a retranslation […] For this correlation to hold empirically, it needs to be nuanced in two ways. To begin with, it is not … universal. A first translation can be a great translation.[20]

[18] Andrew Chesterman, 'Beyond the Particular', in *Translation Universals: Do They Exist?*, edited by Anna Mauranen and Pekka Kujamäki (Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 33–50 (p. 40).
[19] Attacks recently reached a climax in endorsements on the cover of Sharon Deane-Cox's *Retranslation: Translation, Literature and Reinterpretation* (New York, 2016): the book 'demolishes the "Retranslation Hypothesis" of Antoine Berman' (Tom Cheesman) and 'puts the final nail in the coffin of the Retranslation Hypothesis' (Sebnem Susam-Saraeva).
[20] 'C'est seulement aux retraductions qu'il incombe d'atteindre – de temps en temps –

Since the translation I propose here serves an argument, it is open to criticism as any other would be – it cannot escape being shaped by its purpose – but it highlights the distinctions Berman established so clearly. He was indeed careful to qualify his hypothesis in two essential ways that are of interest for the study of back-translation: he wrote that 'all retranslations are not great translations (!)', and that his hypothesis was not to be considered 'universal'. These nuances are emphasized through prominent punctuation: an exclamation mark in mid-sentence and an ellipsis: 'it is not … universal'. While my translation of 'absolue' as 'universal' here aims to reveal the irony of Berman's postulate being included in a list of 'translation universals', it also responds to the hesitation conveyed by this ellipsis, which implies his uncertainty that 'absolue' or 'absolute' was the right word. Such punctuation is a tangible trace within the text of the distinctions Berman sought to emphasize, and these nuances matter because the hesitation or discomfort from which they originate relates to our malaise with back-translations – a malaise that can be explained by the all-too-neat distinction we tend to draw between descriptive and ideological approaches, as if one were exclusively preoccupied with objectivity and the other with subjectivity. While Chesterman, adopting a descriptive approach, attempted to 'universalize' Berman's thoughts on retranslation, scholars adopting an ideological approach have pointed to the subjective judgements called for by his use of adjectives: if only retranslations can be 'great', then first translations are bound to be 'poor'.[21] Berman strikingly preempted such 'universalizing' and 'ideological' impulses by adding here that 'first translations can be great' and that 'all

l'accompli […] Si toute retraduction n'est pas une grande traduction (!), toute grande traduction, elle, est une retraduction […] Pour que cette corrélation soit empiriquement vraie, il faut la nuancer de deux manières. D'abord, elle n'est pas ... absolue. Il peut y avoir une première traduction qui soit une grande traduction.' Antoine Berman, 'La retraduction comme espace de la traduction', *Palimpsestes*, 4 (1990), 1-7 (pp. 1, 3).

[21] On this point see Françoise Massardier-Kenney, 'Toward a Rethinking of Retranslation', *Translation Review*, 92 (2015), 73–85.

retranslations are not great translations (!)'.[22] Both misinterpretations, however, have consequences reaching far beyond quarrels about the meaning of this particular text. Berman's article is instructive insofar as it reveals how problematic the conceptualization of retranslations already was, and by extension it indicates how much more challenging the theorization of back-translations can be. Whereas reflecting on retranslations seems to have *exacerbated* the division between descriptive and ideological approaches, considering literary back-translations appears to *threaten* that division, so much so that theorizing them might render it obsolete.

Just as all literary retranslations are not 'great translations', all back-translations are far from being great translations; they don't even 'tend to be closer to their source text' as Chesterman's list has it. There is a marked tendency within Translation Studies to universalize hypotheses into norms. While it has been understandable in the context of a relatively young discipline in need of basic principles to assert itself as an autonomous and rigorous field, it has also prevented Translation Studies from growing. Following Steiner, Lefevere, or Venuti, we are now quick to identify ethnocentric or appropriative translations, but less to realize that our field, more than others, tends to function by appropriating and formulating normative rules. The 'greatness' of retranslations and back-translations cannot be universalized, nor can it be reduced to subjective appreciation: there can be as many good or bad translations, retranslations, and back-translations, as there are individuals and judgements to assert them as such. The 'greatness' in retranslations that interested Berman – and that back-translations emphasize – was no more subjective than universal; it was neutral or hypothetical, it was theoretical.

[22] It is therefore problematic to reduce Berman's retranslation hypothesis to the affirmation that 'subsequent translations *always* improve upon their predecessors'. Chantal Wright, 'Introduction', in Antoine Berman, *The Age of Translation*, translated by Chantal Wright (London, 2018), p. 6; my emphasis.

Berman has been widely criticized for his use of the adjective 'great' to describe retranslations, since it immediately calls for evaluative criteria. Surely, when Chesterman 'mistranslated' Berman – that is, when the premise 'all great translations are retranslations' became part of a list of universals as 'later translations tend to be closer to the source text' – it was likewise in an attempt to systematize the subjectivity implied by this adjective. If Chesterman's 'mistranslation' initiated a series of misinterpretations, this term understandably generated it. But Berman was unjustly criticized for resorting to a vocabulary of loss to qualify translations, not only because he specified that 'first translations can be great translations', but because this criticism originates from mistranslations of another term fundamental to his structural conception of retranslation: the notion of 'défaillance'. Stefan Heyvaert suggests 'failing',[23] Françoise Massardier-Kenney offers no fewer than three renderings ('faltering', 'decay', and 'deficiency'), Sharon Deane-Cox proposes 'shortcomings', and Chantal Wright 'defaults',[24] all of which position 'défaillance' as a negative concept. Such translations neglect the psychoanalytical dimension of the concept and its place in the French philosophical tradition,[25] but also misinterpret what in Berman's thought is a neutral, theoretical argument, as the notion of 'struggle' I propose may instead emphasize: 'Every translation is struggling, entropic, regardless of its principles.'[26] In sum, the structural dimension of the 'retranslation hypothesis' has been overlooked on account of such mistranslations, and these have accentuated Berman's subjective terminology where it was in fact meant to be neutral, in order to be theorized.

[23] Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign*, translated by Stefan Heyvaert (New York, 1992), p. 185.
[24] Massardier-Kenney, p. 73; Deane-Cox, p. 3; Wright in Berman, *Age of Translation*, p. 6.
[25] Berman's 'défaillance' needs to be understood in relation to the concept of 'repression' in psychoanalysis and the notion of 'faille' in French critical thought (see my article in the issue).
[26] 'Toute traduction est défaillante, entropique, quels que soient ses principes' (n. 20); my translation.

What Berman's critical reception illustrates particularly well is that while retranslations have reinforced the division between descriptive and ideological approaches, back-translations indeed expose the 'struggle' characterizing all translations, and reflection on that dimension truly requires the reconciliation of both approaches. By travelling the 'wrong way', not only do back-translations escape the competition between translations and enhance the visibility of translators, they also challenge our standard teleological model of translation. Back-translations might be as poor or as great as any other translations or retranslations, but they have one undeniable specificity: their intriguing trajectory forces us to rethink how we approach the translation process. One might be tempted to say that they still compete; only they compete with the original. But that would only be true to a limited extent. When back-translations are published, readers are able to choose to read the original or its back-translation in the same language, as we can choose to listen to a musical piece performed by different musicians or orchestras, except that back-translations remain translations. They are not adaptations; they are translations of translations. With them, the iterability characterizing retranslations is emphasized, multiplied. And with that emphasis or multiplication comes, paradoxically, uniqueness, for there is really no comparison between the original and its back-translation. Translation rarely returns a work home, but when it does, when through back-translation the work resurfaces in the same language, the 'difference' introduced by the process of translation is revealed, and to understand that difference requires both theorization and comparison.

Have enough literary back-translations been made for scholars to analyse them and establish patterns? Certainly not yet, but this number of *Translation and Literature* prepares the way for such investigations through the use of a variety of perspectives: material history (back-translations restoring lost manuscripts for their initial audiences), ideology (back-

translations motivated by nationalist or feminist agendas), and creativity (self-back-translation as a poetic practice).

The issue opens with Dominik Zechner's theoretical reflection which explores how the concept and the process of back-translation challenge our assumptions regarding directionality, analysing their problematization in the works of Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, and the late Werner Hamacher. Zechner's argument is supported by an engagement with the Austrian poet Ernst Jandl: focusing on 'chanson' (1966), his close reading contributes to our understanding of translation and back-translation not only by reassessing Jandl's poems in relation to theoretical statements made by Benjamin, Derrida, and Hamacher, but also by reframing the category of 'concrete poetry' as one equally concerned with the form of poetic expressions and their translatability. 'Jandl's poetry is important', writes Zechner, insofar as it 'exposes the structural possibility of both translation and back-translation without having to rely on traditional notions that revolve around originality, subjectivity, and unity. More than that, by actively undermining these notions, Jandl insists that a singular poetic movement is enough to expose all formal dimensions and complications of translatability, including moments of direction and reversion.'

The issue then moves on to discuss the production and reception of back-translations, as the next three articles attend to literary back-translations into French, Chinese, and German, retracing their intricate history through archival research, and analysing them in terms of ideological distortion, political censorship, and multiple authorship. Pauline Henry-Tierney's article shows how back-translations can help ensure the legacy of an author's philosophical discourse, focusing on Simone de Beauvoir's text 'Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome', which was first published in English for the American audience of *Esquire* in 1959 in a translation by Bernard Frechtman. Her essay reveals that the back-translation of Frechtman's translation was endorsed by Beauvoir herself in 1979.

Comparative analysis of this authorized back-translation with the translation demonstrates that Frechtman had, to a certain extent, distorted Beauvoir's discourse on the 'eternal feminine', and that Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier's back-translation helped restore that discourse for a French readership. If the interpretative movement in this article follows the chronological trajectory of Beauvoir's text on Bardot, comparing its reception in American and French cultures, it also moves beyond qualitative assessment and cultural analysis to posit back-translation as a 'transgressive process' threatening to dismantle scholars' assumptions and 'explode any master-narratives seeking to position translations as absolute Others for "untouchable" originals', since 'as Beauvoir aptly writes: "As soon as one myth is touched, all myths are in danger." '[27]

While back-translation seems to have benefitted the reception of Beauvoir, Wang Jinbo considers an opposite case, reminding us that, just like translations, back-translations can of course prove culturally harmful. His essay comparatively analyses the bilingual editions of Cao Xueqin's classic novel *Hong Lou Meng* published by the Library of Chinese Classics (*A Dream of Red Mansions*, 1999) and the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press (*The Story of The Stone*, 2012). It contends that the preparation of Chinese originals for bilingual editions often involves back-translation, as in the latter edition, where the original text has been partially back-translated in order to match the translation of David Hawkes and John Minford. In such cases, back-translation can entail serious implications: 'it can be slightly alienating, if not shocking, for non-academic Chinese readers to see their celebrated novel "disfigured"', Wang Jinbo writes. His article also demonstrates that the existence of multiple Chinese originals complicates the task of editorial teams, and concludes that 'the use or non-use of back-translation in the production of parallel texts to

[27] Simone de Beauvoir, 'Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome', *Esquire* (August 1959), 32–8 (p. 38).

unravel this complexity has consequences, insofar as it can either reveal or conceal cultural, sexual, and political difference'.

Howard Gaskill's article also addresses the way in which the back-translation of lost or unstable originals can challenge how we conceive of a literary work. However, the case of Arthur Koestler's novel *Darkness at Noon* is a unique or 'strange' one, as the essay's title implies, since the original German manuscript lost in the midst of World War II recently resurfaced to cast doubt, not only on Daphne Hardy's standard English translation (1940), but most ironically on Koestler's self-back-translation. Both Henry-Tierney and Gaskill's articles show how we tend to idealize lost originals, only to find out that they might not be as indispensable to the production of translations and back-translations as we thought, since Beauvoir herself endorsed the back-translation into French of her lost manuscript established from Frechtman's translation, and Koestler partly back-translated his text into German from Hardy's translation. In light of Philip Boehm's retranslation (2019), Hardy's mastery of German appears wanting, but it should then logically lead us to reassess the author's own mastery of English. For Gaskill's extensive archival research reveals that Koestler not only endorsed but was himself involved in producing Hardy's English translation, once referring to it in a crucial unpublished letter as a 'co-translation'.

While the last three articles bring out the ideological dimension of literary back-translations, the next three contributions address issues of directionality, untranslatability, and crypticity within works whose poetics and hermeneutics challenge our traditional ways of reading, interpreting, and cognitively registering literary texts. My own contribution furthers the alternative reading of Berman's 'retranslation hypothesis' initiated above, offering translations and interpretations of two of his premises in 'La retraduction comme espace de traduction': that all translations would be impaired by powerful forces of 'non-translation', especially first translations, and that this phenomenon would be 'attenuated' by

retranslation. It is to develop these two ideas that Berman created the concept of 'défaillance'. The article retraces the evolution of Berman's notion in his œuvre, unearthing and explaining its psychoanalytical dimension, before demonstrating how the study of 'défaillances' across three translative layers can be enlightening by analysing three scenes within Matthew Gregory Lewis' gothic novel *The Monk* (1796), Artaud's French translation (1931) and Phillips' back-translation (2003). The study of literary back-translations, I argue, is valuable retrospectively, insofar as it helps in identifying and analysing tensions within translations as well as within originals. The article thus reveals what might be called the 'emphasizing potential' of back-translations. That is, the study of 'défaillances' in back-translations magnifies elements which were underdeveloped in its source-texts and, in so doing, could transform our understanding of the larger trajectory of literary works.

Byron Taylor goes one step further by practicing back-translation, in order to reassess the alleged untranslatability of Paul Celan's poetry. The article starts by examining two possibilities: that Celan's untranslatability derives from his life experience, or from the hermeticity of his poetry. Setting this inquiry against the rise of interest in the topic of the 'untranslatable' since the publication of the *Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* edited by Barbara Cassin in 2004, it explores the limitations of this concept before back-translating Michael Hamburger and Pierre Joris' English versions of two poems by Celan: 'Radix, Matrix' (1963) and 'Etched Away' (1967). Taylor's empirical approach raises important theoretical issues pertaining to the concept of 'untranslatability' as well as to the practice of back-translation, such as the need to back-translate not once (into German) but twice (for English readers) and the wisdom of producing literal back-translations of literary texts. Back-translation here 'confirms the singularity' of Celan's poetry, enables us to appreciate Hamburger's and Joris' translations, and questions Celan's 'untranslatability': 'does singularity necessarily demand the status of untranslatability?' The article argues that

untranslatability within Celan is due to a paradox – 'intense self-referentiality on the one hand, and opacity on the other' – and concludes with John Sallis that this opacity is itself caused less by 'linguistic idiomaticity' than by 'experiences that are impossible to communicate'. Taylor's empirical approach to back-translation is not only bold, it also inspires thought, for we could dream of more such back-translations: why not back-translate Scott Moncrieff's translation of Proust's *Recherche* into French, or Baudelaire's translation of Poe's *Histoires extraordinaires* into English, to name only well-known translations? What would such back-translations, used as a creative form of criticism, reveal about literary translations? The study of Jandl and Celan's multilingual poetry also poses a thorny problem: how should we translate texts within which authors never cease to translate themselves; how should we read and interpret this 'intensive' self-back-translation?

Alexandra Lukes' article addresses another crucial question from our point of view as readers: how do we cognitively register translation and back-translation? Her analysis of Luis d'Antin van Rooten's famous literary hoax *Mots d'Heures: Gousses, Rames* (1967) shows how what she calls 'crypto-back-translation' not only compels, but to a certain extent forces, us as readers to become conscious of our cognitive process when reading texts involving multiple languages. Van Rooten's use of covert back-translations within an erudite apparatus of footnotes is indeed presented here as a sophisticated hermeneutic strategy alerting us to its cognitive effects. The crypticity of his literary back-translations raises concerns to do with 'transparency and subterfuge in translation that are cognate to discussions in the field on the "translator's invisibility", the "ethics of translation", and the extent to which any act of translation involves some degree of manipulation'. Since van Rooten's text is meant to be experienced, Lukes also investigates how it generates a particular emotional process: 'the gap between understanding van Rooten's practice and figuring out which English nursery rhyme lies behind each French poem can induce a curious

discomfort, where humour morphs into something more troubling, as readers find themselves caught between two languages, trying to forget one in order to remember another, but temporarily unable to recollect what they think they ought to know.' The issue thus suitably concludes with Lukes' essay exploring how back-translation can both enlighten and transform our reading process. Within van Rooten's text, 'back-translation reveals *the extent* to which, as readers, we instinctively search for meaning in a text in a foreign language', while crypto-back-translation illuminates '*how* we set about searching for meaning, by uncovering the intuitive and embodied nature of the reading process as we move, consciously or not, back and forth between languages'.

Whether in terms of politics, poetics, or hermeneutics, all these essays show that back-translations can challenge how we are accustomed to read and interpret texts not only unilingually, but also linearly in terms of directionality. One last contribution the present collection could make in this respect is by reflecting on the ideological challenge that back-translations pose to the traditional Western model of translation: B → A (foreign to source language, text, culture). In the West, translation into the translator's mother tongue is still professionally privileged in that this directionality is felt likely to achieve the highest standards. Yet research has shown that most professional translators now master more than two languages and translate both ways, since an understanding of the source culture is just as necessary as a mastery of the target language to produce ethical and accurate translations.[28] Professional translators also increasingly work from one foreign language into another, and this model is becoming more acceptable: C → B (foreign to other foreign language). But we are still reluctant to acknowledge the wisdom of the model implied by back-translation: A → B → A (source to foreign, and foreign to source language). Yet the

[28] Allison Beeby Lonsdale, 'Directionality', in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, edited by Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha (London, 1998), pp. 88–92.

last two models are not perceived as counter-intuitive in Eastern cultures. This collection of essays, then, not only stresses the need for new descriptive models of translation by questioning our preconceptions in terms of directionality, but suggests that non-Western approaches to translation might be helpful in elaborating these models. The study of literary back-translations also clarifies that, while the search for such new approaches may appear abstract or theoretical, it really isn't, since the models of translation we rely on inevitably entail ideological and conceptual consequences.

Ideologically, what several of the following essays could be said to reveal is that within the back-translation trajectory, B holds a central and threatening reshaping power. By functioning both as a target and source location, the B language forcefully establishes its dominance within the trajectory of back-translations – and of course that B language tends to be English. For example, Wang Jinbo's article is critical of the bilingual edition of *Hong Lou Meng* published by the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, which openly back-translates an English translation (B) in order to create the Chinese original (A), thus running the risk of delegitimizing the A culture. While Pauline Henry-Tierney and Howard Gaskill's contributions establish that back-translation can, on the contrary, re-legitimize literary works for A cultures, it is nevertheless again because English (B) reshaped French and German texts (A). There are two instances examined here where English doesn't occupy the central B position: van Rooten's self-back-translations and Philips' back-translation of Artaud's *The Monk* (in both cases English → French → English). But these two exceptions only prove the rule, for they suggest that when English is no longer the B language, we hesitate to grant back-translations the status of translations. The importance of van Rooten's poetics and hermeneutics has often been dismissed on account of the humoristic dimension of his text, and the reputation of Artaud as a *poète maudit* who spent nine years in psychiatric institutions casts another type of shadow. The back cover of Artaud's *The Monk* labels his

version as an adaptation and a 'simulacrum', and does not so much as mention the name of the back-translator. This underlines the complex legacy of Artaud and van Rooten, but it would be interesting to investigate other such cases where the B language is not English in order to measure the validity of the following premise: do we consciously or unconsciously perceive back-translations into English as problematic because the culturally dominant language has been 'reshaped' or 'contaminated' by another? Hopefully, studies involving larger samples of literary back-translations will explore this and other premises suggested in these pages, thereby responding to Maria Tymozcko's call for new approaches that will 'de-westernize' our conception of translation.[29] By proposing a concrete way of reconceptualizing translation beyond directionality, this special issue contributes to this objective by challenging the ethnocentric B → A model, whose main aim continues to be, in Steiner's words, to 'bring it home': 'the translator invades, extracts, and brings home'.[30]

Conceptually, their ultimate paradox is that back-translations do, of course, bring literary works home. Only, with back-translation, 'home' acquires a different signification. It no longer refers to the target-text's destination but indicates a return to the source-text's location: the work brought back to a home culture originated from that very culture. The eeriness of comparing two texts in the same language that are no more adaptations or versions than they are intralingual translations or retranslations has been stressed: literary back-translations are *translations of translations*. When considering back-translations, the importance we ascribe to the original or the source location is challenged, not through translation, not in foreign country, but right at home, which explains why they can be seen as threatening anomalies. While this volume recognizes the existence of back-translations,

[29] 'Translation studies must de-westernize its perspectives on the nature of translation processes and products, reconceptualizing many of the fundamental (though often unspoken) assumptions of the discipline.' Tymozcko (n. 8), pp. 3–4.
[30] Steiner (n. 9), p. 157.

defines and conceptualizes them, its aim is therefore not only to enable the mapping of back-translation in descriptive studies, but also to suggest new ways to read and interpret the trajectory of literary works.

By lifting the embargo on directionality, back-translations negate the 'negation of entropy' that Steiner attributes to translation, and that still characterizes our perception of translation. The study of back-translation invites new models of translation, moving away from our current understanding centred on directionality, and instead positing translation as an open-ended movement for literary works. The 'return' that has been proposed as the defining characteristic of back-translations – when literary translations are returned to the language of their source-texts – should by no means be considered limiting simply because of the profound malaise it entails theoretically and ideologically. The very discomfort that back-translations generate when 'returning' a work home is their promise: what can we learn from this uncanniness? It might be too soon to venture definite answers, but the theorization of back-translation should certainly help enlarge our conception of translation, if only because, when home is no longer home, suddenly, literary works travelling across languages and cultures no longer have limitations. Back-translations reveal that the books between source- and target-texts can never be made to balance. For literary works are larger than texts, and they are meant to travel, with no preconceived trajectory.