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***Nancy Huston in Self-translation  
An Aesthetics of Redoublement***

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## PART I

### I. AN INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY SELF-TRANSLATION

Traduire, c'est ça qu'il faut : traduttore non è traditore, c'est même la seule façon de ne pas trahir, il n'y a que ça de vrai. Traduire, éternellement traduire.

Nancy Huston

#### 1.1 Framing Self-translation Studies

The earliest academic definition of the phenomenon of self-translation is possibly that established by Slovak translation scholar Anton Popovič in the *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation* (1976), where he terms it as “the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself”. The entry ‘Self-translation’ (or ‘Auto-translation’, or authorial translation) written by Canadian translation scholar Rainier Grutman when it first entered the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies* (1998) quotes: “the act of translating one’s writing and the result of such an undertaking”.<sup>1</sup>

Literary self-translation refers more specifically to the enterprise of bilingual (or multilingual) authors who decide to translate the texts they have written and published in one of the languages they master, into other language(s). The high number of publications on the subject that have flourished in the last decades suggests that this circumscribed branch of study within the academic discipline of *Translation Studies* has benefited from a considerable amount of interest.<sup>2</sup> Just before the turn of the millennium, Grutman described ‘self-translation’ as being ‘frowned upon in literary studies’. Studies have progressed a long way since then, and now it seems no longer the case. Indeed, the corpus of critical studies is currently very lively and continually expanding in different directions. Besides the studies on single authors, monographies,

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<sup>1</sup> Mona Baker and Kirsten Malmkjær (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. (London: Psychology Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> The rich online bibliography available at <http://self-translation.blogspot.it/> inaugurated by Julio-César Santoyo (Universidad de León) and nowadays edited and constantly updated and Eva Gentes (Heinrich Heine University of Düsseldorf) has expanded up to 1000 titles of publications. Gentes calculates that further two hundred works are going to be published over the course of 2017. The last updates were published on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017.



miscellanies,<sup>3</sup> journal issues,<sup>4</sup> essays, lectures, and conferences displaying the term ‘self-translation’ in their titles are appearing frequently enough in a wide range of universities all over the globe, as researchers are gaining consciousness that a plethora of authors – past and contemporary – do write in more than one language and, at some point of their career and for varying reasons, decide to translate their own work, partially or in its entirety.

Such a wide-reaching interest does not proceed from a sudden fancy, but has more probably been fostered by the development of other recent branches of studies and a general tendency toward interdisciplinarity. In fact, the structure of literary self-translation seems to be such that the subject can and should be investigated from a range of perspectives. This young area of investigation is, indeed, a transdisciplinary space resulting from the co-operation of instruments and perspectives from established disciplines, as varied as translation studies, comparative literature, post-colonial and cultural studies, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and studies on bilingualism.

The distinctive trait that differentiates self-translation from ‘usual’, or ‘normal’, or allograph translation is, quite obviously, that *the translator is also the author of the first text*. Besides concentrating on the *strategies* adopted by self-translating authors, fruitful results were produced by research on the *reasons why* authors decide to undertake this task, defined by many a painful labour or, with the neat formula recently found by Christian Lagarde, “un exercice chronophage et énergivore” [a time-consuming and energy-stealing exercise].<sup>5</sup> Why would any author repeat/rewrite/translate – or whatever definition be chosen for the process – their previous work in a second language? Are there economic, poetic, ideological motivations behind it and does it have consequences on the strategies adopted? What kind of identitarian struggle does a bilingual author and self-translator experience?

Contrastive analyses of self-translated texts focus on *how* the two (or more) languages of the self-translator relate to – and arguably affect – each other. Questions as to how the two texts relate are numerous. For instance, is the translative practice systematic, or limited to a single experience? Are the authors constant in their choice of source and

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<sup>3</sup> In Italy this interest is recent but fruitful. Cf. for instance, Simona Anselmi, *On Self-translation: an exploration in self-translators’ teloi and strategies* (Milano: LED, 2012), Andrea Ceccherelli, Gabriella Elna Imposti e Monica Perotto (eds.) *Autotraduzione e riscrittura* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Journal issues devoted exclusively to self-translation: *Semicerchio. Rivista di Poesia comparata*, 20/21 (1999); *Quìmera. Revista de Literatura* 210 (2002); *Que sais-je?* 25 (2003); *In Other Words. The Journal For Literary Translator* 25 (2005); *Atelier de traduction* 7 (2007); *Tradução em revista* 16 (2014); *Glottopol* 25 (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Christian Lagarde, “De l’individu au global: les enjeux psycho-socio-linguistiques de l’autotraduction littéraire”, *Glottopol* n° 25 (2015) 42.

target languages, or do they freely switch direction? Is the native tongue used only to write original texts, as writers were supposed to do according to romantic thinkers such as Friedrich Schleiermacher? Or can authors actually be creative when writing in an acquired idiom? At which point in their careers do writers turn to the process of auto-translation? Are second versions produced after (a short/a long time after?) first versions have been published, or are they on an equal footing from a chronological point of view, i.e., is their progression more or less simultaneous? How does a self-translation relate, as a text, to an allograph translation? Can it be said to possess its own distinctive character? And if it does, which are the hermeneutic tools to reveal it?

Ultimately, it would probably be meaningful to try to embed the issues relating to self-translation into wider pictures: for instance, can the study of self-translation provide a better understanding of the role of *translation* within literature and of its agency in connecting and generating literary systems? In addition, the comparison of texts created and translated by the same person, offers the opportunity to gain a better understanding of language learning processes; on the cognitive differences between first language acquisition and second language learning; on the mechanism of translation applied to specific couples of languages; on the connections between literary translation and cognitive stylistics.

*Self-translation studies* (to use the terminology recently minted by Simona Anselmi)<sup>6</sup> call for a re-thinking of the general perception of bilingualism within translation and literary studies. Ever since the Romantic period, the common frame of mind has been considering monolingual speakers – and writers – as the rule. From a literary point of view, as Jan Hokenson and Marcella Munson put it in *The Bilingual Text, History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation*,

Most obviously, the keepers of the canon strenuously insisted on the linguistic purity of its foundational figures, such as Chaucer and Dante, and they routinely ignored the founders' youthful translations of foreign texts.<sup>7</sup>

In a larger context, linguistic purity and unity has been associated with a sense of belonging to a specific community. The notion of mother tongue, indeed, has been construed to have consequences on the individual and collective identity. Yasmine Yildiz in *The Monolingual Paradigm*, states that “the manufactured proximity between ‘mother’ and ‘tongue’ stages the fantasy behind the modern notion of the mother tongue: namely, that the mother tongue emanates from the mother’s body. This notion indicates that within the monolingual paradigm, ‘mother tongue’ is more

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Anselmi, *On Self-translation*.

<sup>7</sup> Jan Hokenson and Marcella Munson, *The Bilingual Text. History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2007) 1.

than a metaphor. Instead, it constitutes a *narrative* about origin and identity”.<sup>8</sup> This narrative is widely used to create reassuring boundaries and closed compartments to support our conception of ‘identity’ as a stable, unvarying, reliable entity whereby we can apprehend and eventually formulate universally valid opinions on human experience. Whereas bi- or multi-lingual writers cannot take for granted the referential function of a single language with respect to the world, as they possess more than one language and each is, thus, relativized. They are, therefore, urged to problematize their relationship to the language – and their languages in particular – as highlighted for instance by Martine Paulin in relation to francophone authors.<sup>9</sup>

For a while now, literary and translation studies, though, have shown a steady willpower to overcome or even dismantle the ‘national’ archetypes we have inherited from the Romantic thinkers and philosophers of language, such as *national language*, *national culture* and *national literature*, in order to find new paradigms – not geopolitically-bound ones – to understand the interactions among literary systems through translation. In 2002, Belgian translation scholar Theo Hermans advocated, “If the discipline of translation studies is to engage critically with its own operations and its conditions of acquiring knowledge, it needs to look beyond its own borders”.<sup>10</sup> Influential scholars of diverse disciplines are working toward a redefinition of the monolingual paradigm that first created and continually reinforced national boundaries in the global literary system. This innovative framework, exemplified by philosophers (Édouard Glissant’s *Traité du Tout Monde* for instance), literary critics (Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters*, David Damrosch *What is World Literature?*, and “World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age”, Franco Moretti’s *Conjectures on World Literature*), linguists (Louis-Jean Calvet’s *Le marché des langues*, etc.) was possibly engendered by the postcolonial drive<sup>11</sup> and is currently being fostered by the globalizing forces that, beside pervading almost every aspect of our daily life, are also mobilizing and justifying innovative branches of academic studies.

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<sup>8</sup> Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue. The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011) 12.

<sup>9</sup> Martine Paulin, « Langue maternelle et langue d’écriture », *Hommes et migrations*, 1288 (2010) DOI: 10.4000/hommesmigrations.87801. Accessed October 1<sup>st</sup> 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Theo Hermans, “Paradoxes and Aporias in Translation and Translation Studies”. In *Translation Studies: Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline*, edited by Alessandra Riccardi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 22.

<sup>11</sup> Hokenson and Munson highlight that: “many scholars in postcolonial studies today are bringing bilinguality into focus as a cultural issue, chiefly one of subalternity in diglossic conditions, although perhaps without fully appreciating the wider, historical and intellectual currents that inform literary bilinguality and the specific challenges of self-translation.” Hokenson and Munson, *The Bilingual Text*, 2.

Current *Translation studies* make no exception, since these new tendencies put into question the broader systems in which translation operates. Indeed, the easier, faster, more frequent meeting of individuals who have lived in different cultures – often in situations of conflict – makes it impellent for scholars to reflect on *the conditions of the dialogue and communication* between individuals, groups and cultural systems.<sup>12</sup> The study of literature as a global system and of literary translation is, it goes without saying, only one small piece of the more general picture and one among many others calling for (re)consideration. Still, literature is a significant aspect of what we usually define the ‘culture’ of a certain human group. Romantic sensibility suggested Western scholars to consider languages and cultures as unitary elements, or as sorts of organisms, with precise boundaries delimiting their existence in time and space. In this vision, the act of literary creation could only be carried out through the mother tongue, as the sole instrument enabling the expression of the inmost soul of the individual.

Thus, two main needs seem to ensue from this globalizing evolution: the first is the need to question and redefine the ‘monolingual paradigm’ that we have for so long taken for granted, even though it was never the case before Romanticism. According to Yildiz, “Since the 1990s, literary and cultural studies have begun in earnest *to note multilingualism* both in the present and in the past. Because of the amnesia about multilingualism, the first step has been to re-establish *its existence as a widespread phenomenon*.”<sup>13</sup> With the words of the Argentine-Chilean bilingual writer and self-translator Ariel Dorfman: “Just as there are institutions that compel us toward the defence and adoption of only one language for our identities under siege, there are also equally strong forces in the world today that are pushing us toward *multilingualism as a real alternative*.”<sup>14</sup>

The second need is to investigate the actual role and weight of translation in the creation and circulation of knowledge, information, cultural and literary material. Prominent examples of this tendency are Itamar Even-Zohar’s development of the Polysystem Theory,<sup>15</sup> and David Damrosch’s works on *world literature*, where the latter is indeed defined as “not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works, but rather *a mode of circulation and of reading*”.<sup>16</sup> In his article “Translation and the National Literature”, Damrosch maintains, “Influential translations have regularly played a major role at the heart of national traditions, in many ways achieving a presence almost indistinguishable from the home-grown works. We will gain a better sense of the real

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Yildiz, *Introduction to Beyond the Mother Tongue*.

<sup>13</sup> Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 15. Emphasis mine.

<sup>14</sup> Ariel Dorfman, “The Wandering Bigamist of Language” in *Lives in Translation Bilingual Writers on Identity and Creativity*, edited by Isabelle De Courtivron (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Itamar Even-Zohar, “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem”, in *Poetics Today* 11:1 (1990) 45-51.

<sup>16</sup> David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 5.

shape of national literatures if we think of them less in terms of national languages than of national markets”.<sup>17</sup> In the *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Dirk Delabastita argues that, “translation is not merely something that happens ‘after’ literature and as an extension of it. In many cases it is also present ‘within’ the literary text as a component of the story content and perhaps even as a central theme”.<sup>18</sup> Translation as a content and a medium of the literary is thus gaining space in the academic debate.

In this favourable framework, the study of literary self-translation – recently configured by Paola Puccini as being “forcibly of a multidisciplinary nature”<sup>19</sup> because it involves bilingualism/biculturalism, translation and literature – helps us investigate each of these components and the connections among them. Its asset lays mainly in the fact that the self-translating author is first of all a bi-/multi-lingual speaker, using his competence to work – not in-between – but *within two linguistic and cultural systems* and constantly producing and translating literary and cultural material from one system to the other, possibly transferring lexical or syntactical stylemes from the first language to the second, from the learned to the acquired tongue or viceversa, thus creating a powerful – albeit yet possibly disregarded – connection between them:

En plus de constituer un exercice passionnant sur le plan textuel, on voit que l'autotraduction représente aussi un défi, non seulement pour les individus concernés, mais aussi plus largement pour les champs littéraires entre lesquels ceux-ci essaient de naviguer, champs qui entretiennent des rapports de force dont il n'est pas possible de ne pas tenir compte. L'autotraduction sert de baromètre pour mesurer la fréquence et l'intensité de ces rapports.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the multidisciplinary approach invoked by Puccini is not constrained in the ‘self-translation field’ itself but can open up – as Grutman seems to suggest – to shed light on yet shadowy mechanisms interconnecting literary systems among them and on the mutual influence of languages and this seems increasingly important in a digital, multilingual, globalized age as the one we are experiencing. The phenomenon of literary self-translation has possibly existed since the dawning of writing, but in the Twentieth century, it showed an “amazing outbreak”:

Cela s'explique par le fait que la pratique autotraductive s'insère dans des problématiques qui traversent le siècle et pour des événements historiques majeurs, comme la décolonisation la fuite des régimes totalitaires et les migrations. Dans la traversée des

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<sup>17</sup> David Damrosch, "Translation and National Literature" in *A Companion to Translation Studies* edited by Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Dirk Delabastita, “Literary Translation” in *Handbook of Translation Studies. Volume 2*, edited by Yves Gambier and Luc Van Doorslaer (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Paola Puccini, “Avant-propos. Pour une cartographie de l'autotraduction” in *Interfrancophonies 6* edited by Puccini Paola, (2015) I. DOI: 10.17457/IF6\_2015/PUC1. Translation is mine.

<sup>20</sup> Rainier Grutman, “Francophonie et autotraduction” in *Interfrancophonies 6* edited by Paola Puccini (2015) 18. DOI: 10.17457/IF6\_2015/GRU

réalités linguistiques et culturelles différentes, s'active souvent une quête identitaire qui est à l'origine du parcours de l'autotraducteur.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, many of the writers who experience (literary) bilingualism and self-translation produced a quantity of paratextual reflections on this activity and even, rather commonly, *linguistic memoirs*<sup>22</sup>, where the considerations on language, culture and their peculiar relationship to them are central. These texts display the semantic fields of belonging, family, loyalty and betrayal and, most significantly, *identity*, – i.e., the symbolic power human beings usually attribute to some of the traits that characterize their daily life – the language(s) we communicate in being one of the most powerfully charged of symbolic meanings. In the study of self-translation, these documents are rich sources for increasingly multidisciplinary perspectives.

In this first introductory chapter, I will try to outline the progression of the academic studies in this field, with an eye to the directions that have been taken so far and that will serve to introduce my specific case study. This introduction does not aspire to be comprehensive of all the complex aspects of self-translation. It will be a brief, but hopefully as heuristic as possible, overview of self-translation, in the effort to outline all the issues at stake: the epistemological observation on the process and its outcome; the different typologies of self-translated texts; the width of the phenomenon; its history through various literary systems; the identitarian dimension of the authors involved in this practice, the linguistic inter-exchange between the languages involved and, finally, its theoretic aporias.

In the following chapter, I will proceed to illustrate the case study, focused on the contemporary bilingual author and self-translator Nancy Huston. A biographical and bibliographical profile will help to investigate her literary history and motivations for self-translating, which are explored in Chapter III. A consistent part of the thesis will then be devoted to the presentation and analysis of translating strategies adopted over four different self-translated novels, through a close reading of textual samples, that were considered meaningful to exemplify the evolution of this practice within Nancy

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<sup>21</sup> Puccini, “Avant-propos. Pour une cartographie de l'autotraduction”, II.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Nancy Huston's *Losing North* (Toronto: McArthur & Co., 2002)/*Nord Perdu* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1999) and *Lettres Parisiennes* (with Leïla Sebbar. Paris: J'ai lu, 1987), Julien Green's *Le langage et son double* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), as well as the edited volumes such as Karen Ogulnick's *Language Crossings: Negotiating the Self in a Multicultural World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Mary Besemeres's *Translating One's Self: Language and Selfhood in Cross-cultural Autobiography* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002); Isabelle de Courtivron's *Lives in Translation: Bilingual Writers on Language and Creativity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Steven G. Kellman's *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on their Craft* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003); Wendy Lesser's *The Genius of Language: Fifteen Writers Reflect on Their Mother Tongues* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004); Mary Besemeres and Anna Wierzbicka's *Translating Lives: Living with Two Languages and Cultures* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland, 2007).

Huston's *œuvre* from her first self-translated text – *Plainsong/Cantique des plaines* – to one of her most recent publications – *Danse noire/Black Dance*.

The heuristic approach aims at shedding light on the relations between the author's self-representation in her literary corpus and the practice of transferring her creations from one language to the other, showing how Huston's *aesthetic of redoublement* is shaped not only by lifestyle choices as well as by genre and stylistic choices.

## 1.2 Self-translation in Theory

L'auto-traduction est un domaine obéissant à une logique propre qui tient à son auctorialité et qui est aussi le lieu privilégié où apparaissent avec le plus d'acuité les problèmes liés au bilinguisme d'écriture. Elle est éminemment à la fois traduction et écriture, si bien qu'il ne faudrait pas la réduire à l'écriture seule (en la rangeant dans le champ de la recreation) comme on a tendance à le faire trop souvent.<sup>23</sup>

Michaël Oustinoff

Self-translation, the specific ways in which bilinguals rewrite a text in the second language and adapt it to a different sign system laden with its own literary and philosophical traditions, escapes the categories of text theory, for the text is twinned.<sup>24</sup>

Jan Hokenson and Marcella Munson

In an essay contained in the collection *Autotraduzione e riscrittura*, Laura Salmon<sup>25</sup> provides a deep epistemological analysis of the act and outcome of self-translation. Research on translation, according to Salmon, has been carried out in two “separate and autarchic fields”, i.e., linguistic studies and literary studies.<sup>26</sup> The latter tend to use “non-discrete” lexemes such as “fidelity”, “freedom”, “literarity” and “inspiration” and this un-discreteness naturally clashes with the scientific approach of linguistic studies. Moreover, while the literates generally focus on historical and descriptive research on the *text* (taking into consideration the interaction between language, culture, society, canon and tradition), the linguists (and psico- and neuro-linguists) provide, rather, a cognitive approach to the *process*. Thus, always according to Salmon, a certain incommunicability between the two ‘autarchic approaches’ is made worse by the fact that some basic lexemes, such as the very term ‘translation’, identify two separate meanings: in the specific case, the mental process and the text resulting from it. Naturally, the compound ‘self-translation’ suffers the same fate. The discussion in this field would benefit from a ‘scientific’ definition of the concepts at stake; not necessarily an objective definition – the variables are too numerous to achieve such a thing –, but

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<sup>23</sup> Michaël Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d'écriture et auto-traduction. Julien Green, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2001) 57.

<sup>24</sup> Hokenson and Munson, *The Bilingual Text*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Author also of *Teoria della traduzione: storia, scienza, professione* (2003) and *Bilinguismo e traduzione: dalla neurolinguistica alla didattica delle lingue* (2008 and 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Laura Salmon, “Il processo autotraduttivo: definizioni e concetti in chiave epistemologico-cognitiva”, in *Autotraduzione e riscrittura* edited by Andrea Ceccherelli, Gabriella Elina Imposti e Monica Perotto (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2013), 77. Translation is mine.



at least a *shared* definitions of the *terms and criteria* that enable us to study the phenomenon.<sup>27</sup>

A self-translated text, then, is a text that does not owe its genesis to ‘the blank space of the page’, but is engendered by the close reading and subjective interpretation of another text – written in another language – which, as a mould, shapes the form and content of the second text. Thus, according to Salmon, self-translating means to compose a text “*ex novo*, but not *ex nihilo*”,<sup>28</sup> i.e., to make a text anew, but not out of scratch. When it has taken shape in such a way, it can be labelled a ‘translation’, even though the variations occurring between it and the ‘original’ can be so numerous that writers may decide to categorize it as a ‘translation proper’, *equivalent* – to any personally judged extent – to the original; or a ‘rewriting’, only very partially superposable to the original...or whatever mixture falls between these extremes.

In “L’Autotraduction en tant que traduction”<sup>29</sup> [i.e., Self-translation as Translation], translation scholar Helena Tanqueiro analyses the features that enable us to consider self-translation along the same line as ‘orthodox’<sup>30</sup> translation, and states that this process requires a bilingual and bicultural translator who possesses the competence usually attributed to a ‘normal’ translator. It is performed on an original work whose diegetic universe is ‘fully determined’ and takes three steps to be accomplished: the reading and interpretation of the text; the selection of translative strategies; and the actual act of writing in a second language. Furthermore, it implies a redefinition of the author/readers collaboration and finally, it is influenced – like any other translation – by extra-textual, pragmatic factors (e.g., deadlines).

Apart from these aspects that seem to align self-translation to the same level of other kinds of ‘orthodox’ translation, there are some extremely relevant characteristics that make it stand out. In her article “Redefining Translation through Self-Translation,” Caroline Shread underlines that:

Despite the considerable impact of poststructuralist thought in the field of literary criticism, theoretical conceptions of translation remain constrained within traditional models in which the author’s sovereignty and creative originality enshrined in the original text are never attainable by the secondary, subservient imitation, reflection, or refraction that is translation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Salmon, “Il processo autotraduttivo”, 77 and following.

<sup>28</sup> *Idem*, 80.

<sup>29</sup> Helena Tanqueiro, “L’Autotraduction en tant que traduction” in *Quaderns: revista de traduccio*, 16 (2009).

<sup>30</sup> The term is used here to define a translation done by someone different from the author of the original version.

<sup>31</sup> Caroline Shread, “Redefining Translation through Self-Translation” in *FLS XXXVI* (2009): 53. (Emphasis mine).

In the case of self-translation, though, what is usually considered a ‘secondary’ or even ‘degenerative’ process, generating a ‘derivative’ result (a translation),<sup>32</sup> has been theorized instead as a *creative expansion of literary creation*. In fact, such positive attribution is justified by the peculiar nature of this practice, combining creative writing and orthodox translation, by virtue of the translator’s special authority. A self-translated text, in fact, cannot be conceived of as a translation *among others*, those that generally grow ‘old’ with the passing of time, by virtue of the fact that it is carried out and signed by the Author itself.

For Michaël Oustinoff, – author of the ground-breaking study *Bilinguisme d’écriture et auto- traduction. Julien Green, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov* – creative writing and translation are two poles opposed by a “*dichotomie primitive*”,<sup>33</sup> an archetypical dichotomy. The choice of the term dichotomy seems to exclude any hope of conciliation between these two concepts. Nonetheless, Shread’s hope is that “by forcing us to reconsider some basic assumptions, *a close analysis and bold reading of self-translation have the power to redefine our concept of translation*”,<sup>34</sup> on condition that scholars abandon the idea of translation as a minor practice, subservient to the author’s ‘*sovereignty and creative originality*’, to concentrate on and promote its positive, ‘generative’ potential.<sup>35</sup>

The essays by Helena Tanqueiro and Carolyn Shread show that, when facing the growing corpus on literary self-translation, scholars are being confronted with two opposite perspectives. On the one hand, there are scholars who stress the ‘positive’ value of self-translation and the possibility to undermine, through it, traditional categories and assumptions usually taken for granted in analysing translation *tout court*. The underlying implication is a hierarchy between that two acts exists, and that such hierarchy needs to be subverted. On the other hand, at the opposite end of the range, other scholars completely assimilate self-translation to standard translation in order to exploit long-standing categories and existing research frameworks to analyse its products. In-between these two extreme positions, theoretical issues on which critics give varying opinions and definitions continually resurface and need to be tackled. As Salmon points out, until shared definitions of the basic terms and concepts are established, the discussion remains open. In the following paragraphs, I will try to

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<sup>32</sup> Translation is still regarded as “a lesser art, an invisible craft” points out Lawrence Venuti in *Introduction to The Translator. Special Issue: Translation and Minority*. Volume 4, number 2 (1998): 135.

<sup>33</sup> Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d’écriture et auto-traduction*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Shread, “Redefining Translation through Self-Translation”, 54.

<sup>35</sup> In the same article, Shread declares the affinity of her ideas with Jacques Derrida’s view of translation placing the survival of the text before the long-standing concern for the communication of meaning.

outline the sorts of theoretical questions we are faced with when dealing with literary self-translation's critiques.

### 1.2.1 Author, Translator and Text

The first questions which arise inevitably when broaching self-translation refer to the initial part of this split word, the *self-*, i.e., the author of the translation. Dilemmas arise as to the status of the author in relation to its texts, such as, for instance: how does the notion of authority act on the process and on the result of translation? Is the self-translating author tied down to the 'original' text as a 'standard' or 'orthodox' translator? The writing of an author should be considered a creative rewriting rather than a 'translation'? The process leading to the creation of the two texts seem to matter immensely for establishing adequate definitions. For instance, is the first text completed and published before the beginning of the self-translation process, or does the author write his text part in the first language, part in the second language and then fills in the gaps? If so, a punctual discussion on what 'bilingual writing' means would be needed to reach some shared notions.

Helena Tanqueiro, who focuses on the figure of the author/translator to tackle the issue, defines the self-translator a 'privileged translator'.<sup>36</sup> First of all, because, as mentioned above, the translated text is read by the general public as an 'original' work, given that the name of the translator is rarely mentioned. But mainly because the translator has full *authority* to improve his second version with respect to the first one and to find translative solutions which would perhaps be considered inappropriate if adopted by a standard translator. In the light of Salmon's epistemological reading of the phenomenon, though, such definitions are based on scarcely scientific preconceptions, i.e. specifically, that "a person who affirms to be bilingual is actually bilingual"; "writers are better translators even if they do not know to perfection the language they translate into;" "writers who affirm to know well the language they translate into are reliable translators;" "translating requires or implies the knowledge of the author's intention;" "the author knows his/her intention when he/she writes;" "self-translators are synonyms of 'fidelity';" "at the same time self-translators are exempt from obligations of fidelity to the 'original' text".<sup>37</sup> Also, textual analyses on specific cases have shown that in general self-translators do not abuse of this supposed 'privileged authority' and tend to respect the diegetic universe they created previously,

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<sup>36</sup> Tanqueiro, « L'Autotraduction en tant que traduction », 107-122.

<sup>37</sup> Salmon, "Il processo autotraduttivo", 91.

so that the modifications the texts undergo are usually of linguistic/cultural domestication. Tanqueiro's definition should then be checked for applicability case by case and can hardly be considered valid for each and every self-translating author.

Salmon's epistemology notwithstanding, it seems common sense to believe that, since the person providing these two versions is *the same*, their agency engenders meaningful consequences on the translated text, whose *secondary, derivative* (and hence, defective) nature seems to be nullified by virtue of the special authority unconsciously attributed to its 'producer', a quality which distinguishes it from any other third-language translator. See, for instance, Julio César Santoyo – one of the first historians of self-translation – stating “la autora ha hecho uso en ellas de *la libertad que le da su auctoritas* para modificar puntualmente las equivalencias, algo que *no le estaria permitido a un traductor ajeno*.”[the author made use here of that liberty given by her *auctoritas*, to punctually modify equivalences, something that would not be allowed to an alien translator].<sup>38</sup>

The identity of author and translator – “à la fois ‘à la source’ du texte et l’artisan du cible” [at the source of the text and artisan of the target text] in the words of Christian Lagarde<sup>39</sup> – inextricably binds the two texts into not so much *a single linguistic event as a double-sided one*. The identity of the two roles – author, translator – is evidently the primary justification for the attention devoted to self-translation, but the discourse on the authority of these two agents will probably not lead to further information on the nature of these translations. The feelings of authors towards their own *authority* and the latitude of freedom this allegedly bestows on them are as many and diverse as the authors themselves. Some take advantage of such ‘freedom’, as is the case with Antjie Krog who states: “The moment I translate my own poem, I feel *no loyalty to the old text*, because it existed, it was there, it was leading its own life, but my loyalty, my skill and creativity are directed to the new text, the new process and the new life of this poem”.<sup>40</sup> Others renounce to it completely.

If the focus shifts from the definition of the agency of the author/translator to the *presentation* (by its author/translator) and *reception* (by the public/the critic) of the text, we see that the final products ensuing from the self-translating process are two texts that can be considered either a form of bilingual writing (when the two texts are published simultaneously), or one the translation of the other (if one is published after the other), and all this ultimately depends on how the author and the editors choose to

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<sup>38</sup> Santoyo, “Autotraducciones: ensayo de tipología”, 211.

<sup>39</sup> Lagarde, “De l’individu au global”, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Antjie Krog, “In the Name of the Other. Poetry in Self-translation.” Conference communication at Literarischen Colloquium “Wie es ist, sich selbst zu übersetzen”. Berlin, 2008. URL <http://www.litnet.co.za/in-the-name-of-the-other-poetry-in-self-translation/>. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

specify the nature of the text in its paratextual elements. Indeed, any text *received* as a translation by the reading public and, among them, by the critics, is a translation. Also, any text presented by its author as a translation is considered a translation, albeit strict lexical, syntactical and structural comparisons could belie this definition. Rather than telling something about the actual genesis and form of the text, the way the text is presented to the public by the authors/self-translators tells something about the *symbolic value* ‘translation’ and ‘recreation’ has for them. If they describe their endeavour as a translation, they implicitly attribute to this practice a value comparable to that of creative rewriting in terms of effort and ability. On the other hand, if they prefer to call it a recreation, a rewriting, a transposition (etc.), it is presumably because they esteem the term ‘translation’ to be depreciating of the work and effort they have put into this second version of their text. Text bottom-up linguistic analysis of any ‘double-sided text’ will in all likelihood reveal that certain fragments are unproblematically categorized as ‘simple translation’ (if such a thing can actually be argued to exist), whereas other fragments necessitate of other definitions, such as *rewriting, transformation, adaptation, transaction, transcreation*<sup>41</sup>...and provide the widest variety of cases mixing these two possibilities in different proportions. Trying to find a paradigm valid for all self-translators would be unfruitful, since each experience is unique and, as Grutman rightly points out,

En examinant une série de cas concrets, on trouverait peut-être autant d’autotraducteurs qui collent littéralement à leur texte que d’écrivains qui s’en servent comme d’un tremplin, pour se réécrire. [Examining concrete study cases, one would probably find just as many self-translators literally sticking to their text as others who use it as a springboard to rewrite it].<sup>42</sup>

On the linguistic level, the distinction between *translation* and *recreation* ultimately turns out to be a false problem. This distinction assumes some relevance if it is taken into consideration on a literary level, where it deals with the prestige historically attributed – in the Modern Age – to ‘original work’ and translation.

But as for the text in itself, given that author and translator are the same person, how do we categorize the two versions? How do they stand to each other? Is there an ‘original’ and a ‘translation’? If the author is not taken into consideration, this distinction is quite simply irrelevant: a text is a text and the label we attach to it says little or nothing at all of its form and content. The superimposed definition is not relevant to the analysis of the text in itself. Other characteristics are important in that

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<sup>41</sup> Raymond Federman says of his work “I am immediately tempted to write (rewrite, adapt, transform, transact, transcreate – I am not sure of what term I should use here, *but certainly not translate*) the original into the other language.” in Raymond Federman, “A Voice Within A Voice: Federman Translating/Translating Federman”, in *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*, (New York: State University of New York, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> Rainier Grutman, “L’autotraduction: dilemme social et entre-deux textuel” in *Atelier de traduction* 7 (2007): 198.

case, and they are inherent to it: cohesion, coherence, comprehensibility... The superimposed definitions start to be relevant when that particular text is put in relation to other texts: a translation vs. its original text, a creation in intertextual relation with other texts in that same language, in a historical context, etc. The self-translating process is often not declared in the paratextual elements of the printed book so that, for readers and critics alike, it is difficult to establish with certainty which version was written first and which was translated. Sometimes, the first version is completed before beginning the translation into a second language and this process is undertaken as if it needed the same requirements of an 'orthodox' translation. In other cases, instead, the self-translating process is simultaneous to the act of creation: the text is written alternatively in two languages and then the gaps for each version are filled in a subsequent moment.<sup>43</sup> Grutman, resuming the findings of Brian T. Fitch and Michaël Oustinoff, points out that "cette sorte de *pollinisation croisée* crée entre les deux versions un lien dynamique dont ne rendent effectivement pas compte les termes 'original' et 'traduction'" [This sort of *crossed pollination* establishes a dynamic relation between the two texts, for which the terms 'original' and 'translation' cannot account].<sup>44</sup>

To overcome these false categorical impasses, critics have started to name the two 'linguistic events' not with the traditional dichotomy 'original text' vs. 'translation', but with the labels '*first version*' and '*second version*'. Grutman departs from this neutral definitions in claiming that "the author's authority is transferred metonymically to the final product, which thus becomes a *second original*"<sup>45</sup> or, as defined by Jan Hokenson and Marcella Munson with another oxymoron, "a new original". Regardless of these more or less original tags, from a practical point of view, the obstacles constituted by the linguistic and cultural transfer into a second language are the same for self-translators as those encountered by any ordinary translator. As Simona Anselmi states, "self-translators, rather than enjoying the same freedom as original writing, are subject to the same translational constraints as normal translations, that is, constraints imposed by the new communicative function of the translation, its changed target language and culture and the translations strategies demanded by the re-contextualizing process".<sup>46</sup> Therefore, this theoretical *privilege* turns out to be rather illusory, because the supposedly *better* understanding of the initial intention, if anything, makes it harder for the author to negotiate a transfer into a second language, being aware of the losses it inevitably entails. These observations on the problems

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<sup>43</sup> As in the case of Nancy Huston's *Instruments des ténèbres/Instruments of Darkness*. Arles: Actes Sud, 1996 and Toronto: McArthur & Co., 1997.

<sup>44</sup> Grutman, "L'autotraduction: dilemme social et entre-deux textuel", 199.

<sup>45</sup> Rainier Grutman and Trish Van Bolderen, "Self-translation", in *A Companion to Translation Studies* edited by Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (Chichester: Wiley– Blackwell, 2014), 324.

<sup>46</sup> Anselmi, *On Self-translation*, 29.

posed by the search for a scientific definition of self-translation once again point out that translation is, most of the time, a ‘violent’ operation: the translator splits words from the concept they supposedly convey and finds substitutes to express that idea, or the most similar idea s/he could manage. If the marriage between signifier and signified is clearer to the eyes of the author who created it in the first place, then the operation for finding a valid substitute must be even more complex and, for some of them, also painful.

Also, even if we theoretically granted the self-translator such privilege in *action*, s/he could not be granted it in *perception*; to the eyes of the public, in fact, the undeclared self-translation may be even more invisible than standard translation, unless the author decided to comment on it in paratextual elements. Instead of revealing the generative potential of the translating process through self-translation – as Shread advocates – the difficult process of linguistic and cultural transfer simply risks to disappear from the scene.

So the focus should go back to the person behind this operation. On a different level of inquiry, there are also additional factors that derive from this *identity* – in the literal sense – and constitute a primary subject explored in this translational subfield. It is not uncommon for self-translators to take inspiration from their practice to produce literary reflections on language, bilingualism and translation, and their personal relations to such concepts. Other writers play with their ‘double identity’, as pointed out by Grutman in the entry “Self-translation” (in *A Companion to Translation Studies*), where he states that although “the authors of both versions are *the same physical person*”, quite often “the self-translating persona appears later on in a writer’s career (Vladimir Nabokov being one of many examples), and some bilingual writers even choose to differentiate between their respective *personae* in each language (think of Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen in Denmark, Jean Ray/John Flanders in Belgium, of Julien/Julian Green in France).” This subtle difference is rarely taken into account in critical studies, for the tendency is to ascribe every ‘written product’ to what Michel Foucault names ‘author-function’.<sup>47</sup> However, even when authors do not particularly emphasize these aspects in their self-representation, the two linguistic versions they produce are enough to arouse questions as to the cultural transfer they embody.

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<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ed. and Trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977).

### 1.2.2 Reconsidering Traditional Categories and Binary Oppositions

Self-translation could be a fertile ground for text-theory discussions, because this superposition of roles and functions (author/translator, original/translation) forces us to pause upon and possibly reconsider our way of reasoning in terms of binary oppositions. The traditional categorical subordination of translation to literary creation, in fact, derives directly from a conception of the ‘original’ as a finished, complete product, endowed, to the eyes of the potential translator with a faultless fulfilment and self-sufficiency unattainable by any other text aimed at doubling it. Accordingly, translation would be something that exceeds the ‘original’, that comes *after* it and from the outside and is thus not necessary for the comprehension of the ‘original’ text. Whence the secondary, derivative reputation of translation mentioned above and the consequent search for equivalence and visibility on the part of translation and translation critics.

The notion of translation based on the equivalence of Text 2 to Text 1 has long been put into question by deconstructionists, such as Jacques Derrida (who deconstructed the notion of ‘origin’ and considered meaning to be inside the text, not ‘above it’ or ‘beyond it’) and by *Skopos* theorists (who focused on the function of the text in a given historical, linguistic and cultural context). Descriptionist translation scholars such as Mary Snell-Hornby and André Lefevere also advocated the abandonment of concepts such as *equivalence* and *faithfulness*, in order to pave the way for a translation seen as the mediated creation of a new text, which encompasses far more than an equivalence in meaning transposed from language 1 to language 2. These famous antecedents, though, never focused on self-translation as a category that might reinforce their arguments.

Definitions of an oxymoric nature as Grutman’s “second original” and Hokenson and Munson’s “new original” are functional on condition that the categories of ‘original’ and ‘translation’ are subverted. In fact, if the ‘first text’ is deprived of its epistemological independence, i.e., if it is no longer considered a finished, complete, independent entity, then also our notion of (its) translation will change accordingly. In fact, the notion of ‘original’ comes into being only within the binary opposition to ‘translation’. Only when we try to translate it, we can conceive of it as of the ‘original’ text; in other words, *it is translation that allows originals to exist*.

An opinion worth considering, at this point, is that of self-translators themselves. French American postmodern author and self-translator Raymond Federman, for instance, places the authorial translation on the same line of continuity of the creative writing act:

The original creative act (whether in French or in English) always proceeds in the dark... and in ignorance and error. Though the act of translating, and especially of self-translating, is also a creative act, it is performed in the light (in the light of the existing original text), it



is performed in knowledge (in the knowledge of the existing text), and therefore it is performed without error -at least at the start. In other words, the translation of a text reassures, reasserts knowledge, the knowledge already present in the original text. But perhaps it also corrects the initial errors of that text. As a result, the translation is no longer...an approximation of the original, or a duplication, or a substitute, but a continuation of the work, of the workings of the text.<sup>48</sup>

Authors who embark in self-translation, in fact, choose to be confronted with the unstable, fluid nature of what s/he has written. The process of interpretation is not left to others, i.e. to readers or to 'standard' translators. Instead, after having experienced the freedom of the white page, the liberty of creating a 'diegetic universe' from anew, – to use Tanqueiro's words and presuming that such a thing really exists – self-translators put some distance between themselves and their creation – through language – and need to interpret them; they are confronted with their own text as an alterity, to de-code it and re-code it into a different language/culture. The long-standing notions of *faithfulness* and *equivalence* in translation utterly lose their validity once we no longer regard the first text as an 'original' and a 'finished entity'. With Caroline Shread's words, if we consider "this extension of the 'original' [...]" not as a lack of faithfulness, but instead as an indication of the *indeterminate nature of the source text*, then the process and goals of translation appear in a different light.<sup>49</sup> Translation ensures a life to the text that goes beyond its first 'version', through the creations of a 'second original', which is the forefather of all the other differently 'original' texts that will come afterwards, in translations provided by third parties. The self-translator is thus multiplying its text, at least doubling its chances to be translated into other languages. The potential of self-translation with regard to our conception of translation in general is that, theoretically, this translating experience can be thought of as additional to that of 'ordinary' authors who 'limit' themselves to translating concepts and images into a coherent and cohesive text in a single language.

The identification between the act of writing and the act of translating has been envisioned long ago by celebrated authors such as poet Charles Baudelaire, who wondered "Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un poète (je prends le mot dans son acception la plus large), si ce n'est un traducteur, un déchiffreur?" [What is a poet, – in the broadest sense of the word – if not a translator, a decipherer?],<sup>50</sup> and novelist Marcel Proust who stated that "Les devoirs et les taches d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur" [The duty and tasks of a writer are the same as a translator's].<sup>51</sup> Both invested the term with an ideal, almost prophetic aura and intended translation not as an interlinguistic transposition, but as the connector between the platonic world of ideas and the

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<sup>48</sup> Federman, *Critifiction*, 81.

<sup>49</sup> Shread, "Redefining Translation through Self-Translation", 63– 64.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Baudelaire, "Réflexions sur quelques-uns des mes contemporains. Victor Hugo" in *Oeuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire. Volume III, L'Art romantique* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), 317.

<sup>51</sup> Marcel Proust, *Le temps retrouvé. Volume II*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1927), 41.

material world of literature. However, the identity proclaimed by Baudelaire and Proust is advocated also – and this is closer to the present reflection – by George Steiner and by Octavio Paz for the products of these processes, the original text and the translation:

No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation, first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase. However, the inverse of this reasoning is entirely valid. All texts are originals because each translation has its own distinctive character. Up to a point, each translation is a creation and thus constitutes a unique text.<sup>52</sup>

Following these intuitions and the research of deconstructionists and descriptivist theorists, nowadays – states Simona Anselmi – “new approaches within translation studies are further investigating the creative element in translation and re-affirming translation as a mode of writing [...] recognizing the presence of the translator’s agency and subjectivity”,<sup>53</sup> thus working to redefine the hierarchical relation between the ‘original’ and the ‘translation’.

Translation is *per se* an hybrid practice, generated by a tension between constraints and creativity.<sup>54</sup> Equally, self-translation is a hybrid form of art and highly professional craftsmanship. What remains to be considered is the two texts’ *linguistic dynamic relation*. This dynamic relation characterizing the self-translated text can possibly provide food for research on how – and to what degree – an authorial ‘voice’ or ‘style’ is transferred from a language into another and possibly help us to gain a deeper understanding of the ever-discussed notion of literary *style*.

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<sup>52</sup> Octavio Paz, “Translation, Literature and Letters” (transl. by Irene del Corral) in *Theories of Translation from Dryden to Derrida* edited by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 154.

<sup>53</sup> Anselmi, *On Self-translation*, 24.

<sup>54</sup> Jean Boase-Beier and Michael Holman, (eds.) *The Practices of Literary Translation: Constraints and Creativity* (Manchester: St Jerome, 1999).

## 1.3 Self-translation in Practice

### 1.3.1 Self-translators, these strangers.

Among modern self-translators, Samuel Beckett is, beyond doubt, the most famous, quoted and studied. Reference to his bilingual work recurs with such a disproportionate frequency that by now it seems traditional to introduce any discourse on self-translation with his name, one that is so well-known to the general reading public regardless of this particular activity of his. According to Rainier Grutman, Beckett has become “a sort of *hapax legomenon*, the most celebrated of a very small group of self-translators studied in *splendid isolation*”,<sup>55</sup> or “une sorte de comète de Halley”.<sup>56</sup>

Admittedly, Beckett’s work is one of the reasons why – not to say the main reason – scholars first started to be interested in self-translation and bilingual literary production, and continues to represent a reference point for countless studies.<sup>57</sup> Although his self-translating poetics has recently been highlighted as one of the most salient features of his literary production (see, for instance, the study by Sinéad Mooney, *A Tongue Not Mine: Beckett and Translation*, where bilingualism is clearly defined as the basis for Beckett’s “aesthetics of dislocation”),<sup>58</sup> for a very long time, Beckett’s *oeuvre* has been contended between Anglophone literary critics and scholars, and Francophone literary critics and scholars, as a member of ‘their’ respective national literature, thus often focusing mainly on only half of his production and letting the translated counterpart in the shadows. Moreover, his Irish origin and his relationship with the language of his native country, Gaelic, was usually completely disregarded. Nowadays, after his fame of self-translator has been long secured, scholars set out to underline his specificity in the ‘realm’ of self-translators, underlining his quasi-unique features: the fact that he self-translated the totality of his works being

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<sup>55</sup> Grutman, “A Sociological Glance at Self-translation”, 69.

<sup>56</sup> Rainier Grutman, “L’autotraduction: de la galerie de portraits à la galaxie des langues” in *Glottopol 25* edited by Christian Lagarde (2015): 15. URL: [http://glottopol.univ-rouen.fr/telecharger/numero\\_25/gpl25\\_01grutman.pdf](http://glottopol.univ-rouen.fr/telecharger/numero_25/gpl25_01grutman.pdf). Accessed January 4th, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Chronologically, one of the first ground-breaking studies, still influential today is that of Brian T. Fitch, *Beckett and Babel. An investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

<sup>58</sup> According to Mooney, “if the wealth of scholarship on Beckett’s work teaches us anything, it is just how pivotal a role Beckett plays in fostering a new mode of creating and thinking about self– translation. He shows, first and foremost, that a career– long commitment to translation can be just as central to a literary project as “original” writing” in Sinéad Mooney, *A Tongue Not Mine: Beckett and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21.

the most salient. As the vast majority of self-translators translate only part of their texts, in his article “Beckett and Beyond: Putting Self-translation in Perspective”,<sup>59</sup> Grutman advocates moving *beyond* Beckett in order to gain a wider understanding of self-translation *per se*.

Since the studies on Beckett and – in a close second – on Vladimir Nabokov have paved the way, a number of other authors have been ‘re-discovered’ as self-translators. Presently, it would be difficult to provide an ultimate, comprehensive list of the authors who have tried translating their works, whether only once or, on the opposite, have included this practice as a constant of their literary aesthetics (engaging in what Dan Miron labelled ‘integral literary bilingualism’).<sup>60</sup> The lists of self-translating writers displayed by each scholar vary according to the focus of their study, or the languages involved in translation, or the temporal span or geographical area considered, or the quantity of self-translated texts with respect to the author’s entire corpus.

For instance, in an effort to demonstrate that self-translation is not such a rare phenomenon and is thus liable to provide scholars with innovative prospects on translation ‘proper’, Grutman – in his essay “A Sociological Glance at Self-translation”<sup>61</sup> – reports a list of authors, i.e., the self-translating Nobel laureates, whose literary prestige is supposed to justify a scholarly interest. According to the Belgian scholar, their number is higher than one would suppose, given the little consideration this practice was held in until very recently. Nonetheless, the list includes Frédéric Mistral (1904, Occitan-French), Rabindranath Tagore (1913, Bengali-Hindu-English), Karl Adolph Gjellerup (1917, Danish-German), Luigi Pirandello (1934, Sicilian<sup>62</sup>-Italian), Samuel Beckett (1969, English-French), Isaac Bashevis Singer (1978, Yiddish-English), Czeslaw Milosz (1980, Polish-English) and Joseph Brodsky (1987, Russian-English).

Thus, out of the 110 Nobel prizes for Literature distributed since 1901 until the present day, more than 10% are self-translators. Self-translation has occurred in the past when the hierarchical diglossia of Latin and vernacular languages was common in the European continent. Some of the milestones of literature, authors that are usually described as the ‘fathers’ of their national literature were actually self-translators

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<sup>59</sup> Rainier Grutman, “Beckett and Beyond: Putting Self-translation in Perspective” in *Orbis Litterarum* 68/3 (2013).

<sup>60</sup> Dan Miron, *From Contiguity to Continuity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> Grutman, “A Sociological Glance at Self-translation”, 63-80.

<sup>62</sup> The UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger reports Sicilian to be among the endangered languages, with an estimate number of speakers gravitating around 5 millions including the immigrants from Sicily to different parts of the world. URL: <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php?hl=en&page=atlasmap&id=1023>. Accessed January, 22nd 2016.

writing in more than one language; as Hokenson and Munson put it “a roll-call of self-translators would summon up the stellar figures of many literatures and languages”<sup>63</sup>: Étienne Dolet, Jean Calvin, Joachim Du Bellay, and Remy Belleau in France; Thomas More, John Donne, and Andrew Marvell in Great Britain, Pietro Bembo, Carlo Goldoni, in Italy, just to name some examples. The practice still occurs nowadays in the post-colonial, globalized world, all over the five continents, with some particularly prolific areas characterized by situations of diglossia or diffused bilingualism, such as Spain, Canada, Africa, and Latin America.

For the sake of example, and in order to visualize the quantity and variety of self-translating experiences, I am listing some self-translators active in the Twentieth and Twenty-first century, stating the languages they wrote and translated into. The list bears witness that self-translation has been very common in linguistic contact zones.

The French language, as revealed by such critics as Pascale Casanova in her milestone essay *La république mondiale des lettres*,<sup>64</sup> has the symbolic power to attract not only many authors in general, but also many self-translators. Besides the great exiled authors of Irish origins, James Joyce (who dwelled into the self-translation of *Anna Livia Plurabelle* from English into Italian and French) and Samuel Beckett (English-French), others were and are active on the territory of France, such as the archy-famous Julien Green (French-English), Romain Gary (French-English), and naturally, Nancy Huston (French-English). Other yet underresearched authors who self-translate(d) are: Stefan George (French-German), Vassilis Alexakis (French-Greek), Anne Weber (French-German), Yvan Goll (German-French) Jean/Hans Arp (German-French), René Schickele (German-French), Tomi Ungerer (German-French), Héctor Bianciotti (Spanish-French), Panaït Istrati (French-Romanian), Gao Xingjian (French-Mandarin, Nobel prize in 2000), Andreï Makine (French-Russian), Josep Sebastià Pons (Catalan-French), Henri Guiter (Catalan-French). Some ‘internal self-translator translate toward Romance sister languages of French, like Frédéric Mistral (French-Provençal), René Nelli, (French-Occitan) Roland Pécout (French-Occitan), Joan-Francés Mariòt (French-Occitan), Bernard Manciet (French-Gascon), Youenn Drezen (French-Breton), Pierre-Jakez Hélias (French-Breton). In near-by Belgium there are a number of self-translators working with the official languages of the country, such as Roger Avermaete (French-Dutch), Marnix Gijzen (French-Dutch), Johan Daisne, (French-Dutch) Éric de Kuyper (French-Dutch), Paul Pourveur (French-Dutch); and Michel Seuphor (pseudonym for Fernand Berckelaers; French-Flemish), Jean Ray/John Flanders, (pseudonym for Raymond De Kremer; French-Flemish) and Camille Melloy (French-Flemish). Pierre Lepori, who self-translates in French and Italian, lives in Switzerland.

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<sup>63</sup> Hokenson and Munson, *The Bilingual Text*, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Pascale Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

In French-speaking ex-colonies, self-translation is a common enough phenomenon that might, from case to case, be charged with political undertones. In Maghreb, there are the Moroccan Abdellatif Laâbi (Arabic-French) and Mohamed Serghini (Arabic-French), the Tunisian Jalila Baccar (Arabic-French), the Algerian Rachid Boudjedra (Arabic-French), Waciny Laredj (Arabic-French) and Slimane Benaïssa (Arabic-French). In Madagascar, we find Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo (French-Malagasy), and in Rwanda Alexis Kagame (French-Kinyarwanda). Other arabophone authors translating their works into English are the Palestinian Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (Arabic-English), and the Moroccan Leila Abouzeid (Arabic-English).

In Canada, diglossia is a fertile ground for the phenomenon of self-translation between French and English, one which involves Nicole Brossard, Lucie Lequin, Louise Dupré, Barbara Godard, Mary Jean Green, Barbara Havercroft, Helen Hoy, Linda Hutcheon, and Lori Saint-Martin, Alejandro Saravia, Marc Prescott, Daniel Gagnon, Gabrielle Roy, Paul Savoie, Madeleine Blais-Dahlem, Raoul Granger. There are also self-translators who work with one of the official languages and another foreign language, like Dorê Michelut (English-Italian-Furlan), Marco Micone (French-Italian) and Antonio D'Alfonso (French-Italian).

English is possibly the second most represented language in literary self-translation. Besides the hyperfamous self-translators quoted above, to whom we should add Raymond Federman (English-French), there are authors such as Karen Blixen (Danish-English) and Palos Karnezis (English-Greek). A peculiar flourishing of self-translation is evident in post-colonial settings: in South Africa we find Andre Brink (Afrikaans-English), Elsa Joubert (Afrikaans-English), Uys Krige (Afrikaans-English), Breyten Breytenbach (Afrikaans-English), Jan Rabie (Afrikaans-English), Antjie Krog (Afrikaans-English), Mark Behr (Afrikaans-English), Dalene Matthee (Afrikaans-English), Marlene Van Niekerk (Afrikaans-English); in Kenya, there is the very famous Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Gikuyu-English).

Some self-translators using English as one of their languages are from the middle and extreme East, such as Eileen Chang (Chinese-English), Dung Kai Cheung (Chinese-English), Rabindranath Tagore (Bangla-English), Girish Karnad (Kannada-English) and Qurratulain Hyder (Urdu-English).

The Spanish language is also very well-represented in the panorama of self-translation. It is the official language in Spain where many authors are bilingual and also speak one of the numerous Romance co-official languages of the region, such as Bernardo Atxaga (Spanish-Basque), Mariasun Landa (Spanish-Basque), Ramón Saizarbitoria (Spanish-Basque), Carme Riera (Spanish-Catalan), Sebastia Juan Arbó (Spanish-Catalan), Josep Palau i Fabre (Spanish-Catalan), Juan Marsé Carbó (Spanish-Catalan; Cervantes Prize in 2008), Álvaro Cunqueiro (Spanish-Galician) and Manuel Rivas (Spanish-Galician).

Spanish and English ‘meet’ in the works of South-American bilingual authors and self-translators such as the Argentinian Manuel Puig, the Brazilian Ana Maria Machado and João Ubaldo Ribeiro, the Chilean Ariel Dorfman Vicente Huidobro and María Luisa Bombal. In the region of the Caribbeans, let us remember here the Cuban Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, Ruth Behar and Teresa Bevin; and the Puertorican Rosario Ferré, Esmeralda Santiago, Miguel Algarín and Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes. In the northern part of the continent, then, we find the Mexican Roberta Fernández, Sabine R. Ulibarrí, Jorge H. Aigla, María Amparo Escandón, and Miguel Gonzales-Gerth, while Rolando Hinojosa-Smith (Spanish-English), Felix Pollak (English-German), Lin Yutang (Chinese-English) Alberto Ferras (Spanish-English), Andrés Berger-Kiss (Spanish-English, Hungarian origin), and Miroslav Penkov (English-Bulgarian) live and write in the U.S.A.

There are then more ‘curious’ cases of language mixture such as the writer Tawada Yoko who lives in Germany and self-translated once between German and Japanese; or Theodor Kallifatides, who lives in Sweden and self-translates in Greek and Swedish.

Among the Italian authors who have given a go at self-translation there are Giuseppe Ungaretti<sup>65</sup> (Italian-French); Luigi Pirandello (from Sicilian to Italian); Dolores Prato;<sup>66</sup> Italian-born Carlo Coccioli who moved to Mexico City in 1953 and wrote in Italian, Spanish and French, like Francesca Gargallo,<sup>67</sup> while Francesca Duranti (English-Italian) lives and writes between Italy and the United States. Dôre Michelut and Gianna Patriarca (Italian-English-Ciociaro) write and self-translates in Canada.<sup>68</sup> Franco Biondi, Italian poet who emigrated to Germany, self-translates in Italian and German.

This list is certainly partial and incomplete. Self-translation studies being fairly recent, the mapping of it on a global scale is far from being complete. Its phenomenology, moreover, depends on a variety of factors: the type of bilingualism of writers; the geographical and social standing of the languages involved in their production; the literary traditions they combine; the scopes and consequent strategies for self-translation, etc. As a worldwide phenomenon, thus, self-translation is far from being satisfyingly

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Giuseppe E. Sansone, “Ungaretti autotraduttore” in *I luoghi del tradurre*, edited by Giuseppe E. Sansone (Milano: Guerini e Associati, 1991).

<sup>66</sup> Chiara Montini, “S’autotraduire en traduisant les mots : la vie entre deux langues de Dolores Prato.” in *Glottopol 25* edited by Christian Lagarde (2015) URL: [http://glottopol.univ-rouen.fr/telecharger/numero\\_25/gpl25\\_16montini.pdf](http://glottopol.univ-rouen.fr/telecharger/numero_25/gpl25_16montini.pdf). Accessed January 4th, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Irina Bajini, “Messicani per scelta o ispanografi per vocazione? Il caso di Carlo Coccioli, Fabio Morabito, Francesca Gargallo e Marco Perilli” in *Oltreoceano 5* edited by Alessandra Ferraro (2011). DOI: 10.1400/197629. Accessed January 4th, 2017.

<sup>68</sup> Deborah Saidero, “Self-Translation as Transcultural Re-Inscription of Identity in Dôre Michelut and Gianna Patriarca” in *Oltreoceano 5*, edited by Alessandra Ferraro (2011). DOI: 10.1400/197623. Accessed January 4th, 2017.

mapped. For this reason, exhaustively investigated case studies are still needed as a preliminary step for further research leading to universal considerations.

As observed by Eva Gentes and Trish Van Bolderen, in fact, “non-Western scholarship and self-translators are overwhelmingly underrepresented in general reference sources”,<sup>69</sup> and their number would certainly enrich the present sample. However, this list is hopefully representative of the width and the complexity of the phenomenon, as well as of its relevance to the global literary system.

### 1.3.2 Typologies of Self-Translated Texts

Not all the translators listed above followed the same procedures, nor published the same amount of self-translated texts. Together with the research team *Autotrad*, Professor Julio César Santoyo of the University of León, was one of the first scholars to devote a systematic academic attention to the practice. He focused on the experiences of single self-translators, such as Rosario Ferré,<sup>70</sup> Rabindranath Tagore<sup>71</sup> and Francisco Martínez de la Rosa,<sup>72</sup> as well as on a more ample historical perspective, as we will see in detail in 1.3.3. In his essay, “Autotraducciones: ensayo de tipología”,<sup>73</sup> Santoyo outlines the existent typologies of literary self-translated texts:

1) **Pseudo-self-translation:** occurs when the author publishes an original text presenting it as a translation from a foreign language, sometimes for editorial reasons or in order to disengage his/her name from more or less dangerous implications. The example proposed by Santoyo is the novel *Les échos du pas de Roland* by Jean-Baptiste

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<sup>69</sup> Eva Gentes and Trish Van Bolderen, “Self-Translation” in Oxford Bibliographies Online. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780199913701-0104. Accessed December 13th, 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Julio-César Santoyo, “Rosario Ferré: Entre dos lenguas, entre dos culturas” in *Estudios de Filología Inglesa: Homenaje al profesor José María Ruiz Ruiz*, edited by Pilar Abad García and José Ramón Fernández Suárez (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2003).

<sup>71</sup> Julio-César Santoyo, “Rabindranath Tagore: Memorias de un autotraductor arrepentido” in *A World of English, A World of Translation: Estudios Interdisciplinarios sobre Traducción y Lengua Inglesa* edited by Francisco Javier Díaz Pérez and Ana María Ortega Cebrenos (Jaén: Universidad de Jaén, 2004).

<sup>72</sup> Julio-César Santoyo, “Francisco Martínez de la Rosa, autor y traductor: Nueva visita a Aben Humeya” in *Traducción y traductores: Del Romanticismo al Realismo* edited by Francisco Lafarga and Luis Pegenaute (Bern/New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> Julio-César Santoyo, “Autotraducciones: ensayo de tipología”, in *Al humanista, traductor y maestro Miguel Ángel Vega Cernuda* edited by Pilar Martino Alba, Juan Antonio Albaladejo Martínez and Martha Pulido (Madrid: Dykinson, D.L., 2013).



Desconaguerre, first published in French in 1867 as “translated from Basque”, but whose ‘original’ Basque version was actually written afterwards. Santoyo also quotes the examples of *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole, *Lettres persanes* by Montesquieu and *The Duchess's Diary*, by Robin Chapman.

There are pseudo-selftranslation that give life to actual inter-language self-translation. An example is the scandal-provoking crime novel *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*,<sup>74</sup> written in French by Boris Vian and published in 1946 as “a translation from the American” under the pseudonym Vernon Sullivan, which was subsequently translated into American (*I Shall Spit on Your Graves*) by Vian himself, with the help of his wife Michelle.<sup>75</sup>

For yet other reasons, Russian *émigré* writer Andreï Makine (heir to Assia Djebar in the *Académie française* since 2016) was forced to present his first novels in French as translations made by a (fictitious) Albert Lemmonier from (inexistent) original Russian versions, because no Parisian editor would risk publishing a beginner’s novel in French. In 1995, then, Makine’s novel *Le testament français* won the *Prix Medici*, the *Prix Goncourt*, as well as the *Prix Goncourt des lycéens*, thus eventually acknowledging him fully as a ‘French writer’.<sup>76</sup>

**2) Intra-language (inter-genre) self-translation:** when a text is ‘translated’ from poetry to prose or viceversa, as in the case of Spanish poet Antonio Machado, who versified *La tierra de Alvar González* in his poem collection *Campos de Castilla*.<sup>77</sup>

**3) Inter-linguistic self-translation:** refers to the case that most promptly comes to mind, i.e., a ‘translated’ text in ‘language two’ generating from an ‘original’ text in ‘language one’. Within this category there may also be cases in which translation is not only interlinguistic, but also intratextual, i.e., with the words of Santoyo “el proceso autotraductor no genera un segundo texto, distinto y diverso dal primero, sino un unico texto, una singularidad textual en dualidad linguistica, en la que el discurso poético se desarrolla en dos idiomas, uno traduccion de otro, con presencia que puede ser alterna

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<sup>74</sup> Boris Vian, *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* (Paris: Les éditions du Scorpion, 1946).

<sup>75</sup> On the subject cf. the essay by Fabio Regattin, “Quand les préfixes se cumulent: la ‘pseudo- auto-traduction’” in *Interfrancophonies 6* edited by Paola Puccini (2015). DOI: 10.17457/IF6\_2015/REG. Accessed January 4th, 2017.

<sup>76</sup> On Makine’s work cf. Nina Nazarova, *Andreï Makine, Deux facettes de son œuvre* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005) and Gabriella Safran “Andreï Makine’s Literary Bilingualism and the Critics.” *Comparative Literature* 55/3 (2003).

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Santoyo, “Autotraducciones: ensayo de tipología”, 209.

o sucesiva”. [the self-translation process does not generate a second text, different and distinct from the first, but a single text, a bilingual textual unity, where the poetic discourse is developed in two languages, one being the translation of the other, and their presence that can be alternated or in succession]<sup>78</sup>; resulting in a peaceful and sometimes even harmonious coexistence of two languages within the same text as in Santoyo’s example, Chicano poet Angela dos Hoyos with her poems “Third-World Theme” and “The Deadliest of the Species”<sup>79</sup> (where English and Spanish lines cohabit the same text). The same procedure has been used by Cuban-American writer Gustavo Pérez-Firmat in *Bilingual Blues* (1995).<sup>80</sup>

Within the common case of inter-linguistic self-translation, Santoyo further distinguishes between:

3a) **direct vs. inverse self-translation:** which varies according to the direction of the process of self-translation, from maternal/native language to second/acquired language or viceversa; only few authors are known to switch direction nonchalantly as S. Beckett, C. Aitmatov, R. Federman, R. Gary Julien Green and N. Huston; the cases of perfect bilingualism are the rarest. Julien green, who was born in Paris from American parents and moved to the U.S.A. as a young man, is one of them.

However, this distinction could be problematic in the case of writers that claim to feel both languages as ‘maternal’ or ‘native’, as in the case of Samar Attar, author of *Lina: A Portrait Of A Damascene Girl*, who was born in Damascus, Syria. She studied in Canada and the United States, and worked in Algeria, West Germany and Australia. Having been shaped by so many different languages, makes it hard to tell which is your mother tongue. Educated to English and French in an Arabophone family, and with a German-speaking husband and daughter, she wrote: “With such a background like mine, the borderline between native and foreign, national and cosmopolitan, writer and translator, visible or invisible, natural or hybrid, is blurred”.<sup>81</sup>

3b) **Horizontal vs. vertical self-translation:** this distinction does not regard the author’s preference toward his/her two languages but is related exclusively to the literary prestige of the languages involved, a non-secondary factor engendering self-translation in many areas of the world where, as in ex-colonies, for instance, the distance between the cultural and economic power of the two languages is great.

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<sup>78</sup> Santoyo, “Autotraducciones: ensayo de tipología”, 210.

<sup>79</sup> Published in Tino Villanueva, *Chicanos: Antología histórica y literaria* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980).

<sup>80</sup> Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Bilingual Blues: Poems, 1981– 1994*. (Tempe: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingue, 1995).

<sup>81</sup> Samar Attar, “Translating the exiled self. Reflections on translation and censorship.” in *Intercultural Communication Studies* XIV/4, (2005), 132. URL: <http://web.uri.edu/iaics/files/10-Samar-Attar.pdf>. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Examples of vertical self-translation would be the works by André Brink (Afrikaans-English) and Rabindranath Tagore (Bengali-English).<sup>82</sup>

3c) **Unidirectional vs. multidirectional self-translation:** whereas unidirectionality is the common pattern, [language A (either maternal or acquired) to language B (either maternal or acquired)], multidirectionality is the infrequent case in which starting from text 1 the author produces text 2 in more than one language, as in the case of poem collection *Alternanze/Alternances/Alternations* by Giovanni Costa (1994);<sup>83</sup> another example is that of the Italian poets Fausto Cercignani (Italian, German, English and French) and Alberto Mario DeLogu (Italian, English, French, Sardinian dialect).

3d) **Individual vs collaborative self-translation:** although the issue might be debatable, Santoyo incorporates the cases of collaborative translation under the umbrella term self-translation, providing examples of works translated by professionals ‘in collaboration with’ or ‘under the strict supervisions of’ authors such as Ngûgî wa Thiong’o, Emil Cioran, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Czeslaw Milosz (who happen to be also unidirectional self-translators). Two eminent examples need to be added to this list: first of all, James Joyce, who collaborated with Beckett for the translation into French of *Anna Livia Plurabelle* and with Nino Frank for its Italian version; secondly, Vladimir Nabokov, who worked with his son Dmitri, a professional translator for a number of his publications in English.<sup>84</sup>

3e) **Simultaneous vs delayed self-translation:**<sup>85</sup> this subcategory distinguishes between those texts that have been translated after the first version has been printed and published, and other texts for which the author decides to carry on with two parallel versions in two languages. For instance, Nancy Huston wrote her novel *Instruments of Darkness/Instruments des ténèbres* alternating a chapter in English with one in French until she completed the narration. Then she translated each chapter into the missing language to have a better chance at publication. Other authors let a long span of time elapse between the first publication and the translation, and take profit from this occasion so as to take liberties with their text: they may add or subtract a number of passages or even go as far as to modify the plot, resuscitating a character,

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. for instance Rainier Grutman, “Diglosia y autotraducción ‘vertical’ (en y fuera de España)”, in *Aproximaciones a la autotraducción*, edited by, Xosé Manuel Dasilva and Helena Tanqueiro (Vigo: Academia del Hispanismo, 2011).

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Santoyo, “Autotraducciones: ensayo de tipología”, 215.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Olive Classe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Literary Translation into English. Volume II*. (London/Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000) 987– 990.

<sup>85</sup> Rainier Grutman brought forward this terminology in 1991, in his review of Brian T. Fitch, “Beckett and Babel,” in *Target* 3/1 (1988), 124–127; subsequently, he explained it further in the 1998 entry “Autotranslation” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, edited by Mona Baker (London/New York: Routledge), 17–20.

for instance, as did Galician novelist Suso de Toro for Inspector Maquieira in *Ambulancia*.<sup>86</sup>

3f) **Second self-translation:** refers to the additional passage of re-creating a new ‘original’ by retranslating the translation (in language 2) into the first language, as in the celebrated case of Nabokov’s autobiography, on which he worked for half a century, continually retranslating from Russian to English, and viceversa, gradually enriching his text through the contact and clash between the two languages.<sup>87</sup>

3g) **Explicit/transparent vs implicit opaque self-translation:** this distinction regards the information provided to readers through paratextual elements, i.e., whether or not the author declares that the text is fruit of a translation from another language version. Sometimes it does not depend on the author to render the translation less ‘invisible’, but on editorial choices. In some particular cases, however, the translation is given the prominent role: French-American author J. Green published *Le langage et son double*<sup>88</sup> as ‘Julien Green traduit par Julian Green’.<sup>89</sup>

### 1.3.3 Towards a History of Self-translation?

Until the 1980s, literary self-translations were universally considered exceptions. In *L'épreuve de l'étranger*, French translation scholar Antoine Berman stated that “les autotraductions sont des exceptions”, while Brian T. Fitch, while studying the bilingual corpus of Samuel Beckett, claimed that “direct discussion or even mention of self-translation is *virtually non-existent* in writings on theory of translation”.<sup>90</sup> Self-translators themselves – who chose to mention this aspect of their work – seemed to attribute little relevance to this endeavour. For instance, French-American novelist Raymond Federman stated:

I am also a bilingual writer. That is to say, I write both in French and in English, and that is perhaps less common. Furthermore, I also, at times, translate my own work either from English into French or vice versa. That self-translating activity is certainly not very common

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<sup>86</sup> Suso De Toro, *Ambulancia* (Vigo: Xerais, 1998).

<sup>87</sup> For a critique of Nabokov’s autobiography(ies), cf. Jennifer Coates, “Changing Horses: Nabokov and Translation” in *The Practices of Literary Translation: Constraints and Creativity* edited by Joan Boase-Beier and Michael Holman (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1998).

<sup>88</sup> Green, *Le langage et son double*, Title page.

<sup>89</sup> On the visibility vs. invisibility of self-translation, cf. in particular Xosé Manuel Dasilva, “La autotraducción transparente y la autotraducción opaca.” In *Aproximaciones a la autotraducción*. edited by Xosé Manuel Dasilva and Helena Tanqueiro (Vigo: Editorial Academia del Hispanismo, 2011).

<sup>90</sup> Brian T. Fitch, *Beckett and Babel. An investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work*. (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 21. Emphasis mine.

in the field of creative writing. In that sense then, I am somewhat of a phenomenon. The French would say: Federman, c'est un drôle de phénomène!<sup>91</sup>

As the number and linguistic distribution of self-translators listed in 1.3.1 possibly conveys, the practice should be suspected to have some consequences in the history of translation and its function in engendering and nourishing the literary systems by providing two versions of the same work for different readerships. Historical investigations of this phenomenon demonstrated that reality is, indeed, very different from what scholars claimed until a couple of decades ago, i.e. that self-translation is a rare, negligible practice. After the turn of the millennium in particular, the amount of research in the field has increased exponentially. The bibliography published in 2006 by the already mentioned Julio-César Santoyo “Traducciones de autor. Materiales para una bibliografía básica”,<sup>92</sup> counted 266 titles of articles and monographs in Catalan, English, French, Galician, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. After a decade, the bibliography edited by Eva Gentes, (Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf) and available online, counted over a thousand titles.

A considerable effort has been made to demonstrate that, rather than being uniquely a post-modern fancy,<sup>93</sup> (and unlike the academic interest for it, which is decidedly post-modern) literary self-translation is an ancient practice, underresearched in present times. The Spanish scholar devoted several ground-breaking essays to reconstructing the long tradition of self-translating authors from a historical perspective: “Traducciones de autor: una mirada retrospectiva” (2002), “Autotraducciones: Una perspectiva histórica” (2005) and “Esbozo de una historia de la autotraducción” (2011).<sup>94</sup>

In “Autotraducciones: Una perspectiva histórica”, Santoyo lists testimonies from former scholars considering this practice “una especie de rareza cultural o literaria” [a sort of cultural or literary rarity], a subject to be studied in the frameworks of bilingualism and comparative literature, rather than in the framework of translation proper. While Richard S. Sylvester and Helena Tanquero, for instance, describe self-translations as “rare and exceptional events”, or rather “eccentric oddities”,

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<sup>91</sup> Raymond Federman, “A Voice Within A Voice: Federman Translating/Translating Federman”, in *Critfiction: Postmodern Essays* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 76.

<sup>92</sup> Julio-César Santoyo, “Traducciones de autor. Materiales para una bibliografía básica” in *Interculturalidad y Traducción 2* (2006), URL: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2289458>. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>93</sup> In analysing the self-translation of Raymond Federman, Sara Kippur defines the practice ‘a post-modern mouvance’. Sara Kippur, *Writing It Twice: Self-Translation and The Making Of A World Literature in French* (Evanston: Northern University Press, 2015).

<sup>94</sup> Respectively in *Quimera: Revista de literatura 210* (2002), 27-32; in *Meta: journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal 50/3* (2005), 858– 867 and in “Esbozo de una historia de la autotraducción” in *L'Autotraduction aux frontières de la langue et de la culture* edited by Christian Lagarde, and Helena Tanqueiro (Limoges: Lambert-Lucas, 2013), 23-35.

unrepresentative of larger-scale phenomena,<sup>95</sup> Santoyo argues that such preconceptions stem from a lack of knowledge of the historical relevance of this practice.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to establish who was ‘the first’ self-translator. In his most recent “Esbozo de una historia de la autotraducción”, Santoyo goes as far as suggesting that

Nada sorprendente sería que la larga inscripción trilingüe (persa antiguo, elamita y babilonio) en el farallón iraní de Behistun, mandada grabar por Darío I a finales del siglo VI o comienzos del V a. de C. fuera el texto de un autotraductor a esas tres lenguas. [It would not come as a surprise that the long trilingual inscription (ancient Persian, Elamite and Babylonian) on the Iranian cliff of Behistun, ordered by Darius I at the end of the sixth or the beginning of the fifth century B.C., were the work of a self-translator in those three languages]<sup>96</sup>

It is worth noticing that Santoyo seems to be reconstructing a universal history of self-translation, one which comprises scientific treatises as well as inscriptions. The concepts of author and text in antiquity were very different indeed from what we conceive of them now, and so was the notion and practice of translation. Cordingley reminds us that:

In the Middle Ages and in Early-Modern Europe, translation was habitually performed in pairs or in teams, with individuals specialized in different languages taking on separate roles in the process of interpreting a text in one language and transposing it into another.<sup>97</sup>

Anyhow, on the basis of textual evidences, Santoyo gives the primacy to Titus Flavius Josephus (born in Jeruslame in 37 or 38 A.D., as Joseph ben Matityahu), a Jew, Roman-naturalized historian who lived in Rome in the first century. He wrote a work known as *The Wars of the Jews*<sup>98</sup> in Aramaic, his ‘paternal tongue’, and subsequently translated it into Greek (Φλαυίου Ἰωσήπου ἱστορία Ἰουδαϊκοῦ πολέμου πρὸς Ῥωμαίους βιβλία). Josephus states, in fact, in the preface: “I have proposed to myself, for the sake of such as live [*sic*] under the government of the Romans, to translate those books into the Greek tongue, which I formerly composed in the language of our country”.<sup>99</sup> Santoyo then quotes such self-proclaimed self-translators as Moses Sefardi/Pedro Alfonso (1062-1110; *Disciplina clericalis*), Abraham bar Hiyya (also known as Savasorda, ca. 1065-ca. 1145 who self-translated *The Foundations of Understanding and the Tower of Faith* from Arabic to Hebrew), Juda ben Salomon Cohen (also self-

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<sup>95</sup> Santoyo, “Autotraducciones: una perspectiva històrica”, 858-859. Translation is mine.

<sup>96</sup> Santoyo, “Esbozo de una historia de la autotraducción”, 23.

<sup>97</sup> Anthony Cordingley, “Self-translation, going global” in *Self-translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture* edited by Anthony Cordingley (London: Continuum, 2013), 2.

<sup>98</sup> The first translation into English was by Thomas Lodge in 1602, but the most quoted is usually that by William Whiston.

<sup>99</sup> URL <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>

translating his philosophical-scientific encyclopaedia known as *Midrash ha-ḥokhmah* from Arabic to Hebrew), Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1168-1253; *Estatuta familiae*, translated into French and English), and Ramon Llull (1232-1316), which Santoyo defines “quizá el más prolífico autotraductor de la Edad Media europea” [perhaps the most prolific European self-translator during the Middle Ages].<sup>100</sup> The sixteenth century is “el primer gran siglo de la autotraducción en Europa”, but a long list of self-translating authors could be provided also for the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when self-translation, especially from Latin to Vernacular Romance languages, flourished, particularly in Spain and Italy. Among the most famous authors we may mention Thomas More (from Latin to English), Etienne Dolet, Joachim Du Bellay and Jean Calvin (from Latin to French), John Donne, Abraham Cowley and Andrew Marvell (from Latin to English), and Carlo Goldoni (from French to Italian).

In the light of his findings, Santoyo concludes his draft by stating that for historical and geo-political reasons, the primacy of ‘self-translating century’ goes to the Twentieth century:

Si alguno, el s. XX ha sido el siglo de la autotraducción, y a su vez el del comienzo de la reflexión teórica sobre el proceso autotraductor. Ha sido el siglo de la internacionalización de los conflictos bélicos, el siglo de los exilios de masa por razones bélicas, políticas, étnicas, económicas, o religiosas, el siglo de la descolonización, también el de la globalización, y con ella de la consolidación del inglés como lengua internacional de la comunicación..., todo lo cual ha propiciado, como nunca antes, la deslocalización de lenguas y culturas, y el biligüismo como ‘condición y estado natural’ de muchos hablantes, caldo ideal para el cultivo de la autotraducción.<sup>101</sup>

Thus, by sketching a list of well-known self-translating authors spanning from antiquity to modern days, Santoyo manages – almost single-handedly – to dismantle the preconception that wants self-translation to be a recent and minor phenomenon, and to appreciate the importance of the recent historical events on the diffusion of this practice in the globalized literary system.

In “History and the Self-translator”, Jan Hokenson takes the historical reconstruction one step further, while striving to shed light on the “identifiable constants” linking the pursuits of self-translators over time. Apparently, “self-translations can arise from the same sorts of socioeconomic conditions (immigration or exile)”, i.e., the same conditions that generally foster the activity of secondary translators; in addition, though, self-translators have something else in common: “private, artistic and literary ambitions of a uniquely dual nature”.<sup>102</sup> Hokenson supports the usefulness of studying

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<sup>100</sup> Santoyo, “Autotraducciones: una perspectiva històrica”, 860.

<sup>101</sup> Santoyo, “Esbozo de una historia de la autotraducción”, 33.

<sup>102</sup> Jan Hokenson, “History and the Self-translator” in *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture* edited by Anthony Cordingley (London: Continuum, 2013), 40 and following.

single cases as, in order to retrieve patterns and recurrences, they can help elaborate a stereotypical figure to be retrieved in different epochs and contexts. Indeed, if a ‘history of self-translation’ could take inspiration from or even be embedded into the wider ‘history of translation’ for what concern the *contents* and the *modalities* of such enterprise, the *motives*, however, are not “a common rubric” in Translation Studies, while they should retain a primary relevance in analysing the figure of the self-translator. Accordingly, Hokenson –quoting W.G. Runciman’s *The Theory of Social and Cultural Selection* - calls for a distinction between the macro- or extra-personal motivations (others may call it social or socio-linguistic) level and the micro- or personal (what may be named cultural) level in the choice of self-translating. As prominent examples of how the personal drive and aspirations can intervene in prompting self-translation, Hokenson chooses Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695), who, while translating from Latin to Spanish, “ben(t) familiar Church Latin tropes to new Hispanic and new genre contexts, which she clearly relished” and “began in baroque conventions but developed *a personal poetics of the feminine*” that was quite ahead of her time.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, Giuseppe Ungaretti, who was born in Alexandria from Italian parents, wrote his first poems in French, while influenced by Mallarmean inspirations; self-translation “allowed him to escape the burden of Mallarmé’s formal legacy in French poetics and to use his French discoveries in pioneering in Italian”.<sup>104</sup>

The contemporary author selected for the present case study in self-translation, Nancy Huston, falls into this very group, or category, delineated by Hokenson who includes De la Cruz, Ungaretti, Goldoni and Nabokov: what is common to their experience is that, unlike immigrant writers and allograph translators, these self-translating authors seem:

[...] acutely conscious of writing in the language of venerable predecessors in *both* languages, those predecessors who established the dominant stylistic conventions in and against which they feel they must work, to create an original *oeuvre*.<sup>105</sup>

The case of Huston seems ‘historically’ relevant in the current state-of-the-art also because, despite all the critical writing (and polemics) about her being Canadian, she learnt German as a child, she lived and attended high school and university also in the U.S.A, has been living in France for more than 40 years and has recently been going back and forth from Switzerland. Therefore, rather than being ‘simply’ bi-lingual and bi-cultural, she can be considered a post-modern, global and multilingual writer, whose work is inspired and pervaded by universal drives, and as such, embodies contemporary trends of literature and translation.

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<sup>103</sup> Hokenson, “History and the Self-translator”, 45.

<sup>104</sup> *Ivi*, 46.

<sup>105</sup> *Ivi*, 50.



The aim of the present thesis is precisely to shed light on how the self-translation process can become a tool for shaping some stylistic patterns, at the linguistic level and also, occasionally, on the narrative level. While Huston's aesthetics may have its own irrepeatable peculiarities, this use of self-translation – as a dynamic take on the canons of (at least) two literary systems – can potentially be pointed out as a constant in self-translation studies. The analysis of her *demarche* in Chapter III and Chapter IV, V and VI will try to demonstrate whether Hokenson's claim that "the sheer act of self-translation is an opening out onto both languages, rather than a binary tension of foreclosure".<sup>106</sup>

### 1.3.4 Self-translation in a Sociolinguistic Perspective

Translations are hardly ever given the same status of 'national masterpieces' into the histories of the so-called national literatures,<sup>107</sup> which are usually narrated in praise of the monolingual paradigm – so aptly described by Yasemin Yildiz –<sup>108</sup> and do not usually attribute much relevance to the contributions incorporated through translation from other literary co-systems. Nowadays, though, the studies on world literature are more and more shifting the focus on the dynamic relation between the hierarchies of languages and the role of translation in national and transnational literary systems, or, to use Itamar Even-Zohar's terms, "to describe and explain the behaviour of the literary polysystem in synchrony and diachrony",<sup>109</sup> considering translation not so much an ideal operation as one rooted in its cultural (political, economical, etc.) context. Indeed, according to Polysystem Theory, translated literature maintains a central position in the global literary polysystem, because it is a path along which new repertoires are still being developed and innovations implemented within a 'home' system. This happens particularly when such 'home' systems are either of recent foundation, or peripheral and weak, or suffering from stagnation. According to Even-Zohar, the repertoire of translated literature within a one-language literature (or, with a doxal Romantic definition, 'national literature') is correlated by the way the texts to be translated are selected among foreign texts according to the principle of the 'home co-systems'. Thus, studies seem to have come a long way since Lawrence Venuti denounced the invisibility of translation and called for a rethinking of the cultural, sociological and economic consequences of this practice.

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<sup>106</sup> Hokenson, "History and the Self-translator", 52.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem"

<sup>108</sup> Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*.

<sup>109</sup> Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem", 46.

If translation is gaining visibility on the cultural scene, a differentiation should be made for self-translation. As Rainier Grutman explains in his article “Francophonie et autotraduction”, self-translation (bypassing the status one can choose to confer to it, i.e., ‘translation’ or ‘rewriting’) does not function the same way as translation, because its appearance on the literary scene is not dictated by the same market laws. In that regard, « le comportement de l’autotraduction est non seulement inhabituel, mais carrément contraire aux habitudes en matière de traduction ». <sup>110</sup> To make an example among many others, Huston’s books are published in their English version in the U.S.A. and in Canada as ‘original works’ and not as translations from French literature. And the same happened in France when her first version was actually written in English.

Self-translators are agents *within* the home co-system, operating *inside it*, both linguistically and culturally, not *from the outside*. At the same time, however, their published work within that system *is a translation* – that did not follow the usual process of selection among texts imported from a foreign language/culture, but has been presented as an original work – and, as such, it is the output of an already existing text received and interpreted in a precise historical and socio-cultural context. This event happens not only in weak, peripheral literary co-systems, to keep on using Itamar-Zohar’s terminology. On the contrary, celebrated names of self-translators show that it has happened and still happens today in central systems too, such as, for instance, the American and European macro-systems: Beckett, Nabokov, Federman, Dorfman, and Huston are just few cases in point. Scholar Christian Lagarde agrees in saying that “les conséquences ne se circonscrivent pas au plan personnel de l’écrivain, mais [...] peuvent impliquer, également en termes de reconnaissance, un mouvement ou une communauté (souvent minoritaires), voire l’ensemble d’une société”, <sup>111</sup> and the numbers of self-translators mentioned in 1.3.1 show that the phenomenon has acquired a non-negligible weight. Therefore, it seems plausible that *Self-translation studies* are liable to bring to the fore arguments so far underresearched that may re-inforce the role and prestige of translation within the global polysystem and certainly call for further investigations. Upon analysing the genesis of ancient Greek and Roman literatures, the historian Luciano Canfora put forward that they may be considered ‘literatures of translation’; <sup>112</sup> current reflections on self-translation may

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<sup>110</sup> Grutman, “Francophonie et autotraduction”.

<sup>111</sup> Lagarde, “De l’individu au global”, 31.

<sup>112</sup> The scholar points out that: “the formula ‘literature of translation’ is disliked (unjustly), because it is regarded (unjustly) as limiting. If we look back at the path covered so far, from the Luwian tables in Wilusa, we can say that in a certain sense, all archaic literatures were literatures of translation. The belief that it started with Hellenism is an optical illusion. The ‘blending’ – linguistic as well as literary – began much earlier and had a cyclic evolution.” Canfora, Luciano. *Una società premoderna. Lavoro, morale, scrittura in Grecia* (Bari: Dedalo, 1989) 220. Translation is mine.

force us to reconsider the commonplace notion of originality in literature and re-established a more fact-based opinion on the role and function of translation.

Two main language-related aspects are relevant in dealing with self-translation, and these basically correspond to the distinction Hokenson made in her historical analysis between the micro-level and the macro-level. On the one hand, there is the relationship between self-translators and their languages (micro-level), entailing personal histories and choices. This aspect is profusely commented upon by the authors themselves, especially in autobiographical texts. Cf., for instance, Huston's *Nord perdu. Suivi de douze France/Losing North: Musing on Land, Tongue and Self*<sup>113</sup>; Vassilis Alexakis's *Paris-Athènes* (1989), Julian Green's *Le langage et son double/Language and its Shadow*, Rosario Ferré's *Memoria/Memory*, Ariel Dorfman's *Rumbo al sur, deseando el norte/Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey*, to quote but a few famous examples.

The other important complementary aspect that calls for consideration is the social context in which the translation takes place, which, in turn, usually invokes considerations on the 'literary weight' of these languages, how they interact, and the different communicative value attributed to them by the community of speakers.

Although in single case studies the two aspects work together to shape the self-translator's practice and are thus commonly juxtaposed in critical analyses (as we will see in exploring Huston bio- and bibliography), socio-linguistic enquiries on self-translation naturally converge on the latter. The first tentative approach to studying self-translation focused on the individual author, "à travers l'étude de quelques cas certes fascinants, mais dont le caractère représentatif et explicative ne va pas de soi".<sup>114</sup> The current trend is rather to exploit the formerly investigated case studies to identify models and paradigms, in the awareness that these cannot account for each specificity.

For instance, in the monograph *On Self-translation. An exploration in Self-translators' Teloï and Strategies* (2009), Simona Anselmi draws inspiration from Chesterman's notion of the translator's *telos* ("a translator's ideological motivation for working as a translator") to elaborate on the reasons why, at a certain point, authors decide to translate themselves, and, more significantly, whether or not this results in strategies bearing some differences according to their aims. Anselmi subdivides the *teloï* of self-translating authors into four main groups:

– editorial reasons engendered by dissatisfaction with former allograph translations (e.g., Kundera, Nabokov and Brodsky);

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<sup>113</sup> Arles: Actes Sud, 1999 and Toronto: McArthur & Co., 2002.

<sup>114</sup> Rainier Grutman, "L'autotraduction: de la galerie de portraits à la galaxie des langues".

- poetic reasons (e.g., Beckett, Joyce, Huston);
- ideological reasons (e.g., Ngũgĩ);
- economic and commercial reasons.

These categories are not stagnant compartments, of course. A variety of reasons may prompt self-translation from case to case; for Huston, the poetic reason conceptualized by Anselmi seems to intervene later, while the first self-translation was prompted by editorial reasons, as I will outline in Chapter 3. The economic ‘usefulness’ or advantage of self-translation is a potentially omnipresent, though never sufficiently motivating factor – if considered by itself – for a large group of bilingual authors.

However, what is more remarkable from a sociolinguistic perspective is the ideological reason subtending the works by certain self-translators, particularly those living in contact contexts characterized by diglossia (e.g., Rabindranath Tagore, André Brink). The place occupied by the languages involved in translation and the literary traditions they represent in the so-called ‘world republic of letters’ – in Pascale Casanova’s terms –<sup>115</sup> seem to have accounted for the consideration and recognition of certain self-translators by the academic community. English and French are central and vehicular in the literary polysystem: they are certainly the target-languages of the highest number of translations, as Rainier Grutman recently pointed out:

D’après les statistiques de l’UNESCO (1979– 2011) publiées dans *l’Index Translationum*, les six principales langues-sources sont, dans cet ordre: l’anglais, le français, l’allemand, le russe, l’italien et l’espagnol. Bel et bien devancé par l’anglais, qui se trouve en position hégémonique, « hyper– centrale » depuis la Seconde Guerre mondiale, le français n’en occupe pas moins la deuxième place parmi les langues sources, juste devant l’allemand et dominant facilement le russe (2 x fois moins de textes-sources qu’en français), l’italien (3 x fois moins) et l’espagnol (4 x fois moins).<sup>116</sup>

Their historical development on large portions of the globe and the fact that they are the most read languages also contribute to account for the reasons why authors who self-translate(d) in between these languages are so numerous and consequently most studied (apart from the obvious Beckett, see e.g. Julie/an Green, Raymond Federman, Nancy Huston). These are closely followed by authors who self-translated into either one of them (Vladimir Nabokov, Stefan George, Karen Blixen, Jorge Semprun, Milan Kundera, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, André Brink, Rosario Ferré, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Rabindranath Tagore).

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<sup>115</sup> Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres*, 125.

<sup>116</sup> Grutman, “Francophonie et autotraduction”, 5-6.

Indeed, according to the metaphor of the *galaxy of languages* put forward by linguist Abram De Swaan,<sup>117</sup> the choice of translating one's work from a *peripheral* language to a *super-central* or to the *hyper-central* language in the 'galactic' system of languages – or indeed, in 'the market of languages', to use Louis Jean Calvet's references<sup>118</sup> – has quantitative and qualitative consequences. The central place occupied in such market ensures a larger reading public and possibly a far-reaching diffusion of one's work. Besides, as Christian Lagarde pointed out, the consideration of intellectual and academic milieus possibly blur the global map via the selection they are bound to do,

[...] au-delà du prestige même de la langue choisie pour suppléer les carences de l'autre, viennent s'ajouter la pertinence et le prestige de la critique spécialisée et des milieux intellectuels et universitaires, dont le jugement est convoité et, s'il est favorable, sert de passeport à une carrière internationale de premier plan.<sup>119</sup>

The recurrence to a high-ranking language such as English and French, though, alongside with improved chances of being read and known by wider unprofessional and professional public, also entails some possible losses for authors whose other language is a 'peripheral language' as Gykyu, for instance, the native tongue of Kenian poet Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o,<sup>120</sup> several times Nobel Laureate candidate. When the author cannot count on a native language of sufficient prestige is arguably forced to publish in the 'dominant' language, the risk being that one's original work will remain virtually unknown, whereas the translation – passing off as an original text – will take its place in the literary market. The text in the lesser-language might be 'suffocated' by the dominant language even in cases of bilingual publications, as denounced by Corinna Krause as regards the publication of contemporary Scottish Gaelic poetry.<sup>121</sup>

According to Christian Lagarde, who edited a recent issue of *Glottopol* entitled «L'autotraduction: une perspective sociolinguistique», one of the visible effects of diglossia on certain authors is to engender a bipartition of genres in their production, whereby:

[...] aux essais, études scientifiques, et tout cas, à la théorisation, correspond la 'langue de la raison', la plus valorisée et répandue socialement, tandis que l'expression proprement littéraire (et davantage encore poétique) s'incarne dans la 'langue du cœur', langue

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<sup>117</sup> Abram De Swaan, "The Emergent World Language System: an Introduction" in *International Political Science Review/Revue internationale de science politique* 14/3 (1993), 221.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Louis-Jean Calvet, *Le marché aux langues* (Paris, Plon, 2001).

<sup>119</sup> Lagarde, "De l'individu au global", 39.

<sup>120</sup> His 1986 essay *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (East Africa: EAEP) was recently translated into Italian as *Decolonizzare la mente* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2015).

<sup>121</sup> Corinna Krause, "Why bother with the original? Self-translation and Scottish Gaelic poetry" in *Self-translation. Brokering Originality into Hybrid Culture* edited by Anthony Cordingley (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

maternelle ou choisie, vernaculaire, confidentielle dans sa diffusion et ses contenus (et/ou délibérément intimiste).<sup>122</sup>

Once again, the choice of Huston as a case study seems particularly relevant to problematize the socio-linguistic aspects of self-translation. Even though she is from a country generally associated with diglossia, her bilingualism developed later in her life and the place occupied by the two languages – such hyper-central literary languages as English and French – in her mind and in her literary production, followed unexpected turns, as we will see in Chapter 2. The bipartition of genres characterizing her production, therefore, is not context-related but rather a personal choice.

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<sup>122</sup> Lagarde, “De l’individu au global”, 36.

## 1.4 Against Self-translation

In order to outline the current perspectives on self-translation as heuristically as possible, it seems appropriate, after the presentation of theoretical and practical issues, to shortly outline also some counter-current voices on the subject matter.

In “Come se si scrivessero due libri diversi”, semiotician Umberto Eco, experienced translator, translation editor, foreign-language writer (his *Trattato di semiotica generale* was first written in English as *A Theory of Semiotics*<sup>123</sup>), and as an author whose works were translated into numerous languages and who cared to collaborate with his translators, states that “self-translation is a rewriting, a re-invention into different languages”.<sup>124</sup> As an example supporting this belief he discussed the rather ‘extreme’ case of the French and Italian versions of Joyce’s *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, where Joyce – according to Eco – based his translation from English to Italian on a certain rhythmic coherence:

È arrivato al capolavoro di capire che il bello del testo inglese era di esser fatto di tanti monosillabi e siccome la lingua italiana di monosillabi ne ha pochissimi ha esagerato in polisillabi lunghissimi; cioè ha trasportato una idea di coerenza ritmica dal poco al molto, e ha scritto quindi assolutamente un altro testo. [He brilliantly realized that the beauty of the English text resided in the fact of being composed with lots of monosyllabic words; since the Italian language has few monosyllabic words, he conversely exaggerated with long polysyllabic terms. He thus transposed the idea of rhythmic coherence from short to long words; he wrote therefore absolutely another text]<sup>125</sup>

For Eco the term ‘rewriting’ is more appropriate to define the process of writing the same text in another language, because the linguistic schemes intrinsic to each language influence our way of thinking and writing in that language to such a degree that there is ontological incompatibility. For Eco, there cannot be ‘pure self-translation’; the fact that the author and the translator are the same person is of no help whatsoever, because he does not believe in the notion of authorial intention: “Io ho sempre sostenuto che molte volte il testo è più intelligente del suo autore e dice cose a cui l’autore non aveva pensato” [I have always claimed that the text is often more clever than its author and tells things that the author had not thought of].<sup>126</sup> Thus, Eco provocatively concluded that “Joyce non si è affatto autotradotto: la sua pseudo-traduzione in francese e poi in italiano di *Anna Livia Plurabelle* non è affatto una traduzione.” [Joyce did not self-translate at all: his pseudo-translation of *Anna Livia*

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<sup>123</sup> Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1976).

<sup>124</sup> Umberto Eco, “Come se si scrivessero due libri diversi” in *Autotraduzione e riscrittura*. Edited by Andrea Ceccherelli, Gabriella Elina Imposti and Monica Perotto (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2013), 27. Translation is mine.

<sup>125</sup> Eco, “Come se si scrivessero due libri diversi”, 27. Translation is mine.

<sup>126</sup> *Ivi*, 28.

Plurabelle, in French first and then in Italian, is not a translation altogether].<sup>127</sup> However, Eco does not elaborate on the reasons why a criterion of rhythmic coherence should not be consistent with the idea of translation:<sup>128</sup> if the interpreter of the text identifies the rhythmic or phonological pattern of the text as a stylistic feature hierarchically more important than other features, why should not his or her translation be based on this very criterion? In addition, if this interpreter happens to be the author of the text, why should his or her choice in matters of translative criteria be questionable by any other interpreter?

Eco's critique of the usefulness of 'self-translation' as a category seems therefore to derive directly from his mistrust for the use of 'translation' as indicative of the identity of two texts: *not only self-translations, but translations also are actually rewritings*, because each different language "ci obbliga ad usare stilemi prefissati" [forces us to use pre-established stylemes],<sup>129</sup> modelling the text in a way that only partially depends on the agent.

Translation scholar Susan Bassnett develops her analysis of self-translation along the same line of thought. In accordance with Borges's considerations on the inexistence of 'the original',<sup>130</sup> mentioned in 1.2.2, she analyses textual examples of numerous self-translators driven by different purposes and applying different strategies, such as Huston, Tagore, Beckett, Nabokov, Amelia Rosselli and Ngûgî wa Thiong'o; she undelines the divergences of the two versions taken into consideration, reaching the conclusion that:

The term 'self-translation' is problematic in several respects, but principally because it compels us to consider the problem of the existence of an 'original'. The very definition of translation presupposes an original somewhere else, so when we talk of self-translation, the assumption is that there will be another previously composed text from which the second text can claim its origin. Yet many writers consider themselves as bilinguals and shift between languages, hence the binary notion of original-translation appears simplistic and unhelpful.<sup>131</sup>

She then proposes to "think of the text as the unit of significance", to be "better placed to accept the idea of translation as rewriting" and to "dispense with the terminology of self-translation."<sup>132</sup> The title of Bassnett's article – "The Self-Translator as Rewriter" –

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<sup>127</sup> Eco, Umberto. "Come se si scrivessero due libri diversi", 27.

<sup>128</sup> In fact, for certain theorists, rhythm – heuristically intened as "l'organisation du mouvement de la parole" is the very basis not only of a theory of translation but also of a theory of language. Cf. Henry Meschonnic, "Traduire au XXIè siècle" in *Quaderns. Revue de traduction* 15 (2008): 61.

<sup>129</sup> Eco, "Come se si scrivessero due libri diversi", 26.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Efrain Kristal, *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2002).

<sup>131</sup> Susan Bassnett, "The Self-Translator as Rewriter" in *Self-translation. Brokering Originality into Hybrid Culture* edited by Anthony Cordingley (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 15.

<sup>132</sup> Bassnett, "The Self-Translator as Rewriter", 24.



clearly recalls her work *The Translator as Writer* edited together with Peter Bush and where they advocate the need to “recognise translation as an art to be celebrated, not concealed.”<sup>133</sup> It thus seems that – despite her refusal to grant the practice an autonomous status – her reading of self-translation aligns with the innovative call for a renewed prestige and recognition to be granted to translation, no longer a Cinderella art. This is partly surprising, because self-translation studies could be a bridging field of inquiry between translation studies and the recent drives of Comparative Literatures that Bassnett seems to appreciate.<sup>134</sup>

Besides Eco and Bassnett’s critique of the opportunity of theorizing self-translation, there is another one based on sociolinguistic and political aspects, criticising – *a posteriori*, rather than *a priori*, as in Eco and Bassnett – the practice and outcomes of self-translation. According to Grutman and Van Bolderen, in fact, some writers “have gone as far as condemning self-translation *on political grounds*”,<sup>135</sup> like poet Christopher Whyte who fears that translation into English may render the Gaelic text superfluous. “In Scotland and Wales,” the two authors specify, “as in Catalonia or Galicia, self-translations into English or Spanish that achieve the status of ‘second originals’ may indeed marginalize, dwarf, or even disqualify work initially written in a minority language.”<sup>136</sup> On her blog on self-translation, Eva Gentes has started to group together writers who prefer not to use the term ‘translation’ to define what they do. Carmen Riera explains: “[D]ado que *no creo en la traducción* intento hacer una versión, lo cual significa para mí reescribir el texto en la nueva lengua”; André Brink, whose method seems very similar to Huston’s, states: “I do not ‘translate’ my books. I rewrite them in English or Afrikaans, sometimes alternating chapters and in the process reworking the original in the light of the changes made in the other language”; and finally, Rolando Hinojosa Smith prefers the term ‘rendition’: “I think I like to keep the flavor rather than just a word-by-word definition or translation”.<sup>137</sup>

This brief overview on the various standpoints against self-translation show that the critique might be based on the impossibility to overcome the aporia created by the identity of author and translator, and thus of original text and translation (already discussed in 1.2.1.), as in the case of Eco and Bassnett’s observations. In the case of the self-translators themselves, instead, the inopportunity to define their work as self-

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<sup>133</sup> Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, *The Translator as Writer* (London: Continuum, 2007), 2.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. the interview on *Asymptote* “Theorising Translation with Susan Bassnett” by Nazry Bahrawi (2011). URL: <http://www.asymptotejournal.com/interview/an-interview-with-susan-bassnett/>. Accessed December 19th, 2016.

<sup>135</sup> Grutman and Van Bolderen, “Self-translation”, 325.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>137</sup> Eva Gentes, “[Self-translation: translation or rewriting?](http://self-translation.blogspot.it/2010/05/self-translation-translation-or.html)” on Self-translation (Blogspot) 2010. URL <http://self-translation.blogspot.it/2010/05/self-translation-translation-or.html>. Accessed December 28th, 2016.

translation seems to derive from the common perception of the derivative and, hence, secondary value of translation with respect to creative writing in terms of effort and authenticity, which in turn derives from the above-mentioned aporia.

Without being forced to choose between 'translation proper' and 'rewriting', one of the possible ways to mediate between the two extremes, is to investigate how and why it is possible to attribute self-translation its own autonomous status and dignity.

## 1.5 Innovative Theoretical Models to Approach the Self-translated Text

To date, one of the most comprehensive, in-depth analyses of the history of self-translation in Western literature was published in 2007 by Jan Hokenson and Marcella Munson, under the title of *The Bilingual Text. History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation*.<sup>138</sup> The premise, as in most of the critical texts written on the subject until then, began by stressing that “[...] self-translators have long been neglected in literary history and translation theory, and it is still often assumed that they are just idiosyncratic anomalies, mostly preening polyglots or maladaptive immigrants”.<sup>139</sup> Within the academia, the interest for the subject manifested at first through single case studies (cf. the above-mentioned Beckett and Nabokov). However, the sentiment that scholars were dealing with isolated albeit interesting cases prevented them from formulating ampler theoretical frameworks and models.

Unlike former critics, though, Jan Walsh Hokenson and Marcella Munson venture to make hypotheses for the neglect suffered by this phenomenon in translation studies. In particular, they attribute it to the construction of national literary canons – in conjunction with the birth of national states and, even earlier, during the Renaissance – by authors and critics who primed the monolingual paradigm and the ‘purity’ of the national language, and creative writing above translation. Such a notion has persisted until today:

Our thesis is that the current concepts of bilingualism and translation are still largely the legacies of German Romantic philosophy of language. As several theorists have shown (Berman, Pym, Venuti), the critical categories of translation continue to reflect their origins in the German Romantics’ notion of the specific *Wesen* or essence of a language as indissociable from its Volk or country, a concept that soon came to be identified with nation, amid competing ideologies of culture.<sup>140</sup>

The Romantic legitimization of the monolingual paradigm has influenced our ideas on translation, whereas:

[...] bilinguality seems to be the one category of language-user that high modernist thought did not, indeed perhaps even refused to consider. If theories of language elided the bilingual, so theories of subjectivity tended to assume a monolingual subject, indeed monolingualism as the very grounds of being.<sup>141</sup>

Given this premise on the neglect of bilingualism and the necessity of a renewed perspective on it in the era of globalization, the two scholars try to reconstruct the

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<sup>138</sup> Hokenson and Munson *The Bilingual Text*.

<sup>139</sup> *Ivi*, 1.

<sup>140</sup> *Ivi*, 3.

<sup>141</sup> *Ivi*, 148.

patterns of self-translating bilingual writers through the ages. They focus on the periods and areas in which particular socio-linguistic situations (like diglossia) favoured this kind of practice among literates (e.g., the expansion of the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, the age of geographical discoveries, decolonisation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). The structure of their study very well mirrors the current status of self-translation studies depicted so far, as the authors themselves point out: “The sequence of analysis would seem to lead from individual self-translators, then period clusters of them, then national, continental, hemispheric and global patterns.”<sup>142</sup> Thus, the picture they frame – linking such different levels – is that of a ‘rich and venerable tradition’<sup>143</sup> displaying authors whose work has made them known in literary history also for reasons different from translation: Nicole Oresme, Charles D’Orléans, Rémy Belleau, during the Middle Ages; John Donne, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Carlo Goldoni during the Renaissance; the contemporary self-translating poets and novelists Rabindranath Tagore, Stefan George, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Beckett, Julian Green and Rosario Ferré. Each author-self-translator’s biography is analysed in order to investigate the reasons why they were lead to experience self-translation at some point of their literary career and to illustrate their outcome. Their aim is a rather ambitious one:

As several scholars have shown apropos of single writers, *it has been difficult even to classify self-translation as a literary and cultural endeavour*: are the two texts both original creations? Is either text complete? Is self-translation a separate genre? Can either version belong within a single language or literary tradition? How can two linguistic versions of a text be commensurable? Ultimately, as Federman said of Beckett, “an urgent need exists...to arrive at an aesthetic of bilingualism and self-translating, or better yet at a poetics of such activities”.<sup>144</sup>

To the purpose, Hokenson and Munson’s linguistic contrastive analyses are not merely focused on describing the dissimilarities between the two versions, as it is usually done in analyses of ‘orthodox’ translations. On the contrary, they were carried out in order to find the tools to describe the texts’ *commensurability*, the “continuities across language versions”.<sup>145</sup>

Indeed, the single case studies are certainly interesting and thoroughly documented, but more interestingly still, they are embedded in the research of the theoretical models which best serve to account for the bilingual text and the role of translation as a medium of transfer of linguistic, stylistic and cultural aspects of texts among the

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<sup>142</sup> Hokenson, “History and the Self-Translator”, 42.

<sup>143</sup> Hokenson and Munson, *The Bilingual Text*, 1.

<sup>144</sup> *Ivi*, 2. Emphasis mine.

<sup>145</sup> *Ivi*, 4.

literary co-systems. In order to do so, Hokenson and Munson call for a complete renewal of the critical rubrics to employ, and more precisely, they claim that:

When Rémy Belleau or Stefan George writes a poem in French, and then writes it again in Latin or German, the standard binary model of author and translator collapses. Theoretical models of source and target languages also break down in the dual text by the one hand, as do linguistic models of lexical equivalence, and foreign versus domestic culture. Literary critical models of a writer's (monolingual) style, and of translation as diminution and loss, a falling away from the original, similarly cannot serve. New categories of analysis must be developed, as extrapolated from the bilingual texts of self-translators through the centuries.<sup>146</sup>

Indeed, Hokenson and Munson focus on similarity, on the overlapping and the comparable, not on the gaps between text one and text two (or, 'the translation'), thus distancing themselves from binary models and taking inspiration from other theoretical models, such as Anthony Pym's notion of the translator as a unit of 'sociolinguistic interculture'; Marilyn Gaddis Rose's method of 'stereoscopic reading'; and Andrei Fedorov's concept of 'functional and stylistic correspondence'.<sup>147</sup>

Pym intends cultures as "large-scale systems of assumed shared references, linguistic or otherwise, used for the purposes of reducing complexity."<sup>148</sup> For Pym, a bilingual author and translator, usually described as being in-between, can more aptly be considered as:

[...] liv[ing] and work[ing] not in a hypothetical gap between languages, between source and target cultures, but in the midst of them; [real translators] combine several languages and cultural competences at once, and constitute[ing] a mid-zone of overlaps and intersections, being actively engaged in several cultures simultaneously.<sup>149</sup>

Gaddis Rose developed her 'stereoscopic reading', i.e., "using both the original language text and one (or more) translations while reading and teaching",<sup>150</sup> at the intersection of translation studies with other disciplines, such as comparative literature and literary criticism. The scholar thus investigates the "interliminal" space of translation studies in favour of literary criticism, since the translation practice, being time-bound and ideology-cued, constitutes a former 'fixed' reading of the original work the scholar is willing to analyse.<sup>151</sup> Gaddis Rose maintains "In literary critiques there should be potentially equal standing for the original texts and their translations.

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<sup>146</sup> Hokenson and Munson, *The Bilingual Text*, 3.

<sup>147</sup> *Ivi*, 4.

<sup>148</sup> Anthony Pym, "Propositions on Cross-Cultural Communication and Translation" in *Target* 16/1 (2004), 2. DOI: 10.1075/target.16.1.02pym. Accessed January 4th, 2017.

<sup>149</sup> Hokenson and Munson, *The Bilingual Text*, 4.

<sup>150</sup> Marilyn Gaddis Rose, *Translation and Literary Criticism* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997), 90.

<sup>151</sup> Gaddis Rose, *Translation and Literary Criticism*, 7.

Granting equal standard to the text of the original and the text(s) of the translation is not the same as giving them equal merit. Nor is it getting deeply involved with the insolvable concept of equivalence.” Although Gaddis Rose developed her model using allograph translations and even back-translations into English (on Jane Austen, for instance), the self-translated bilingual text suits such approach perfectly, as Hokenson and Munson’s aim is to read and criticise the bilingual text as a whole (albeit formed by two complementary linguistic and cultural partner versions).

In the article «Cleps pour une histoire de la traductologie soviétique», Christian Balliu points out that Fedorov’s model of *functional equivalence* is applied to the text *as a whole* (not to single translatable elements), it being based on the assumption that:

[...] toute langue évoluée est suffisamment riche pour traduire un contenu qu’une autre langue exprime en unité avec la forme. En outre, les moyens stylistiques de la langue d’arrivée ne servent pas à copier les particularités formelles de l’original, mais à traduire les fonctions stylistiques remplies par les éléments de l’original.<sup>152</sup>

To sum up, what can be learnt from Hokenson and Munson’s milestone monography is that, in their broadest linguistic, cultural and literary sense, the three notions remembered above, i.e., “the bilingual text as stereoscopic, the self-translator as socio-linguistic interculture, and self-translation as functional correspondence” serve as a basis for developing the analyses on self-translations and to “link the period histories along the theoretical arcs”.<sup>153</sup> Not only that: they could be employed to analyse the trajectory of the single self-translator as it is done in Part II of the present thesis.

In contrast with Eco’s and Bassnett’s readings, the scholars who have analysed self-translated texts in depth seem to agree that it can stand on its own two feet. Brian T. Fitch, in a widely quoted study on Beckett,<sup>154</sup> concludes his analyses of the English and French versions by stating that: “the deviations are so great that the second text escapes all theoretical rubrics of standard translation, yet the similarities are so great that neither can it be called an autonomous creation”,<sup>155</sup> thus reinforcing the hypothesis proposed above that self-translation should have a status apart from other practices. Indeed, the intrinsic dissimilarities between languages have possibly been one of the motivational springs for self-translation, all the while not impeding the authors to call their second texts ‘translations’ of the first. The reputation of translation as ‘a Cinderella art’ throughout the Twentieth century had possibly influenced the scholars’ mindset when first engaging with self-translated text.

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<sup>152</sup> Christian Balliu, «Cleps pour une histoire de la traductologie soviétique» in *Meta: journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal* 50/ 3 (2005), 942.

<sup>153</sup> Hokenson and Munson, *The Bilingual Text*, 4.

<sup>154</sup> Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*.

<sup>155</sup> Hokenson and Munson, *The Bilingual Text*, 10.

For Hokenson and Munson, instead, the focus in studying self-translation should rather be on the effects of *bilingualism* and the ensuing linguistic and cultural hybridity, on “the interstices of cultures and languages [...] this in-between or third space [which is] the only possible site of translation”.<sup>156</sup> The challenge is to stop thinking translation “along the vertical axis of *translation studii* whereby a second text descends from the summit or arch-value of the ‘original’, in diminution and loss”.<sup>157</sup> Self-translated texts are, rather, “instantiations of a singular poetics in dual discourse” that connect audiences and time-periods in a peculiar way and whose consequences are yet in need of further studies.

The insistence on interliminality of the dual text and on stereoscopic reading engendered by the bilingual text has proved fruitful also for Michaël Oustinoff in analysing Nabokov, Green and Beckett.<sup>158</sup> For him, as for Hokenson and Munson, self-translation is a domain regulated by its own logic, and it is so because it transgresses the modern and contemporary *doxal* discourse (descriptively and not normatively intended) that considers *translation* and *writing* as two separate activities. Self-translation is instead « *à la fois* traduction et écriture, si bien qu’il ne faudrait pas la réduire à l’écriture seule (en la rangeant dans le champ de la récréation) comme on a tendance à le faire trop souvent. »<sup>159</sup> While self-translation may have its own internal tendencies, intermingling on occasion: domesticating self-translation (*auto-traduction naturalisante*); off-centring self-translation (*auto-traduction décentrée*); and re-creative self-translation (*auto-traduction récréatrice*),<sup>160</sup> it has a constant: that it resists the definition of translation *tout court*.

Theis conceptual basis justifies the analyses of Huston’s self-translations (published autonomously) and their reading as ‘twin texts’ alongside a chronological axis of development of her literary poetics; one that critic Sara Kippur has called an “aesthetics of translatedness” and that is here read as an *aesthetics of redoublement*.

In the light of the theorizations on the twinned text and on Oustinoff’ *bilinguisme d’écriture*, Huston’s self-translations will be scanned to establish whether or not “l’empreinte d’une autre langue peut façonner l’écriture, voire le style d’un auteur”, in that, instead of considering variations as faults in translation, they should be regarded as “effets de style”.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, through the linguistic effect of interference, the first text language may in fact shape the second text, and “L’‘autre langue’ peut [...] contribuer

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<sup>156</sup> Hokenson and Munson, *The Bilingual Text*, 154.

<sup>157</sup> *Ivi*, 206-207.

<sup>158</sup> Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d’écriture et auto-traduction*.

<sup>159</sup> *Ivi*, 57. Emphasis mine

<sup>160</sup> *Ivi*, 29-34.

<sup>161</sup> *Ivi*, 44.

à la genèse d'un style particulier. L'empreinte laissée par l'autre langue pourra être d'autant plus forte qu'elle aura été la première langue d'écriture. » [The other language may contribute to engender a particular style. The imprint left by the other language may be stronger if it was the first language of writing].<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d'écriture et auto-traduction*, 45.





## II. NANCY HUSTON: WRITING AND TRANSLATING THE SELF

“The self-translator is an intermediary of and for an ‘original’ text and, in some interpretations of the term, *also for his or her own ‘self’*”, writes Anthony Cordingley in “Self-translation, going global”.<sup>163</sup> Although the present thesis is not embedded in the framework of *migration studies*, describing “the manifold ways in which writers’ identities, their “selves” are remolded by the move to a new country and the integration into a new language-culture”,<sup>164</sup> a presentation of Huston’s biographical and linguistic peculiarities is esteemed necessary, as primary elements shaping her literary and translational aesthetics.

### 2.1 Nancy Huston. A Polyphonic Artist

Novelist, essayist, harpsichord and piano musician, polymorphic artist, mother of two children and *femme de lettres*, Nancy Huston has written, to date, 16 novels and 14 long essays, meaningfully described by literary critic Jane Koustas as “frequently provocative and somewhat eclectic”.<sup>165</sup> Her production spans over almost 40 years, as her first novel, *Les variations Goldberg* (Paris, Seuil) dates back to 1981 and her latest, *Le club des miracles relatifs*, (Arles, Actes Sud) to 2016.

Her varied artistic production also counts numerous other publications, among which: five children and teen books; four theatre plays; a correspondence collection with French-Algerian author Leïla Sebbar and one with the America author Samuel Kinsler; two film scripts (*Les voleurs de vie* 1998, and *Emporte-moi*, 1999), numberless articles in collective works, (e.g. “Traduttore non è traditore” in *Pour une littérature-monde*), several prefaces to other authors’ works (e.g., *Le choc de la maternité* by Anne Enright, *L’amour selon Mme de Rênal* by Annie Leclerc, *Burqa de chair* by Nelly Arcan) and collaborations to illustrated volumes (e.g. *Poser nue*, with Guy Oberson, 2011).

Her novel *Instruments des ténèbres* (*Instruments of Darkness*) won the *prix Goncourt des lycéens* in 1996 and *Lignes de faille* (*Fault lines*) was awarded the *Prix Femina* in 2006. In 2015, she was awarded with the Blue Metropolis International Literary Grand

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<sup>163</sup> Cordingley, “Self-translation: going global”, 1.

<sup>164</sup> Grutman and Van Bolderen “Self-translation”, 323.

<sup>165</sup> Jane Koustas, *Les belles étrangères: Canadiens in Paris* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2008), 60.

Prix in Montreal, “in recognition of a lifetime of literary achievement”.<sup>166</sup> In her last volume of collected essays, *Carnet de l’incarnation. Textes choisis 2002-2015* she defines herself an “impenitent graphomaniac” because “écrire est [sa] façon de supporter le monde”[Writing is her way of putting up with the world].<sup>167</sup>

Since 1992, Nancy Huston has self-translated all of her fiction works, either from French to English, or vice versa, and has often written her novels simultaneously in the two languages she masters. The practice of self-translation was not immediate in her literary career. Its genesis and development are, on the contrary, fairly complex. Besides, she is also an allograph translator from English to French: among others, she translated *Ghosts*, by Eva Figes, into *Spectres; My Tailor is Rich*, by Ethel Gorham, which was published in French with the same title; *Splendeurs et misères de la maternité*, from the English *The Mother Knot* by Jane Lazarre.

Versatile and prolific writer, Huston has meditated and written extensively on the life experiences that have first led her to learn a foreign language – French –, and subsequently to master it to the point of becoming a renowned author in that language, and eventually to lay claim on the use of her mother language – English – as a language for writing. While discussing the relation between private life and literary production in Simone de Beauvoir, Huston righteously noted:

Though it is not good practice to go rummaging around in an author’s private life in order to inflict ‘psychoanalytic’ interpretations on her novels, it is more justifiable to make connections between the two when the author herself has published thousands of pages of autobiography, as well as openly autobiographical novels.<sup>168</sup>

Thus, taking inspiration from this very sentence, it seems justifiable, in analysing Huston’s own *œuvre*, to explore some of the events that left a mark on her, influencing her literary trajectory to various degrees (e.g., the history of her parents’ divorce and her moving to Paris to learn the French language are configured as milestones in the long path toward the accomplishment of her childish dream to ‘become a Writer’ with a capital ‘W’). Linguistic and cultural exiles, the relevance of childhood and of childish traumas are themes that pervade the vast majority of her novels and that she has explicitly connected to personal experience in various essays, interviews and an autobiography bearing the bilingual title *Bad Girl. Classes de littérature* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2014).

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<sup>166</sup> About the Canadian Prize, see <http://bluemetropolis.org>.

<sup>167</sup> Nancy Huston, *Carnet de l’incarnation. Textes choisis 2002-2015* (Ottawa: L’Émeac and Arles: Actes Sud, 2016).

<sup>168</sup> Nancy Huston, *Longings and Belongings* (Toronto: McArthur & Co., 2005). In another essay within the same collection, she points out: “in all my non-fiction writing, from *Jouer au papa et à l’amant* (1979) to *Losing North* (2002), far from adopting a classic academic style or trying to sound severely scientific, I use a highly personal tone of voice, always including vignettes about my daily life, my readings, my childhood, and so forth” (p. 341).

The aim of the present thesis is not to deduct psychoanalytic interpretations – in the literal sense of the expression – from this thematic pattern. As Huston’s pattern towards the practice of self-translation is a complex and unusual one in the panorama of self-translation studies, in the following paragraphs I will try to reconstruct the various steps of her learning of the foreign language and clarify the aspects of her ambivalent relationship to English. By collecting all the hints scattered in different sources, and recomposing the puzzle into a coherent picture, I will try to retrace her *linguistic* biography, showing its connections with her biography *tout court*.

As we have seen in the introductory chapter, there are a number of reasons why authors self-translate and a number of strategies they apply to achieve this task. The study of self-translation in itself calls for a transdisciplinary perspective: one that considers both the *literary* and the *linguistic* aspects (the ‘self’ and the ‘translation’) of the texts under scrutiny, as well as the *con*-text in which they are created, because, as explained by Cordingley “Using the term ‘self-translation’ concentrates attention on the presence of the translator and [...] on the various morphing of the self which occurs not only in the act of translation but during the composition of the ‘original’”.<sup>169</sup>

Moreover, and perhaps more to the point, this particular case study is a contemporary author who has engaged in *different categories* of self-translation (e.g., simultaneous, delayed),<sup>170</sup> and whose relationship with bilingualism and translation has been thematised in a net of echoing texts, where critical writing is nourished by creative writing, and vice versa. A close analysis of such interconnections within the wider production of this author shows that the practice of self-translation started as a one-time exception to solve a publishing problem but eventually took up a more and more important space with the passing of time, thus shaping Huston’s writing both *thematically* and *stylistically* until it became a constitutive part of her literary poetics, intended as (among its multiple meanings) the set of “choix fait par un auteur parmi tous les possibles (dans l’ordre de la thématique, de la composition, du style, etc.) littéraires.” [the choices made by an author among numberless literary possibilities (in terms of themes, composition, style, etc.)].<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Cordingley, “Self-translation, going global”, 2.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Rainier Grutman, «Autotranslation», in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* edited by Mona Baker (Padstow: TJ International, 2000).

<sup>171</sup> Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage*. (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 106.

### 2.1.1 A Canadian Childhood and a French Adulthood

Nancy Louise Huston was born in Calgary, in the Anglophone province of Alberta, Canada, on the 16th September 1953. The Huston family has wide-reaching roots. In her article “Deux voyages retour simple”, the author retraces the origins of her paternal ancestors back to Ireland, where the famine “due aux catastrophiques récoltes de patates irlandaises avait poussé quelques Huston désespérés à fuir leur verte patrie; et que de fil en aiguille ou plutôt de bateau en charrette, certains d’entre eux avaient échoué à l’Ouest du Canada”.<sup>172</sup> In the essay “Towards a patriotism of ambiguity”, she also quotes a grandfather Kester, who “took the initiative of removing the o from its name Koester, in order to make it look less German.”<sup>173</sup> In line with the family history, Nancy’s early childhood is quite rootless; her parents moved eighteen times during their nine years of marriage and her first six years of life.

Speaking of the influence her parents had on her character, Huston recalls that, whereas her father was passionate for the exact sciences and introduced her to the marvels of physics and mathematics, her mother had, instead, a penchant for arts, read incessantly, played the piano well and loved theatre, opera and ballet.<sup>174</sup> When Nancy was six years old (her brother Lorne was eight and her sister Pat three), their parents got divorced and Nancy’s mother moved to Chicago, where she pursued a PhD in Political Sciences. Her father, Jim Huston, remarried shortly afterwards with a young German woman who had recently emigrated from the FRG, and they soon had another baby, Arthur.

The reiterated references to this event in Huston’s essayistic production clearly show how the separation of her parents was a crucial experience for Nancy. In her adult life, the different degree of proximity of her parental figures have come to account for her dichotomies as an individual and especially as a writer. Indeed, when she comments upon her literary career in the light of her psychoanalytic studies, Huston observes

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<sup>172</sup> Nancy Huston, “Deux voyages retour simple” (p. 41-56), in *Une enfance d’ailleurs. 17 écrivains récontent* edited by Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar (Paris: J’ai lu, 2002), 45.

<sup>173</sup> Nancy Huston, *Longings and Belongings* (Toronto: McArthur and Co., 2005), 272. This essay collection in English reunites the translations of texts previously published in French in two different volumes: *Désirs et réalités* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1995) and *Ames et corps* (Arles: Actes sud, 2004)

<sup>174</sup> In her *Journal de la création* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), Huston devotes a passage to this reflection [16 May 1988]: “Une mère intellectuelle: étudiante, professeur et puis...absente (c’est presque une contradiction dans les termes, la ‘mère absente’); vivante, mais ailleurs; ‘en voyage’; auréolée du prestige des pays exotiques. Une mère-idée, une mère-esprit, une mère-lettre ; livre; symbole. Un père, certes intellectuel aussi, mais au contraire très proche. S’occupant de mon corps. Peut-être pas en faisant la cuisine, mais à travers bien d’autres gestes : soignant mes maladies d’enfance, pensant mes blessures, mes coupant les ongles et les cheveux, m’apprenant à nager, m’entraînant avec lui dans des randonnées en forêt ou en montagne, encourageant mes prouesses sportives. À partir de l’âge de six ans, donc : un père totalement présent, corps et esprit ; une mère présente exclusivement par l’écriture. »

that, despite the paternal fancy for exact sciences and the maternal fancy for humanities,

It would be too pat to say that I owe the right hemisphere of my brain to my mother and the left to my father, and that my own sense of being painfully divided between theory and fiction reflects my refusal to choose between these two individuals, who split apart when I was six. No, the fact is that my mother is gifted with a down-to-earth, rational, efficient personality, whereas my father is a dreamer, a man tormented by doubts and spiritual interrogations – he grew interested in physics, he once told me, as a means to understanding metaphysics.<sup>175</sup>

Thus, rather than being a genetic inheritance, her sense of dividedness seems to be a construction deriving from the physical absence of her mother. In *Journal de la création*, for instance, Huston devotes a passage to the features that made her construe her parents as opposites: on the one hand,

Une mère intellectuelle: étudiante, professeur et puis...absente (c'est presque une contradiction dans les termes, la 'mère absente'); vivante, mais ailleurs; 'en voyage'; auréolée du prestige des pays exotiques. Une mère-idée, une mère-esprit, une mère-lettre ; livre; symbole.

On the other hand,

Un père, certes intellectuel aussi, mais au contraire très proche. S'occupant de mon corps. Peut-être pas en faisant la cuisine, mais à travers bien d'autres gestes: soignant mes maladies d'enfance, pensant mes blessures, mes coupant les ongles et les cheveux, m'apprenant à nager, m'entraînant avec lui dans des randonnées en forêt ou en montagne, encourageant mes prouesses sportives.<sup>176</sup>

Huston interprets this dicotomy – “un père totalement présent, corps et esprit ; une mère présente exclusivement par l'écriture” – as the origin of her love for writing. Had her mother not abandoned her family in such a drastic manner, Nancy would have never become a writer, let alone a *French* writer.

Nancy's first encounter with a foreign language happens coincidentally to the traumatic experience of her parents' separation. In fact, while the parents were beginning the procedures of divorce in an atmosphere of “quiet agreement”, the soon-to-be stepmother took charge of the three Huston children and brought them with her to her homeland, the village of Immerath near Koln in Germany, for their summer vacation. Her first encounter with a foreign language, occurring at such a delicate time in her life, left an indelible mark: “I latched onto the German language like a life buoy and I learned to speak it fluently in four months – *I liked myself much better with the protection of the mask, this veneer of the foreigner.*”<sup>177</sup> In fact, while acquisition of the

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<sup>175</sup> Nancy Huston, “Knowledge Uprooted” in *Longings and Belongings*, 332.

<sup>176</sup> On the 16 May 1988, in *Journal de la création*, 259-260.

<sup>177</sup> Nancy Wigston “Nancy Huston Unbound” URL: <http://www.booksincanada.com/article/view.asp?id=3118>. Accessed: January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Emphasis mine.

mother language is the first and in many respects the most influential since it “develops parallel to the cognitive and social abilities of the child”,<sup>178</sup> (even though the extent of such influence is still debated by neuroscientists),<sup>179</sup> the learning of a second language is characterized by a different *consciousness* of the learner, who is aware of his/her process of appropriation of an ‘alien’ code.

The most significant consequence of Nancy’s mother’s physical displacement was that, as she moved to London, it was through a dense correspondence that she remained connected to her children. Writing letters to her mother was Huston’s first apprenticeship in story-telling, and a rather intense one since the very purpose of writing was to find new, clever ways to keep her public – the far-away mother – interested in her daily life.

I suddenly see crystal clear that my vocation as a novelist dates back to my childhood – when, to reassure myself and perhaps even to survive, I had to learn to convincingly conjure up the love of the person who is usually the very symbol of proximity and presence – but who, in my case, was far away and permanently inaccessible.<sup>180</sup>

According to the author, this childish ‘initiation to literature’ also explains her life-long affection for the use of the second person singular in her fictional as well as non-fictional writing: *Cantiques de plaine/Plainsong*, *Tombeau de Romain Gary*, *Dance Noire/Black Dance* and *Bad Girl*. *Classes de littérature* bear witness of this preference of hers.

### 2.1.2 Literary Apprenticeship: Fiction vs Theory

In the summer of 1968, when Nancy is turning 15, the Hustons settle in New Hampshire. Huston describes herself at the time as a “wanting-to-be-woman child, just a few years too young to belong to the rock hippie peaceful violent crazy politicised drop-out sit-in generation which exploded in the course of the same year”.<sup>181</sup> In a small private ‘bucolic’ school in the woods, Nancy’s love for literature was nourished in manifold ways: she learnt the English translation of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the plays by Sartre and Cocteau in their French original texts, Shakespeare’s masterpieces along

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<sup>178</sup> Anna Ciliberti, *Manuale di glottodidattica. Per una cultura dell’insegnamento linguistico*. (Roma: Carrocci, 2012), 24. Translation is mine.

<sup>179</sup> For an overview of the state-of-the-art in this research field cf. Deák, Gideon, O. “Interrelationship of Language and Cognitive Development (Overview)” in *Encyclopaedia of Language Development* edited by Patricia J. Brooks and Vera Kempe (Thousand Oakes: Sage Publishing, 2014).

<sup>180</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 87-88.

<sup>181</sup> Huston, *Longings and Belongings*, 240

with Twentieth century authors such as Tennessee Williams, Robert Coover, Richard Brautigan, Anatole France, Jerzy Kozinski and Walt Whitman. Her English teacher, she remembers in “Knowledge uprooted”, introduced her to her own ability to write:

He taught us that literature spoke of death, sex, madness, fear – of *ourselves* – and that provided we approach any page, blank or printed, with the fullness of our living strength, it would be within our reach. Not a speck of literary theory. How was that possible? Nothing but passion, compassion, listening and communicating. When I think about it, nothing I learned about literature in that strange little school in the backwoods of New Hampshire has been belied in the decades since.<sup>182</sup>

Turning 17, Nancy moved again, to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she worked for a year at Harvard as a medical secretary in a psychiatric clinic in order to save some money for attending university. Her university education was, by her own saying, quite “checkered”; she reports having followed a course on the literature of the absurd (Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Eugène Ionesco) on the West coast of Canada, another on *Thérèse Desqueyroux* and *Tartatin de Tarascone* in the Bronx and a course on ‘the psychology of writing’, i.e., on Freud, Jung and Simone de Beauvoir in New York, at the Sarah Lawrence College, where she entered with a scholarship, all the while taking up small jobs to earn her own living and taking piano lessons at Julliard School of Drama, Dance and Music in NYC.

In 1973, she left America for a Junior Year Abroad in Paris. The choice of the country and language was not essential, but quite fortuitous: “la nécessité c’était de me sauver.”<sup>183</sup> The meeting with the foreign tongue, anyhow, brought to her mind the sense of elation she first felt in learning German as a child. “Ça aurait pu être l’Italie ou l’Espagne, mais il se trouvait que mon français était passable. Certes, je soulignais encore en lisant, et personne ne m’avait encore initiée aux délices du subjonctif, mais je me débrouillais.”<sup>184</sup> If her wish to become a novelist was deep-rooted in her childhood, by this time it had become her strongest drive. “Je me souviens que je suis arrivée en France en disant à qui voulait l’entendre que c’était mon projet dans la vie d’être écrivain”.<sup>185</sup>

The ‘project’, however, took longer to realize than she had initially wished. In post-68 Parisian, *École de Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*, in fact the atmosphere was not so favourable for aspiring novelists: “Theory was the thing”, she recounts in *Longings*

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<sup>182</sup> Huston, *Longings and Belongings*, 332-333.

<sup>183</sup> Nancy Huston, “En français dans le texte” in *Désirs et réalités* (Arles: Actes sud, 1995), 264.

<sup>184</sup> Huston, “En français dans le texte”, 267. Cf. also Mi-Kyung, Yi. « Épreuves de l’étranger : entretien avec Nancy Huston réalisé par Mi-Kyung Yi » in *Horizons philosophiques* 12/1 (2001), 5: “Il se trouve que c’était la langue française, non pas à cause de mes origines canadiennes, mais parce qu’au lycée, j’ai eu un très bon professeur de français d’une part et, d’autre part, mon université new-yorkaise avait une antenne à Paris. Mais si ça avait été l’italien, l’effet intérieur, psychologique aurait été identique.”

<sup>185</sup> Mi-Kyung, Yi. « Épreuves de l’étranger », 3.



*and Belongings*,<sup>186</sup> where she recalls catching up with the up-to-date, fashionable thinkers of the time: “The complete works of Marx and Engels, but also Foucault and Althusser, but also Derrida and Barthes, Metz and Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari, Lacan, and so forth. On top of all of this, in that same vintage year of 1975 new books and ideas were coming out – books by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, Annie Leclerc and Marie Cardinal, adding some feminist spice to my already tasty *ratatouille* of theories.”<sup>187</sup> This seems a fortunate coincidence: in his introduction to *Literature, Theory and Common Sense*, Antoine Compagnon explains that at the beginning of the Seventies, after decades of “foot-dragging and isolation”, “French theory found itself from one moment to the next on the cutting edge of literary studies around the world”.<sup>188</sup>

Learning a foreign language and coming into contact with the whole set of academic, radically anti-fiction theories could be construed as fairly discouraging obstacles to launching into fictional writing. Instead, Huston describes them as necessary preliminary steps. “Il m’a fallu et le détour par la langue française et aussi, curieusement, le détour par la théorie.” [I needed both the detour through the French language and the detour through theory].<sup>189</sup> Starting to use French for ‘professional’ writing is described by Huston as a liberating experience; the new language acted on her as a rejuvenating source of inspiration. Her first published text was an article for a new-born feminist journal, *Sorcières*; on the request of Xavière Gauthier, Huston was “forced” to start writing in a foreign language outside of the academy, “avec beaucoup de trépidation et de maladresse,” she recalls, “mais aussi avec un plaisir que je n’aurais même pas pu imaginer en anglais.”<sup>190</sup> In the same period, she also contributed to other reviews, such as *Histoire d’elles*, *Les temps modernes* and *Les cahiers du GRIF*.

As regards the ‘détour par la théorie’, instead, she would recall with some irony decades later: within of two years she had become a real ‘left-wing’ Parisian intellectual.<sup>191</sup> One of the mentors who influenced her thinking most at the time was probably the semiologist and literary critic Roland Barthes. She followed his large seminar entitled “A Lover’s Discourse”, as well as his *petit séminaire* on “The Intimidations of

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<sup>186</sup> Huston, *Longings and Belongings*.

<sup>187</sup> Huston, “Knowledge Uprooted”, 335.

<sup>188</sup> Antoine Compagnon, *Literature, Theory and Common Sense* translated by Carol Cosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>189</sup> Mi-Kyung, Yi. «Épreuves de l’étranger », 3.

<sup>190</sup> *Ivi*, 2.

<sup>191</sup> Huston, “Knowledge Uprooted”, 336.

Language”, “The opera” and “The Practise, Function and Ideology of Crossing-Out” in 1975.<sup>192</sup>

Barthes was also the supervisor of her *mémoire*, which dealt with the linguistic interdictions and taboos in the French language, and was published in 1980 by Payot with the title *Dire et interdire, éléments de jurologie*.

French swearwords, blasphemies and insults were probably more accessible to me as an object of scientific study than they would have been to a native speaker, because I didn't react to them emotionally.<sup>193</sup>

The leap into fictional writing was only possible after Barthes's death,<sup>194</sup> – of her theoretical *superego* – as Huston avows in an interview with Catherine Argand (*L'entretien*): only then did she feel the courage to abandon theory and start writing fiction. According to Huston, Barthes himself had wished to become a novelist, but being such a disillusioned theorist, could not get started because he found it difficult to believe in any fiction he wrote, even in the name of his own characters.

Huston's first novel – *Les variations Goldberg* – with its precise, finely shaped narrative structure certainly bears witness to her fondness for theory and in particular for the form. Each of its 30 chapters – corresponding to Goldberg's variations – report the interior monologue, the interior 'music', in a way, of each of the members of the audience while Johan Sebastian Bach's *music* for piano is being played by the protagonist, Liliane Kulainn. There is no proper action, only an investigation into the characters' minds, revealing their feelings for the beautiful pianist, the relationships of friendship, love or enmity linking them to her and among them...and a final surprising revelation: all the interior monologues have been imagined and interpreted by the pianist, as a sort of metronome, while she was playing each variation, in order to distance herself from the emotion of the music. Interestingly enough, Huston “became fluent” in French “at almost exactly the same time as I discovered the harpsichord (1971).” While when she ‘abandoned her mother language’, she also abandoned the piano she had been practising since she was little. « A strange and secret paradigm has come to form and deform my thinking about these things for the past quarter of a century », she wrote in 1995,

I see *English and the piano* as motherly instruments: emotional, romantic, manipulative, sentimental and crude. In both, variations and dynamics are emphasized, exaggerated, imposed, flagrantly and unavoidably expressed. French and the harpsichord, on the other

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<sup>192</sup> Huston, “Knowledge Uprooted”, 337.

<sup>193</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 49.

<sup>194</sup> Roland Barthes died in 1980.

hand, are neutral, intellectual instruments. They require control, restraint, and delicate mastery; their expressivity is infinitely more subtle, discreet and refined.<sup>195</sup>

### 2.1.3 Exile, Motherhood and Literature

In the early Eighties, Nancy Huston married Bulgarian philosopher and critic Tzvetan Todorov.<sup>196</sup> She taught Semiotics at the Sarah Lawrence College and Feminist Theory at the Columbia University in Paris, as well as English language at the French Ministry of Finance. “De fil en aiguille, comme on dit, sans jamais avoir prononcé la phrase: ‘Je m’installe définitivement en France’, j’ai construit une vie ici.”<sup>197</sup> One of her first attempts at writing a long essay is not brilliantly received:

Nowhere more than in *Mosaïque de la pornographie*, written during the nine months of my first pregnancy (1982), did I deploy my knowledge of literary theory more systematically. I carefully analysed the literary genre of porn in its ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms, as consumed primarily by men or primarily by women, and conducted a ruthless narratological study of points of view, implicit content, solicited identifications, and so forth. The book was a total flop.<sup>198</sup>

Huston’s first child, Lea, was born in 1982. Her memories of that period seem to be shaded by a tone of regret: “Threatened, no doubt, by the irrefutable reality of motherhood I indulged in [...] frenetic theoretical activity throughout the early 80s – writing books and articles, teaching and lecturing left and right.”<sup>199</sup> Apart from distracting herself with theory, she started realizing the depth and vastitude of the trauma connected to the English language. Motherhood opened her eyes on this aspect because it forced her to think about the language she was supposed to nourish her own daughter with. Trying to speak English to two-year-old Lea was like demasking the fiction and finding reality again:

C’était un effort purement volontariste [...] je me suis mise à chatouiller Léa en lui disant de petites phrases caressantes en anglais. Presque tout de suite je me suis interrompue. Ça me troublait drôlement. Je me suis forcée un peu, j’ai dit : “My little girl”, “My angel

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<sup>195</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 50.

<sup>196</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, born in Sofia 1<sup>st</sup> March 1939, is a Bulgarian-French naturalized scholar; among his most famous books: *Théorie de la littérature* (1965), *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970), *Poétique de la prose* (1971), *Qu’est-ce que le structuralisme?* (1977), *Théories du symbole* (1977), *Mikhail Bakhtine. Le principe dialogique* (1981), *La Conquête de l’Amérique* (1982), *Critique de la critique* (1984) *La Vie commune. Essais d’anthropologie générale* (1995), *L’Esprit des Lumières* (2006) and more recently *La Littérature en péril* (2007).

<sup>197</sup> Huston, *Désirs et réalités*, 267.

<sup>198</sup> Huston, “Knowledge Uprooted”, 340.

<sup>199</sup> *Ivi*, 341.

sweetheart”, “Give Mummy a kiss” – et je me suis arrêtée net. C’est impossible. [...] c’est comme di ma voix devenait réellement la voix de ma mère.<sup>200</sup>

Coming to terms with motherhood for the first time was fundamental to shed light on her ambivalent relationship to her mother, her mother tongue and to develop a reflection on her sense of abandonment. In an interview with Catherine Argand she stated that she “started comprehending her loss” only in that moment, and she concludes sadly: « c’est une chose qui ne se répare pas ».<sup>201</sup>

Halfway in the Eighties, the reflections on her condition of expatriate seem to occupy her more and more pressingly. Her life as a foreign mother and writer in France is the main theme of the correspondence with Algerian-French novelist Leïla Sebbar. Their letters are published under the title *Lettres parisiennes. Autopsie de l’exil*, in 1986. A meaningful subtitle, in that it declared the experience of exile as a dead one (“autopsie”) and, as a consequence, claimed an *apparently* fully acquired and acknowledged identity of the French author. Despite the title, though, the correspondence is a multifaceted sketch of all the aspects of cultural and linguistic exile – which, judging by the content of Nancy’s letters, is still far from being an unproblematic state. The terms used to summarize the letters at the end of the book are particularly meaningful in this regard, underlining – to different degrees – her attachment to her feeling of being still ‘a stranger’ in Paris. The concept of exile is unfolded by counterposing and juxtaposing the different elements that made up her identity: thus, in “contre la francophilie”, she explains her distance from the French people; in “la friction précieuse” [precious friction], “le recul critique” [the critical distance], as well as “la division, le déséquilibre » [division, imbalance], it is evident how the feeling of separatedness from the environment around her, is necessary for literary creation and has little to do with the specific situation of France and a lot to do with the ‘condition of the artist’. Other evokative titles in this sense are: “la Canadienne berrichonne” [a Canadian in the Berry], “la distanciation” [distancing oneself], “vivre entre guillemets” [living in brackets], “l’écart, l’incompréhension” [gap, incomprehension] “vivre entre parenthèses” [living between paratheses], “l’appartenance aliénée” [alienated belonging], “l’exil obsession” [exile as obsession], “le désespoir serein?” [serene despair?], “la détresse dérisoire” [laughable distress], “la recherché de l’écart” [looking for the gap], “étrangéïser” [making foreign]. It is not clear whether the condition of voluntary exile has favoured Huston’s literary career, or whether the dream to become a writer has fostered a need to flee her linguistic and cultural roots and take refuge in Europe. Be as it may, both experiences seem to be ultimately ascribable to her childhood trauma.

[...] if I am happy in exile (in all the meanings of the word, metaphorical and literal), it is because it gives a concrete form to the solitude that is the condition of the activity that

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<sup>200</sup> Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, 138-139.

<sup>201</sup> Catherine Argand, “Nancy Huston: L’Entretien.” *Lire* 293 (March 2001): 31-35. Translation is mine.

matters most to my heart. In the midst of a large family, in the midst of all the groups of children and adolescents to whom I belonged ... I have often felt much lonelier than how I feel this morning, coiled up as I am in the absolute silence of my sixth-floor-window-on-yard studio. [...] It may be a form of madness. If it is, I do not care to know. I felt recently with a new force *how vital it is for me to live in the French language*; and to what extent this artifice is indispensable to me in order to function from day to day.<sup>202</sup>

The choice to live abroad had no contingent, superficial reasons. The power and weight of childhood is fully recognized here as the formative nucleus of her art:

It goes without saying that this does not concern my real mother - our relationships have long since ceased to be turbulent; it only concerns *the despair of a little girl who no longer exists ... and her tricks to overcome it*.<sup>203</sup>

At the end of 1987, shortly afterwards the publication of these observations, Nancy discovers that she is going to become a mother for the second time.<sup>204</sup> The boy, Sasha, will be born on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1988. It is the occasion to dwell on what Huston calls 'the *mind-body problem*', i.e., the relationship(s) between the mind and the body, and the differences in this relation for men and women. This theme, clearly nourished by her own experience, has fascinated her deeply, throughout her career. A comparison of the texts dealing with these themes shows a growing accuracy in their analysis. From *A l'amour comme à la guerre*, correspondence with Sam Kinsey (1984), to *Journal de la création* (as I have said, recounting more intimate experience; 1990), up to the more recent and scandal-provoking essay *Reflets dans un oeil d'homme* (2013). The prefaces to *Splendeur et misères de la maternité* by Jane Lazarre (2001),<sup>205</sup> to *Le choc de la maternité* by Anne Enright (2007) as well as to *Burqa de chair*, posthumous work by Nelly Arcan (2011), reflect Huston's affection for investigating the typically – and exclusively – feminine life experience.

In *Journal de la création*, written in French in 1988 and published in 1990, she explores the possible dichotomy – especially for women – between *literary* creation and *pro-creation*. The *Journal* is a hybrid text where journal entries intermingle with flashbacks and academic reflections. Throughout the period of her pregnancy, the author questions the foetus she is carrying (not yet knowing whether it will be a boy or a girl), recounting some of the innumerable aspects of this physical and spiritual experience of giving life to another human being. Contextually, through the analysis of diaries, letters, extracts of poems and novels of famous women writers who have inspired her, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Sand, Virginia Woolf, Zelda

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<sup>202</sup> Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, 138. Translation and emphasis are mine.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>204</sup> Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, 138-139.

<sup>205</sup> Which she also translated from English to French. The original title is *The Mother Knot* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

Fitzgerald, Simone de Beauvoir<sup>206</sup> and Sylvia Plath,<sup>207</sup> Huston investigates the relationship between private life and literary creation of women artists. She analyses the testimonies they left about their childhood, their relationship with their parents, and later on with their male partners – artists in their turn. Huston takes notes also of her own – dichotomic or compatible? – situation of mother *and femme de lettres* who has built a family with a man whose profession is also teaching and writing. The role of mother and that of the novelist have altogether contrasting requirements:

Une romancière peut avoir besoin, dans ses livres, d'être violente, ou lascive, ou folle, ou d'un pessimisme amer; toutes des mauvaises qualités chez une mère. Une mère, *en tant que mère*, doit être attentive à autrui, établir et entretenir des liens. Une romancière, en tant que romancière, doit être égoïste; son art exige un certain détachement.<sup>208</sup>

Huston minted a meaningful term to define her effort of being both: the word “romancière” reveals, on the one hand, her perduring fascination for wordplays (especially, but not exclusively, in French) and, on the other, her tendency, once again, to the juxtaposition of irreconcilable, dichotomic terms.

*Journal de la création* also provides the context to discuss two life-changing experiences, a physical and a psychological illness, which have occurred in the short lapse of two years and dismantled the ‘certainties’ she so fervently believed having achieved during this first decade of literary production. The “terrifying physical illness”, a hypoesthetic condition caused by myelitis, started in February 1986.<sup>209</sup> Her feet start feeling numb and, in a couple of days, the lack of sensation spreads from her feet up to all her legs, thighs and womb. The metaphor chosen by Huston<sup>210</sup> to explain to herself what was happening refers to the Greek myth of Philemon and Baucis: it is as though her roots were freezing and she was transforming into a tree, thus suggesting a possible psychosomatic origin of her condition, caused by the rejection of her linguistic roots, the English mother tongue and of the childhood memories associated with it. Other textual passages, on the other hand, contradict this vision. She reports,

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<sup>206</sup> Simone de Beauvoir's thoughts on feminism are the focus of a chapter, “Simone de Beauvoir's Children”, in the essays collection *Longings and Belongings* (5-18), where Huston analyses the writings of this writer and philosopher who had been an idol and model during her youthful years in Paris.

<sup>207</sup> In order: Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Georges Sand and Alfred de Musset, Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, Georges Batailles and Colette Peignot, Unica Zurn and Hans Bellmer, Myriam Bat-Yosef, Emma Santos, Julia Kristeva, Monique Wittig.

<sup>208</sup> Mona Chollet, “« Je suis, donc je pense » : la révolution copernicienne de Nancy Huston” in *Périphéries* (2001). URL <http://www.peripheries.net/article254.html>. Accessed January 5th, 2017.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. also Mi-Kyung, «Épreuves de l'étranger ».

<sup>210</sup> “In my mind, the neurological illness would forever be connected to my new awareness that I was living in exile.” Huston, “Knowledge Uprooted”, 342.

for instance, a note from her diary when she is being hospitalized for specific diagnostic examinations:

Comment décrire ça? Je me sens delestée d'un poids. C'est comme si mon surmoi était parti en vacances. Depuis le début j'ai tenu à ce que ce symptôme n'ait rien de psychosomatique. Parce que qui dit maladie psychosomatique dit responsabilité.<sup>211</sup>

Despite that, she reflects that her condition surprisingly reminds of what she had written two years before in her *Histoire d'Omayya*: “Les pieds et les mains fourmillent. Les nerfs deviennent des fils de fer électrifiés. Omayya n'a plus de chair. Elle est pure intelligence. Artificielle et froide.”<sup>212</sup> The illness lasted from February to November 1986.

On the first anniversary of this condition in February 1987, Huston annotated the “beginning of a terrifying psychological illness”,<sup>213</sup> in correspondence with the first draft of the novel *Trois fois septembre*,<sup>214</sup> which “embodies an almost perverse linguistic position. Written in French by an Anglophone, it is made up almost exclusively of the diary and letters of a young American girl (ostensibly written in English but ‘extemporaneously’ translated by the girl’s best friend, who is French, as she reads them aloud to her mother”).<sup>215</sup> The drafting is accompanied by an exacerbated intellectual sensitivity to all kinds of coincidence, as well as by insomnia and sudden mood changes.

In the light of her subsequent engagement in self-translation, this turning point in her literary career is particularly crucial and, not surprisingly, marked by an intensification of her feelings toward writing in the foreign language, the French language. In *Journal de la création*, the moment of literary creation is described with a gloomy metaphor of a writer/miner painfully digging a tunnel “à travers l’air”:

(Le 23 avril 1987) - Écrire : creuser un tunnel à travers l’air. L’air est là, c’est le langage infini et arbitraire, on peut le traverser sans creuser quoi que ce soit, on peut parler “comme on respire”. Mais, dès qu’on commence à creuser, les problèmes se posent : ça devrait être un tunnel de quelle largeur ? De quelle hauteur ? De quelle longueur ? Et on rencontre des obstacles, et les murs du tunnel s’effritent, et ses tournants nous coincent, et on se démène, et on se débat...et à la fin, après une longue lutte, on voit la lumière au bout du tunnel. Ensuite, d’autres pourront s’y engouffrer à leur tour pour découvrir le plaisir du solide, de l’inamovible, de la forme au milieu de l’air amorphe. D’autres liront nos livres et auront,

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<sup>211</sup> Huston, *Journal de la création*, 70.

<sup>212</sup> Self-quotation in *Journal de la création*, 74.

<sup>213</sup> Huston, *Journal de la création*, 16.

<sup>214</sup> Nancy Huston, *Trois fois septembre* (Paris: Seuil, 1989). The novel was self-translated into English with the title *Thrice September*, but was never published.

<sup>215</sup> Huston, “Knowledge Uprooted”, 343.

lorsqu'ils émergeront à nouveau dans la langue orale, un autre regard sur 'les mots en l'air'.<sup>216</sup>

After reporting this image of the act of writing, written the year before, she comments (1st April 1988): « Je ne le savais pas encore mais le 'tunnel' que j'avais commencé à creuser allait bientôt se refermer derrière moi sans s'ouvrir devant, et j'allais me trouver dans le noir. »<sup>217</sup> Her uneasiness worsens with the passing months, and later on she writes :

À l'extérieur, je continuais, avec une difficulté croissante, de jouer mes divers 'rôles' dans la vie. À l'intérieur, je ne vivais ni en 1987 (date du calendrier), ni en 1971 (date de mon roman [*Trois fois septembre, nda*]), mais en 1959 (date du départ de ma mère). Je n'étais plus qu'une petite fille abandonnée : une plaie béante, un gouffre de douleur, victime de l'assassinat et assassine. C'était l'enfer.<sup>218</sup>

She was living, once again, on her own skin, the trauma of the departure of her mother. Transforming real life into literature is a way of surviving the trauma: « chacun transforme sa vie en histoire pour la rendre compréhensible, avalable. »<sup>219</sup> Thus, this theme is obsessively reiterated throughout her work. In 1994 she writes:

[...] en matière de langue maternelle, quand j'avais six ans, elle a disparu. Ma mère. Avec sa langue dans sa bouche. *Mary-Louise*, elle s'appellait, s'appelle encore. Et aussi, *Mommy. Mom. Mother*. Elle a été immédiatement remplacée par une jeune émigrée allemande du nom de *Maria. Mutter. Mutti*.<sup>220</sup>

Textual traces of this obsessive reiteration are numerous. In 2002, she returns on the subject:

All mothers are foreigners. The one I lived inside, and whose voice I felt vibrating long before I could hear it [...] - the one of whose flesh I am the flesh - became a stranger to us. *She turned into an idea, an absence, an abstraction, a letter, a woman of letters*. In the letters she wrote to us, her children, she described at length and in detail the foreign countries she was visiting, or going to visit, and the foreign cities she was living in, or planning to live in, and the languages she was learning, Romanic and romantic, fabled and fabulous.<sup>221</sup>

Becoming a writer is thus explained as a way to comprehend the traumatic experience and turn it into a positive source of inspiration. For Huston, the process of turning

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<sup>216</sup> Huston, *Journal de la création*, 181.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>218</sup> Huston, *Journal de la création*, 283.

<sup>219</sup> Huston, *Désirs et réalités*, 265. Also in *Lettres parisiennes*, 210 Huston had avowed: "Pendant ces dernières vacances je me suis aperçue que j'avais toujours eu cet automatisme qu'est la distanciation, ce réflexe qui consiste à « cadrer » les événements, à m'étonner devant eux, à exagérer un tant soit peu mes réactions à leur égard, à me raconter ma vie comme une histoire. » Emphasis mine.

<sup>220</sup> Huston, *Désirs et réalités*, 265.

<sup>221</sup> Nancy Huston, "The Foreign Mother" in *Longings and Belongings* (Toronto: McArthur & Co., 2005) 351-352.



*things* into *ideas and words*, i.e., fabulation is not only the writer's job, but also the most peculiar, the most intrinsically *human* ability, distinguishing our species from all others, and something we have in common with all other individuals on earth.<sup>222</sup>

The “crisis of 1986-87”,<sup>223</sup> i.e., the coincidence of these physical and psychical illnesses, has been later construed by Huston as a fundamental moment in the shaping of her ‘literary self’. The comprehension of the effects of exile and of writing exclusively in a foreign language, superposed to the discovery of motherhood and of its evoking her own infancy, led Huston to open up to the possibility of reembracing her native English language and to reappropriate a medium that was emotionally overcharged.

The novel which had contributed to engender her psychological crisis – in Huston's own interpretation – already shows the signs of the change about to come. *Trois fois septembre*, written in French, manually, on blood-red paper, is in fact a highly dramatic novel: *Selena*, an extremely fragile young American girl – whose boyfriend has been psychologically destroyed by the Vietnam warfield – has just committed suicide. Her best friend *Solange*, a former schoolmate of French origins, receives as a heritage a bunch of letters, notes, and scraps of diary written during the previous two years. In order to understand the reasons of the girl's suicide, Solange orally translates Selena's texts (written in American English) into French for her own mother, Renée, who also knew the girl, as she was her professor of French.

But the real switch comes the following year: “As of the fall of 1989, when *Journal de la creation* was at the printers, I began writing Plainsong. *In English*.” As we are going to see in detail in Chapter 3, her switching back to the English language is the decisive step toward the definition of her literary poetics.

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<sup>222</sup> Cf. Nancy Huston, *L'espèce fabulatrice* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2008) and *The Tale-tellers. A Short Study of Humankind* (Toronto, McArthur & Co., 2008).

<sup>223</sup> Huston, “Knowledge Uprooted”, 343.

## 2.2 Linguistic Doubling and the Construction of a Literary Identity

What emerges from Nancy Huston's multi-faceted, rhizomatic reflection, and from the complexity of themes summarized above is the refusal to passively accept a choice between art and life, between body and mind, like a multitude of women artists before her were forced to do.

Should we find one unifying aspect of all these varied texts, it would certainly be the marked preference for hybridity, variety and polyphony, and for showing both sides of the coin on every occasion. Huston's conception of the artistic creation is a constant juxtaposing and balancing of opposites and her whole literary production is crossed, recurrently, insistently, by couples of mirroring figures: mother vs. father; theory vs. literature, fiction vs. non-fiction; immanent, daily life vs. immortal, artistic creation; and most importantly for this analysis, mother tongue vs. acquired language, English vs. French.

The relationship between the languages – shaped by the experience quoted in 2.1 – is at first asymmetrical and hierarchical. Writing and self-translating gradually become a means to welcome the complexities of bilingualism, by letting the opposites *coexist* and *dialogue* within her writing.

### 2.2.1 Reflections on the Split Identity

Nancy Huston is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural intellectual and writer and by virtue of her reflections on these conditions, her literary work has often been analysed as a discourse on identity. Reflections on this complex concept developed greatly in the post-modernist episteme and in a number of directions that are beyond the scope of this thesis, concerned with the historical, social, political, anthropological and philosophical constructions of the sense of identity in individuals and groups of people. Observations, here, will be limited to the perception and construction of identity of a single individual within a literary corpus.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Given her peculiar choice of exiling herself voluntarily in France, the figure of Nancy Huston cannot be superposed to that of a post-colonial subject; in this regard, Ioanna Chatzidimitriou makes an important distinction: "This obvious similarity between translingual writers and the post-colonial multi-lingual condition should not obscure two fundamental differences: the communal character of historical experience whether elating or traumatizing, and the institutionally normative imposition of the foreign language upon the native tongue." Ioanna Chatzidimitriou, "Self-translation as Minorization Process:

An identity can be perceived as ‘split’ when compared and contrasted to that of individuals or groups who – rather self-deceptively – think of themselves as ‘monolingual’ and ‘monocultural’.

After a life of hearing questions about his feeling ‘half Lebanese and half French’ or ‘more Lebanese than French’ or viceversa, francophone author Amin Maalouf, who was born in Beirut and, like Huston, emigrated to France, explains with these words his own bilingual/bicultural status:

Moitié français, donc, et moitié libanais? Pas du tout! *L'identité ne se compartimente pas, elle ne se répartit ni par moitiés, ni par tiers, ni par plages cloisonnées. Je n'ai pas plusieurs identités, j'en ai une seule, faite de tous les éléments qui l'ont façonnée, selon un 'dosage' particulier qui n'est jamais le même d'une personne à l'autre. [Half French, half Lebanese, then? Not at all! The identity is not compartmentalized, it is not divided, neither in halves nor thirds, nor closed off beaches. I do not have several identities; I have one, made up of all the elements that have shaped it, according to peculiar 'dosages' that are never the same from one person to another].*<sup>225</sup>

Somewhat naively, culture is still conceived by some as a closed, impermeable and homogenous set of rules, rites, references, traditional food, books and other various non-written modes of interacting among human beings and interpreting one's portion of the world; all of the above is often thought to be dependent on one's belonging to such or such nation, and necessitating of defence from ‘external’ influences. Ever since the origin of nations and nationalisms, ‘national identity’ has thus very often been – and still is – a meaningful, discriminating issue when it comes to literature. As Edward Said pointed out,

The modern history of literary study is strictly bound up with the development of cultural nationalism, whose aim was first to distinguish the national canon, then to maintain it in a place reserved for eminence, authority and aesthetic autonomy.<sup>226</sup>

Thus, for the sake of simplification, authors are usually classified into groups – primarily determined by the language in which their works are published (by the media, the market, the academic community, the educational system). These categories, which are fundamental for the sake of studying a range of phenomena, are hardly ever able to represent a complex reality in a faithful manner: the work of any individual writer is an irreducible mixture of influences and echoes from the most

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Nancy Huston's "Limbes/Limbo" in *SubStance* 119/38-2, (2009). DOI: 10.1353/sub.o.0050. Accessed January 4th, 2017.

<sup>225</sup> Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières* (Paris: Grasset, 1998), 10. Emphasis mine.

<sup>226</sup> Edward Said, "Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations" in *Race and Class* 32.1 (1990). DOI:10.1177/030639689003200101. Accessed January 4th, 2017.

varied sources of the vast literary world. This paradigm, moreover, can be applied not only to individuals but also to literary texts.<sup>227</sup>

In this framework, authors who write in more than one language and, *a fortiori*, self-translators, represent a glaring, outstanding case. The bilingual thinks, speaks and writes in at least two languages, lives and is shaped by at least two cultural systems, sometimes knows two distinct geographic areas and all of these elements contribute to form his or her vision, his or her personal mixed *Weltanschauung*. Moreover, the self-translator chooses the task of translation, i.e., the task to put these different elements in relation with each other, in order to conceptualize, show, describe, understand the difference, the gaps between them, which can sometimes be conceived of, as happens to Huston, as problematic or painful ones.

Indeed, many self-translators, not to say the vast majority of them, show a tendency to take position with respect to their bilingual writing, i.e., to explain, discuss, legitimize, or more simply narrate, this feature of theirs, which is evidently neither given nor taken for granted in the literary discourse. The linguistic identity is, on the contrary, a matter of the utmost relevance and its ‘composition’ is variously defined by different authors who are driven by their experience to reflect upon the implications of being from a different country than the one they live and write in, for instance, or of publishing the same books in different languages and for different readerships.

The passage from one country to another, and from a language to another, raises – either willingly or unwillingly – the question of the ‘split identity’, and each author chooses his/her own definitions to deconstruct this issue and reveal the stereotypes usually associated with it. Huston’s answer when asked about her ‘feeling French’ after decades of living in the Hexagone recuperates the elements that in her view constitute an identity, intended as the most intimate core, the essence of a human being:<sup>228</sup>

Do you feel French by now? People often ask me. (To live abroad is to be perpetually subjected to silly questions.) What on earth might it be like, to “feel French”? How would I know were it to happen to me one day? Foreigners can be given French nationality [...] they can be given French diplomas and French honours [...] *They will never be French for all that, because no one has the power to give them a French childhood. [...] Your childhood stays with you all your life, no matter where you go.*<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Julia Kristeva introduced the Bakhtinian notion of *intertextuality* in the Western world and in the French language with her essay *Séméiôtikè. Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969). On the notion of intertextuality applied to self-translated texts, Jane Wilhelm, “Autour de Limbes/*Limbo*: un hommage à Samuel Beckett de Nancy Huston” in *Palimpsestes* 18 (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2006).

<sup>228</sup> Balint-Babos offers an interesting perspective on the different declinations of identity in Huston’s texts, distinguishing between the personal identity, and the fictional identity, the fabulation on the Self in the text. Adina Balint-Babos, “Nancy Huston: penser l’identité multiple” in *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l’Ouest* 24/1-2 (2012). DOI : 10.7202/1021929ar. Accessed January 4th, 2017.

<sup>229</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 6-7.

Huston's reflections seem to suggest that for her the core of the matter is not that the expatriate is split between two life experiences; the matter is that these different parts play different roles in shaping and structuring one's own perception of identity.

Canada, – the 'Great North' as she calls it elsewhere – was the setting of her earliest childhood memories and, as Huston maintains, childhood is the essential core of the adult and a novelist needs to be particularly aware of this and give his/her own childhood the role it deserves in literary creation. 'Canada', 'Alberta', 'the North strong and free', the boundless, snow-covered plains of her childhood<sup>230</sup> were given different roles in her writing: at first, an ill-conceived impatience for its "platitude" and "lack of history", then, in later works, a slow rediscovery of its history and of the contradictions of a country, that had left a bigger mark than Huston was initially inclined to admit. Critics have sometimes ranged her into the group of Canadian authors,<sup>231</sup> even though her writing activity has almost always taken place somewhere else. As we will see in detail later, her 'Canadianness' has also been object of debates and polemics, in particular on the occasion of the awarding of the Canadian *Governor general's Award* for one of her first self-translated novels, *Cantique des plaines*.<sup>232</sup>

Unlike 'impatriates', "people in exile are rich – rich with the accumulated sum of their contradictory identities". They are aware of "some truths that shape the human condition in general", and among them, of the "absolutely unique nature of childhood", that is always within us, like a kernel in its fruit, and does not disappear when we grow up, "the fruit doesn't become hollow as it grows".<sup>233</sup> It is an altogether different thing to spend one's childhood in a country than to spend one's adult life in it. Childhood and, most importantly, *the language of childhood* are perceived by Huston – as well as by other writers – as the foundational elements of the individual; Assia Djebar, also an

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<sup>230</sup> In *Nord perdu* she writes: "le Nord, c'est une image. Une image pour dire qu'il y fait froid et qu'il n'y a personne." (14) And again: "Mon pays c'était le Nord, le Grand Nord, le nost vrai, fort et libre. Je l'ai trahi, et je l'ai perdu." (15)

<sup>231</sup> See, for instance, Koustas, *Les belles étrangères*.

<sup>232</sup> See Chapter III.

<sup>233</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 8. In regard of the Lebanese author Huston declared "Je me sens en exil depuis toujours. Je ne sais pas ce que signifie « chez moi » car, quand j'étais petite, ma famille déménageait tout le temps et j'étais toujours la nouvelle, l'« étrangère » à l'école. [...] Ce fut la même chose quand, à 20 ans, je suis venue passer une année à Paris. J'allais pouvoir me reconnaître étrangère puisque je l'étais effectivement. Aujourd'hui, j'aime cette position. Je ne la subis plus, je la choisis. J'aime beaucoup ce que dit l'écrivain franco-libanais Amin Maalouf. Quand on le somme de dire ce qu'il est au fond, il répond : « Je suis mon histoire. »" Nancy Huston interviewed by Hélène Fresnel on *Psychologie*. URL: <http://www.psychologies.com/Culture/Savoirs/Litterature/Interviews/Nancy-Huston-Plus-les-femmes-sont-autonomes-plus-elles-deviennent-objets>. Accessed December 21st, 2016.

expatriate author, writes: “Identity is not made up only of paper or blood but also by language”.<sup>234</sup>

Moreover, while the ‘impatriates’ can nurture in their minds the illusion of continuity for their whole life, the expatriates are forced to come to terms with the fact that they are ‘here’ now, they were ‘there’ before, and these two ‘worlds’ often do not communicate: “*Ici*, vous taisez ce que vous futes”, while “*Là*, vous taisez ce que vous faites.”<sup>235</sup> Despite the forced censure, when the author is spotted and unmasked as a foreigner, one’s original nationality becomes one’s *most salient trait*, (“Elle est morose, *notre Canadienne*”, writes a French journalist describing Huston’s *L’empreinte de l’ange* in 1998) the trait that identifies the individual publicly and that is constantly brought to the foreground, “whereas, back home, of course, your nationality was virtually non-existent, as invisible and inaudible as the air you breathed!”.<sup>236</sup>

In *Nord perdu. Suivi de douze France*, written after exactly 25 years of life in France and self-translated as *Losing North: Musing on Land, Tongue and Self*, Huston explains the multitude of facets that come with being constantly confronted with her ‘contradictory identities’. On the one hand, the life she has ‘left behind’ and that her French friends and neighbours do not and cannot know, and that is resumed in a poignant list of images:

The people around you haven’t the vaguest notion of your childhood, with its nursery rhymes, food, schools, friends, neighbourhoods,- and it’s not worth the effort, you don’t want to bore them by giving them a crash course on Western Canada, Protestantism, wheat fields, country and western music, oil derricks, freight trains, piano lessons, picnics, mountain lakes, your father, your mother, everything that shaped you...<sup>237</sup>

On the other hand, there is her current, daily French life, of which her parents and close relatives know and share very little, because: “you don’t want to give them a crash course on Chirac, Mitterrand, Duras, the Place de Vosges at dawn, your bakery, your publisher, your favourite radio station [« France Culture », in *Nord perdu*], your friends, your neighbours in the region of Berry, it would be tedious”.<sup>238</sup>

This general sense of separatedness and incommunicability is epitomized by the fact that these two worlds are experienced – and ‘spoken’ – in two different languages.

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<sup>234</sup> Assia Djébar, “Writing in the Language of the Other” in *Lives in Translation: Bilingual Writers on Identity and Creativity*, edited by Isabelle De Courtivron (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Djébar has written extensively on the role of the French language in her writing career. Cf also Djébar, *Ces voix qui m’assiègent* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999).

<sup>235</sup> Huston, *Nord Perdu*, 20-21.

<sup>236</sup> Nancy Huston, “The Mask and the Pen” in *Lives in Translation. Bilingual writers on Identity and Creativity* edited by Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>237</sup> Huston, *Nord perdu*, 20-21. It is worth noting here that all these elements are retrieved for her first novel set in Canada, *Plainsong* (1993).

<sup>238</sup> Huston, *Nord perdu*, 21.

Language epitomizes what Huston calls “la détresse de l'étranger”, the anguish of foreignness that hits her every time she visits a new country where people speak a language she does not know:

The minute I find myself on the far side of the border – the language. A blank wall. Impenetrable human beings. They laugh and you've got no idea what they're laughing at. They wave their hands in the air and shout at each other, and you can't even guess what all the excitement is about. It's really rather nightmarish, when you think about it.<sup>239</sup>

Two languages that created and informed two separate lives and worlds: a pre-Paris anglophone life and a Marais-based, French-speaking adult life. The latter is the language of writing, the former the forgotten, hidden language.<sup>240</sup>

### 2.2.2 The Step-Mother Tongue or the First Language of Writing

For the first ten years of her career as a writer, Nancy Huston published only novels and essays *in French*. “The French idiom”, she stated in an interview,

[...] gave me an incredible sense of freedom. I had no bad academic habits in French. I could hear the language more intensely than my own: nothing went without saying, no turns of phrase were taken for granted; also, all emotions were distinctly attenuated.<sup>241</sup>

The French language is initially the favourite tool for writing, not because Huston, unlike other writers, ever thought that, “la langue française ait des qualités intrinsèques qui la rendent par exemple, plus fluide, plus cartésienne, plus jolie, plus claire, que sais-je encore”, [the French language had intrinsic qualities making it, for instance, more fluent, more Cartesian, more attractive, clearer or whatever],<sup>242</sup> but because French epitomized the qualities of the *foreign*, which, once the first obstacles are overcome, represents something new, more objective and more functional for writing because entirely disconnected from the experiences of childhood on the one hand, and of university life and assignments carried out in English on the other.

Whenever Huston is asked about this unusual onset in the literary world, the relationship with her mother always has the fore-scene: “I started in French, paradoxically, ironically. I've said before that it has to do with my mother and my

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<sup>239</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 60-61.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. Christiane Achour, «Nancy Huston et ses langues», dans «Biographie langagière et apprentissage plurilingue» in *Le Français dans le monde: Recherches et applications*, *CLE International* 39 (2006): 42-51.

<sup>241</sup> Nancy Huston, “Finding freedom in a foreign idiom. An interview with Nancy Huston” in *Victorian Writer* (2007): 13.

<sup>242</sup> Mi-Kyung, «Épreuves de l'étranger », 5.

relationship with her.”<sup>243</sup> At the beginning then, when she was working as a journalist for *Sorcières* and *Histoire d’elles*, the new medium is synonym with *freedom* and new possibilities of reconstruction. Recalling the words of the hyper-celebrated self-translator Samuel Beckett, who once said about English: « J’étais parlé par cette langue, je ne la contrôlais plus », <sup>244</sup> Huston avowed,

[...] les tournures obligées, les automatismes et les ‘tics’ universitaires avaient peut-être tué pour moi la langue anglaise ; j’avais tellement écrit pour passer des examens, chaque fois que j’écrivais je n’entendais plus ma langue ; *elle m’habitait comme un poids mort*. [the forced turns, the automatism and the university mannerisms had perhaps killed for me the English language; I had written so much to pass examinations, every time I wrote I could not hear my tongue; *it resided in me like a dead weight*.]<sup>245</sup>

The fact of being insensible to the specific sound and ‘weight’ of one’s own language comes when one is having the possibility of acquiring a new language: when the coincidence of signifier and signified is broken, nothing can be taken for granted anymore. The first article is a revelation for the novelist-to-be, “un jour de septembre, en haut d’une maison rue Saint-Jacques, la page blanche, d’arrêt de mort, s’est transformée d’un seul coup en champ de possibilités. Les mots à ma disposition étaient moins nombreux, mais *ils avaient un gout, ou plutôt un volume, ils étaient vivants*; je les agençais en jouant sur les sons comme si je bâtissais une sculpture musicale...et ça marchait.”<sup>246</sup> She ‘combined the words playing with their sound as if she were putting together a musical sculpture’. We will see from her self-translation that this first imprint with musicality as a leading axe in writing has not abandoned ever since.

Her enthusiasm for the discovery is accompanied by a sense of liberation also because talking a foreign language equals, to some extent, to play a role, to interpret a new character – someone disconnected from one’s inner self, i.e., the self of childhood, and someone that possibly cannot be heard, read and understood by one’s own parents,

The *I* which I used so freely in my essay was also, no doubt, one of the effects of my *uprooted knowledge*. A certain shamelessness was made possible by the fact I was writing in a foreign language – partly because, at least in my imagination, my parents did not speak this language, but more importantly because for me, *French had nothing to do with my intimate, inner life*. In French I could say, quite calmly and even with a certain indifference,

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<sup>243</sup> Huston adds: “My brother - who was eight - also changed linguistic and cultural identities and lives and works in Montreal. We only talk to each other in French, my brother and I - except to fool around sometimes in English, sharing memories and jokes. And it’s not even the same accent, to anyone on the outside it’s quite comical.” In Wigston, Nancy. “Nancy Huston Unbound”. URL [http://www.booksincanada.com/article\\_view.asp?id=3118](http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=3118). Accessed December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016.

<sup>244</sup> Quoted in John E. Jackson, “Le même et l’autre. L’écriture comme traduction”, in *Revue de littérature comparée* 273 (1995): 13. Translation and emphasis are mine.

<sup>245</sup> Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, 103.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibidem*.



things it would have been impossible for me to reveal or even think about in my mother tongue.<sup>247</sup>

In the light of these claims, it is not a coincidence that her thesis supervised by Roland Barthes – as briefly quoted in 2.1.2 – dealt with the swearwords and the transgression of linguistic taboos of the French language:

J'aurais été incapable de faire ce travail en anglais, parce que la force émotive de ces mots était efficace dans ma langue maternelle, alors qu'en français, mon hémisphère gauche est concerné mais pas le droit.[...] En anglais, j'aurais eu du mal à avoir une distance nécessaire pour mener à bien un travail universitaire sur les interdictions linguistiques.<sup>248</sup>

In reason of her ‘non-French’ childhood, then, the French language is at first, “a smooth, homogenous, neutral substance, with no personal associations whatsoever.”<sup>249</sup> Initially, then, this lack of emotional constraints and background works marvellously for her, helping her to push aside her childhood traumas and providing her with new material – the musicality of the French language – to nourish her literary imagination.

The distance provided by a foreign language can be a precious instrument for a writer to sublimate their experience. Georges-Arthur Goldschmitt, for instance wrote in *La Traversée des fleuves* that “Les mots allemands, c'étaient les choses elles-mêmes en français, elles étaient enveloppées d'une sorte de *noli me tangere*, de mise à distance”.<sup>250</sup> As we have seen earlier in her biographical notes, though, burying the mother tongue has worked only up to a certain point. The ‘distance’ that comes with living and working in a foreign language somehow forces the individual to transform daily life into fiction, into text, into literature...but sooner or later the novelist is forced to come to terms with – and reappropriate of – her own innermost core.

### 2.2.3 Becoming a ‘False’ Bilingual

Learning and mastering – even to an excellent degree – a foreign language is one thing; being bilingual is a different thing altogether. As Huston says, “there are bilinguals and

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<sup>247</sup> Huston, *Longings and Belongings*, 342. In a French text she modulates: “C’est en français, à Paris, que j’ai osé mes premiers pas dans l’écriture: j’éprouvais un sentiment d’impunité; mes parents ne liraient pas mes livres. Mais je prenais plus de risques car, hors de sa langue maternelle, on ne sait jamais quand on est au bord du cliché...” in “Français dans le texte.” In *Télérama* (1997) URL: <http://www.telerama.fr/livre/francais-dans-le-texte.69949.php>. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>248</sup> Mi-Kyung, «Épreuves de l’étranger », 6.

<sup>249</sup> Huston, “False Bilingualism” in *Losing North*, 49.

<sup>250</sup> Quoted in Marie Dollé, *L’imaginaire des langues* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), 66.

bilinguals. The true *and the false*".<sup>251</sup> As Huston did not learn the French language 'along with the mother's milk', she considers it her 'step-mother tongue'. The second language is embedded in a part of the psyche that has nothing to do with infancy and childhood, and is thus always consciously, willingly controlled and mastered. In the process of learning a language as an adult, even when the correct use of grammar does no longer represent a constant effort, the choice of the vocabulary does not flow as intuitively and nonchalantly as it does for native speakers whose knowledge of the language is not made shaky by the constant comparison with the native tongue. On the contrary, the choice of words is made, says Huston, after "conscious, lengthy, obsessional, not to say paranoid, reflection".<sup>252</sup> Consciousness is the trait that characterizes the learning of the second language; in "The Mask and the Pen", Huston writes:

[Foreigners] arrive in their new country weighed down with two or three decades' worth of neuronal baggage. Ruts have been dug, habits hardened, synapses practiced, memories frozen, and the tongue has lost its talent for improvisation – hence, the mind is condemned to *conscious imitation*.<sup>253</sup>

In the brain of a 'false bilingual', as Huston defines expatriates like herself, the words to designate any familiar object come to mind in the language one has been 'thinking in'; sometimes the equivalents in both "pop up, simultaneously or in quick succession; but occasionally, the process gets "bogged down, clogged up, blocked off, and I could tear my hair out by the handful".<sup>254</sup> The use of French, after decades of full immersion in the language, still follows the trails that are typical of language students and that a native speaker would never remark; some categories of words, for instance,

[...] are stored in my brain in phonic groups: there's a whole drawer reserved for nouns ending in *eau*. If I speak without thinking, it's as if I were grabbing words out of the drawer at random, and I'm quite capable of saying *tableau* (painting) or *rideau* (curtain) instead of *plateau* (tray).<sup>255</sup>

Nouns are also the first elements to fall into oblivion in the mind of a foreign language speaker, and that happens continually and unwillingly. Other terms are consciously not used by the false bilingual for everyday conversations because they "cancel each other out" and are thus avoided for fear of confounding their respective meaning: "*Eventuellement. Eventually. Harassed. Harassé. Ostensiblement. Ostensibly*".<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 40.

<sup>252</sup> *Ivi*, 41. Emphasis mine.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>255</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 42. Emphasis mine. It is worth signalling here that French words ending in – *eau* have sometimes irregular plurals, therefore students are asked to memorize them as a peculiar category.

<sup>256</sup> *Eventuellement*: possibly, potentially; *harassé*: exhausted; *ostensiblement*: pointedly.

And others yet, “*as a foreigner*, [she] feel[s] unable to use in conversation”: the simple past tense, (too elevated?) some colloquial expressions (too low?), Anglicisms (wouldn’t that sound awkward?), abbreviations (too nonchalant?), and technical expressions. These sorts of self-imposed limitations in the use of language reiterate the feeling of being still a foreigner within the environment that has been her home for so many years. It is a strategy to maintain a precious friction, a distance between herself and the experience of reality which is fundamental for literary creation.

Thus, despite the fact that Huston has been “dreaming, thinking, making love, writing, fantasizing, and weeping in French, in English and sometimes in a monstrous mixture of the two”, the English and the French language are “neither superimposed nor interchangeable” in her perception. The two languages are, on the contrary, set apart and hierarchized, on the one hand, for cognitive reasons, and, on the other hand, for the different ways in which they have been acquired:

All my French is apparently located in my left brain – the hyper-rational, structuring hemisphere which governs my right hand – whereas my mother tongue, [...] is more “bilateral”, (distributed over both hemispheres). Thus, my right brain – the more holistic, artistic, emotive part – is entirely Anglophone.<sup>257</sup>

The native tongue “enfolds and envelops you so that you belong to it”, whereas “with the ‘adopted’ tongue it’s the other way around – you’re the one who needs to mother it, master it – and make it belong to you”.<sup>258</sup> In psychoanalytic terms, the acquired language works in the realm of the super-ego. As a consequence, they are also consciously assigned different roles by the writer: “I prefer French to English in intellectual conversations, interviews, colloquia” – says Huston – “linguistic situations which call upon concepts and categories learned *during my adult life*”, while the mother-tongue, which she has defined also as her “*langue des tripes*” is employed for uninhibited self-expression: “when I feel like letting off steam, freaking out, swearing, singing, yelling, surfing on the pure pleasure of verbal delirium, I do so in English.”<sup>259</sup>

The false bilingualism is perceived not only by the subject, as a result of the different position she attributes to ‘her’ languages; the others, the ‘native’, contribute to underline the subtle differences between being a mother tongue and fully mastering a foreign language. The foreign speaker, eventually, despite all her efforts, reveals herself by the slightest imperfection in the use of language:

No matter how lengthy and arduous their efforts, however, a little something almost always gives them away. The faintest trace, the slightest *souppçon* (a good word for it) of an accent. Or...well...a modulation, an odd turn of phrase, a confusion of genres, an all-but-imperceptible mistake in the matching of verb tenses...That’s all it takes. The French are on the look-out. They’re finicky, picky and nitpicking where their language is

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<sup>257</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 48.

<sup>258</sup> *Ivi*, 47.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibidem*. Emphasis mine.

concerned...The mask slips...and it's too late! They've glimpsed the *real you* behind the mask and now there's no way out: Excuse me, but, did you say *UNE peignoir? UN baignoire? LA diapason? LE guérison???* Did I hear you correctly? Well, I'll be- You're an ALIEN, aren't you?! You come from another country and you're trying to pass yourself off as French...<sup>260</sup>

From the frustration of knowing that French will never be a 'second mother', but will always be a step-mother, Huston has slowly acquired the awareness that being perceived as 'a stranger' has turned from hindrance into an asset; for instance, one of the features that set her apart from her daily interlocutors is her accent,

Mon accent à moi aussi est là, inextirpable ; je sais que je ne m'en débarrasserai jamais. Il devient plus fort quand je suis nerveuse, quand je parle à des inconnus, quand je dois laisser un message sur un répondeur, quand je prends la parole en public. Si j'écoute ma voix enregistrée au magnétophone, j'entends exactement *quels* sons je déforme. Mais rien n'y fait, j'ai appris le français trop longtemps après ma langue maternelle.<sup>261</sup>

Having an accent is associated for Huston with a positive stereotype: someone who speaks with an accent is someone who is split in two, because she who knows two languages also forcibly knows two cultures and, hence, the difficult passage from one to the other and the painful relativization of the former by the knowledge of the latter. "Cette personne est cassée en deux; – she writes – elle a donc *une histoire*".<sup>262</sup>

Cultural relativization, intercommunication and inter-culturality thus progressively become the axes on which to build her literary work. The bilingual has not become a *hybrid*, the split is not healed back into integrity. The two linguistic and cultural heritages are there, separate, facing each other, dialoguing with one another. Critic Mary Gallagher argues that Huston's work is constituted by the juxtaposition of identities and not their hybridization; actively looking for the division – or "bi-vision"<sup>263</sup> – not passively suffering it, is Huston's most distinctive trait as a writer: "Je ne *subis* pas l'écart, je le *cherche*".<sup>264</sup> Voluntary linguistic exile, being a foreigner, is the position that makes literature possible, both linguistically and culturally for Someone who – like Huston – perceives literature as a *mise en abîme* of reality.

Beside other aspects, the linguistic cleavage is a most productive one: Huston says she feels "aussi linguistiquement scindé que mon pays [Canada], avec deux moitiés de ma

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<sup>260</sup> Huston, "The Mask and the Pen", 56.

<sup>261</sup> Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, 13.

<sup>262</sup> Huston, *Nord perdu*, 37.

<sup>263</sup> Gallagher minted this neologism to describe Huston's poetics, aimed at "Alimenter et explorer indéfiniment la dynamique dialogique de la bi-vision, mais aussi à dépasser le cadre plutôt restreint de la simple binarité en faveur de l'expansion et de la prolifération illimitée de l'imagination et de la relation." in Mary Gallagher, "Nancy Huston ou la relation proliférante" in *Vision/Division. L'oeuvre de Nancy Huston* edited by Marta Dvorak and Jane Koustas (Ottawa: Presse de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2004): 33.

<sup>264</sup> Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, 210.

personnalité qui se regardent en chiens de faïence, ou se disputent comme chien et chat, dans mes journaux intimes comme dans mes rêves». <sup>265</sup> In this framework, self-translating each novel from its first language to the second is the way to give body and shape to such intercultural and interlinguistic dialogue.

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<sup>265</sup> Huston, *Désirs et réalités*, 269.

### III. SELF-TRANSLATION AS LITERARY AESTHETICS

#### 3.1 Re-appropriating the English Language in *Plainsong*

In 1993, Huston turned forty. While “at twenty, with a modicum of discipline and luck, you can invent your own appearance”, at forty “you’re forced to think again. Inexorably and irrefutably, the very atavistic defects from which you recoiled as a child start rising to the surface”. Nature reclaims not only the body, but also the mind: “Having spent decades in a nation famous for its irony [...], sincerity suddenly appeals to you”, “you hanker after plain old wonderful stories à la Jim Harrison”, “you begin to miss the brutal frankness of American conversation”, in short, “you reconsider all the things you once rejected”,<sup>266</sup> including the language that once fled for its sentimentality and emotional baggage.

*Plainsong*,<sup>267</sup> Huston’s tenth book, is the first novel written in her mother language. This re-awakening to the mother tongue is thematised by the author in *Nord perdu/Losing North*, where she avows her renewed need for “linguistic authenticity”, i.e., for direct, boundless, uninhibited expression, in contrast with a restraining, self-aware use of the French language as sophisticated medium, detached from the innermost part of the self.

The genesis of *Plainsong* is recounted in “Singing the plains”,<sup>268</sup> and in its French version “Les prairies à Paris”. Huston – whose novels usually declare her penchant for constraining, complex narrative structures – remembers that she wanted to write something less structured, more ‘genuine’ in a way:

I starved for theoretical innocence. I longed to write long, free, wild, gorgeous sentences that explored all the registers of emotion, including, why not? The pathetic. I wanted to tell stories wholeheartedly, fervently, passionately – and to believe in them, without dreading the comments of the theoreticians.<sup>269</sup>

This re-encounter with a language, within which she suddenly discovered that the “whole gamut of styles was available” to her, “marked the real beginning of [her] life as a writer”.<sup>270</sup> The full acknowledgement of her talent and vocation for literature, and for fiction in particular, coincided chronologically and ‘poetically’, on the one hand, with

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<sup>266</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 56-57.

<sup>267</sup> Nancy Huston, *Plainsong* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

<sup>268</sup> Nancy Huston, “Singing the Plains”, in *Longings and Belongings*.

<sup>269</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 37-38.

<sup>270</sup> Huston, “Knowledge Uprooted” in *Longings and Belongings*, 345.

the reconciliation with her mother tongue, and on the other, with reconciliation with the world and environment of her childhood, Canada.

Indeed, *Plainsong* depicts the salient traits of Alberta's landscape and and of its inhabitants in the Twentieth century. In her early writing, Huston had expressed a rather poor opinion of her native place, stating for example that "within the colourless country of Canada, Alberta is a particularly colourless province",<sup>271</sup> or that Western Canada is "deprived of stories and of History".<sup>272</sup> Yet, for some years before starting the redaction of *Plainsong*, when she was living a psychological and physical crisis presumably connected to her condition of voluntary exile, "in the most unexpected places, at the most incongruous moments – Huston remembers – a strange nostalgia would overwhelm me".<sup>273</sup> When, listening to the radio in her car while driving in Paris, she would casually fall on country music evoking images of cow-boys, horses, cold winds and whiskey, her rather exhibited detachment would fade away:

My heart would start flip-flopping and my feet would start tapping and my fingers snapping and before I knew it I'd be humming along, and my astonished husband would say 'Hey! Hey! I thought you hated country and western music!'.<sup>274</sup>

As Huston recounts in *Singing the Plains*, the idea of a book about Alberta first came in her thoughts as a mixture of disparate elements: the ambiance of rodeos and of the coldest winters, than the character of a man who has lived through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Still, this recovery and narrative reconstruction of the Canadian landscape and history was not smooth and self-evident: the feeling of 'boredom' toward her homeland – Huston claims – persisted while she carried on her research for historical documentation on the Native Americans living in Alberta when Europeans settled in. The true surge of interest and the consequent literary inspiration, apparently came from *elsewhere*. Studying the history of Haiti, in fact, she read Frederic W. Turner's *Beyond Geography* and found out that connections could be made between these two distant places:

For some reason (which I can't say I fully understand), the possibility of connecting two places which had hitherto been antithetical in my imagination, suddenly made Alberta's history interesting to me.<sup>275</sup>

Ironically, and rather dishearteningly, when *Plainsong* was finally finished, she could not find a publisher willing to believe in it. Her French editors would not publish a novel in English, and Huston was virtually unknown on the other side of the Atlantic.

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<sup>271</sup> Huston, "Singing the Plains", 245.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>273</sup> Huston, "Singing the Plains", 247.

<sup>274</sup> *Ivi*, 248.

<sup>275</sup> *Ivi*, 255.

After several refusals, and as time was passing by and no other solution seemed conceivable, she decided to translate her novel into French: « Je n'aurais fait confiance à personne pour le *traduire*. Quand la première version a été terminée, je l'ai *réécrite* en français ». <sup>276</sup> The result was *Cantique des plaines*, <sup>277</sup> which was then published in France, simultaneously to *Plainsong* in English Canada and Quebec.

Within Huston's *oeuvre*, this self-translation from the mother language to the acquired language has aroused much attention from critics and students who highlighted its significance in relation to the writer's biography and debated around the controversy that arose after *Cantique des plaines* was enlisted for Governor General's Award in Canada.

The parallelism between the reappropriation of the English language and the reappropriation of a setting, the Canada of her early childhood, is easily retrievable in the plot and structure of the novel. Sitting in her flat in Montréal (Quebec), Paula writes the biography of her grandfather, Paddon Sterling who, at the beginning of the narration, is being buried. The structure of the narration does not follow a chronological order: “dans une chronologie en spirale, une jeune femme ‘invente’ la vie de son grand-père, à partir du peu qu'elle en sait et à l'aide d'un maigre manuscrit qui lui a été remis à sa mort”. <sup>278</sup> It is a peculiar choice of *mise en abîme* of the process of writing, since, instead of impersonating the (falsely) omniscient narrator herself, Huston invests the character of Paula with the task. <sup>279</sup> The use of the second person (Paula recounts everything to Paddon himself), of which I have already reminded the particular emotional undertone for Huston, <sup>280</sup> structures the entire novel as though it were a long letter. In this ‘diversion’, critic Christiane Chaulet-Achour reads a trick to “approcher l'origine tout en prenant ses distances” [to approach the origin, all the while maintaining her distances]. <sup>281</sup> Born in 1900 in a family of Irish immigrants drawn to the harsh Canadian plains by the last trails of the Gold Rush, Paddon loses his mother

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<sup>276</sup> Danielle Laurin, « Source sûre » *Voir* 16 (1993).

<sup>277</sup> Nancy Huston, *Cantique des plaines* (Arles :Actes Sud/Montréal Leméac, 1993).

<sup>278</sup> Nancy Huston, “Déracinement du savoir” in *Au cœur des textes. L'écriture et le souci de la langue. Écrivains, linguistes: témoignages et traces manuscrites* edited by Irène Fenoglio (Louvain la Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 2005), 24.

<sup>279</sup> According to Danielle Laurin, « le roman est en fait une mise en scène du geste d'écrire une histoire monumentale du temps » in « Source sûre », 25. Laurin superposes Paddon's dream of writing a philosophical treatise to the accomplishment of his niece who, instead of continuing her grandfather's project, tells him his own history all along that of Alberta and of First Nations. It is worth noting that the fictional writing of Paula corresponds more or less to that of Huston in terms of timing, as Paddon dies in the early Nineties and the novel is published in 1993.

<sup>280</sup> Cf. 2.1.2.

<sup>281</sup> Christiane Chaulet-Achour, "Retourner sur les pas des 'ancêtres': travail de mémoire et quête de soi dans *Cantique des plaines* de Nancy Huston.", *Dans Autobiographie et interculturelité, Colloque international du Département de français de l'Université d'Alger, 6-8/12/2003* (Blida éditions du Tell, 2004), 1.



at the age of six. After a lonely childhood in a poverty-stricken farmland, the boy – letting down his father’s ambition to see him become a cow boy a ‘bronco buster’ – attends university in Edmonton and follows his dream to become a great philosopher and write a *Treatise on Time*. Instead, he finds himself fighting hunger and misery during the years of the Great Depression. The narration offers the occasion to depict Canada’s historical events and phases: during the 1930s, for instance, the so-called Dust Bowl hit the continent: the overexploited plains, drained and dried out by a severe drought, transformed into dust that stormed over the country lifted by strong winds. Back in Calgary after the death of his father, Paddon marries Karen, a Swedish immigrant, who soon gives birth to three children: Frankie, Ruthie and Johnny. A harsh reality made of famines, droughts and severe winters, as well as irritatingly pious female characters, slowly wear out and eventually destroy Paddon’s intellectual dreams. Forced to quit his studies in order to support his family by working as a history teacher, Paddon becomes more and more frustrated and depressed. The depiction of the plain as a vast, dusty space of ‘emptiness’,<sup>282</sup> becomes an image of the existential *angst* of Paddon, who is deprived of the faith so cherished, on the contrary, by his wife. As he sinks lower and lower in his self-esteem, the casual meeting with Miranda – a young Blackfoot woman, painter and mother of a little girl – turn out to be life-changing. Their love represents a phase of growth for Paddon who finally gets to know a non-European perspective on the ‘conquest of the West’, learns of the history of First Nations, and learns to see himself, and the world, through the eyes of the other.

Dans *Cantique des plaines* – says Huston – le seul de mes romans à avoir l’Alberta comme toile de fond, et je dirais même comme héros, j’évoque la tragédie qu’a représenté la rencontre des peuples autochtones et des Européens.<sup>283</sup>

This is the first of Huston’s novels where the clash of cultures – embodied by the relationships between characters speaking different language becomes a pervading narrative theme. Paddon’s history becomes relevant only when he gets in touch with the perspective of the foreigner – Miranda – on his own status in life. Mixing together characters with distant geographical, cultural and linguistic backgrounds will become one of Huston’s favourite thematic habits.

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<sup>282</sup> Speech of acceptance of the *honoris causa* PhD at the University of Ottawa in June 2010. URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPB4kDj3sQ8>. Accessed January 5th 2017. Emphasis mine.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibidem*.

### 3.1.1 Plainsong Self-translated

Studies on this self-translated text commonly agree that the two versions report many of the characteristics of a ‘doxal’<sup>284</sup> translation in terms of research for equivalence.<sup>285</sup> Besides distinguishing these two texts from any allograph translation, some self-translating peculiarities are relevant in the light of a definition of Huston’s aesthetics.

The epigraphs to two texts differ; not for aesthetic reasons but for purely juridical reasons: the English version quotes the American novelist Flannery O’Connor (“Then you ain’t saved?”) whereas the French version shows a line from a Beatles’ song (“No one you can save that can’t be saved”), solely because the detainers of the rights did not give permission to reproduce the latter in the English publication.<sup>286</sup>

As for the title, the word *plainsong* comes from the Latin *cantus planus* and refers to “unaccompanied church music sung in unison in medieval modes and in free rhythm corresponding to the accentuation of the words, which are taken from the liturgy” and, “large body of traditional ritual melody of the Western Christian Church, in its final form called Gregorian chant”.<sup>287</sup> The word *cantique*, ‘canticle’ (from the Latin *canticus*) in the French version of the text, refers to a song of praise taken from the Bible. The addition of the post-modifier *des plaines*, ‘of the plains’, translates what the English version expresses with one polysemic word.

In this third novel, music is confirmed as a ruling element of the text; in *The Goldberg Variations* (as mentioned in 2.1.2) it shaped the structure and length of each chapter. Here, the insertion of original lyrics from rhythm-blues and country music can be read as a strategy to reappropriate the rhythms of the English language as well as culture-bound elements that are kept unchanged in the French version of the novel. The numerous musical references contribute to shape this ‘far-west’, country landscape,

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<sup>284</sup> The distinction is made by Oustinoff in *Bilinguisme d’écriture*.

<sup>285</sup> Cf. André Trottier, *De Plainsong à Cantiques des plaines : sur l’émergence d’une singularité d’écriture dans le processus d’autotraduction dite décentrée*, (Université Laval, 2007); that of Daniel Boisseu, *Temps et récit dans Cantique des plaines de Nancy Huston* (Université de Montréal, 2008); as well as the PhD theses of Lyudimila Razumova, *Literary Bilingualism as Cosmopolitan Practice: Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Beckett, and Nancy Huston* (Stony Brook University, 2010); of Marlisa Amanda Richters, *Nancy Huston: The Ways of Self-Translating* (Universidad de León, 2012); and of Aliteea Turtureanu, *Translinguisme et transculture dans l’oeuvre de Nancy Huston* (Universitatea Cluj-Napoca, 2012).

<sup>286</sup> Cf. Christine Klein-Lataud, “Les voix parallèles de Nancy Huston” in *Traduction, terminologie, rédaction* 9/1 (1996): 223. Lyudmila Razumova reminds us that “When we are painstakingly comparing two texts and conjecturing the extent of the poetic license or the competence of the reading public, some translation choices may be just a matter of legal or editorial drudgery.”

<sup>287</sup> Michael Kennedy and Joyce Bourne Kennedy, [The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music \(5 ed.\)](http://www.oxfordreference.com/), URL <http://www.oxfordreference.com/>. Accessed December 28th, 2016.

and constitute a major element of difference in the self-translation. Some are church hymns, which Huston translated into French; some are popular songs, such as “Hit the Road Jack” by Percy Mayfield, “This Land is Your Land,” by Woody Guthrie and “Sixteen Tons” by Merle Travis. In this case, a reader-oriented perspective seems to have been Huston’s priority. In the already quoted passage, for instance, Mayfield’s song “Hit the road, Jack” is only reminded with a single line in the English version, whereas in the French version, though the song is quoted in the original language, more lines are reported, possibly in order to enhance the chances that the melody is actually recognized by the French readership (while for the English one there is no such need as the tune is widely famous in that context). Merle Travis’ song “Sixteen tons” is quoted with two lines in the English version: “*You haul sixteen ton, and what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt*”;<sup>288</sup> in the French version, the two lines are reported in the original language and followed by its translation: «*You haul sixteen ton, and what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt...Tu pioches seize tonnes, et où est-ce que t’en es? Plus vieux d’un jour et plus endetté*»; while the verb ‘to haul’ would be more fittingly translated in French by *porter* or *traîner*, the choice of the verb *piocher*, ‘to dig’, better evokes the original context of the miners’ song («I was born one mornin’ when the sun didn’t shine / I picked up my shovel and I walked to the mine»), thus cleverly adapting the quotation to fit the text coherently and for readers who are less likely to be familiar with the complete lyrics of the song. The same strategy is used for the song “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad”, by the Sandhills Sixteen. Where the English shows: “I’ve been working on the railroad / All the live-long day. / I’ve been working on the railroad / Just to pass the time away”,<sup>289</sup> the French version reports the same lines and adds, connecting them with dots “...Je travaille au chemin de fer, toute la sale journée, Je travaille au chemin de fer, juste pour voir le temps passer.”<sup>290</sup> ‘Livelong day’ is rendered by *toute la sale journée* (‘the whole dirty day’), a calque on the more common expression *toute la sainte journée* (‘the whole holy day’). The same strategy of doubling is also used for the first lines of “Home on the Range”.<sup>291</sup>

The brims of English lyrics certainly stand out in the French text, where they “contribuiscono a creare il ‘colore ambientale’ del romanzo” [contribute to create the ‘local colour’ of the novel];<sup>292</sup> or, as Klein-Lataud points out,

[...] dans la version anglaise, les chansons et les hymnes sont tissés dans le texte avec lequel ils forment un tout thématique et linguistique, alors que dans la version française, cités

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<sup>288</sup> Nancy Huston, *Plainsong* (South Royalton: Steerforth Press, 2002), 29-30.

<sup>289</sup> *Ivi*, 47.

<sup>290</sup> Huston, *Cantique des plaines*, 55.

<sup>291</sup> *Plainsong*, 50 and *Cantique des plaines*, 58.

<sup>292</sup> Anna Lapetina, “L’unicità dissimile. Il carattere musicale dell’autotraduzione in *Plainsong / Cantiques des Plaines* di Nancy Huston” in *Oltreoceano* 5 (2011): 69. Translation is mine.

généralement en anglais et suivis de leur traduction, ils tranchent. [In the English version, the songs and hymns are woven into the text with which they form a thematic and linguistic whole, whereas in the French version, generally cited in English and followed by their translation, they are more conspicuous]<sup>293</sup>

Apart from this heterolingual stylistic feature, on a narratological level the two versions are symmetrical except for a single case of suppression of a provocative paragraph in the French version of the novel, where the narrator explains why her mother decided not to let her spend her summer holidays with Grandpa Paddon and the reaction of the latter:<sup>294</sup>

In the midst of all this excitement you sent Ruthie a dry little note *pointing out that only recently the French had gotten kicked out of Algeria on their asses after having settled there a hundred years before, taken over the country and its government, claimed it as their own and built it in their image, and wondering if it might not be dangerous for Canadians to indulge in premature rejoicing about their victory over the natives of this land.*<sup>295</sup>

The passage signalled in italics is missing from the French version of the novel. Is not clear, though, whether its suppression was decided by Huston, or whether the editors account for the decision, having in mind the possible reactions of the French reading public. As the example of the epigraph suggests, not all the choices that seem to pertain to an author's aesthetic standpoint are ultimately accountable to it. Plus, this case of suppression is almost unique in Huston's production. The novels analysed in Chapters IV, V and VI are instead perfectly symmetrical in this respect.

As regards the syntactic level of the two texts: the long, flowing sentences created in the English version are transferred onto the French version. According to Anna Lapetina, who focuses on the musical configurations of this novel,

There are no substantial differences in the syntax or in the content of the two versions; rather, subtle musical nuances are identifiable in the two linguistic registers and in the respective titles. *Plainsong e Cantique des plaines* are substantially the two faces of the same book, where the narrating voice sings according to two different musical registries.<sup>296</sup>

The French stil offers the chance to mix high register and argotic register within the same period, a stylistic trait also to be found in later novels.

Similarly, for Christine Klein-Lataud the English and the French version of Nancy Huston's novel are altogether parallel: the texts differ only to such extent as any translation differs from the source text, particularly in the effect of heterogeneity of

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<sup>293</sup> Klein-Lataud, "Les voix parallèles de Nancy Huston", 223.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibidem*. The pages 197-198 in *Plainsong* correspond to page 238 in *Cantique des plaines*.

<sup>295</sup> Huston, *Plainsong*, 197-198. Emphasis mine.

<sup>296</sup> Lapetina, "L'unicità dissimile. Il carattere musicale dell'autotraduzione in *Plainsong/Cantiques des plaines* di Nancy Huston", 71. Translation is mine.

proper names and references.<sup>297</sup> Where the English version is homogenous except for occasional quoting of Algonkian language, the French version presents proper names and song lyrics in the foreign language, as mentioned above.

However, the foreignizing effect in the French version is increased also by differences in the register: some Standard English terms and idiomatic expressions are translated in the French version with Parisian slang terms and expressions. In this regard, Klein-Lataud highlights that the latter stand out from the Canadian context of the narration; even though “it sometimes happens that an imperfect subjunctive comes to ‘literalize’ the French text”, the “general movement is toward the *argot*”. When the “tall and tough and healthy” female pioneer, is translated as « balèze et baraquée », words that “do not belong to the vocabulary of this region” this gives the impression of “a false note”.<sup>298</sup>

Canadian translation scholar Jane Koustas agrees and underlines that “the French version is consequently a curious mixture: it is the story of an Irish immigrants’ family on the prairies told in very European French by an Anglophone Canadian”.<sup>299</sup> While declaring that the French version cannot be judged as a normal translation, given that it is done by the author (thus not entering the complex questions arose by self-translation and its ambivalent status), Koustas maintains that these elements of *foreignness* – the Parisian *argot* in a Canadian set, among others – are one of the stylistic features of the novelist. Her success within the French literary community “stems possibly from her ability to ‘bring home’ her novels to the French interpretative community through the use of continental French while continuing to be identified as a Canadian ‘northern’ author”.<sup>300</sup>

An element that was not sufficiently highlighted by previous comparative analyses of *Plainsong/Cantique des plaines*, is the presence of a *third other* – besides the English and French linguistic and cultural references – epitomized narratologically by the character of Miranda and linguistically by her native language, Algonkian.

A while later you read Lesson XIV  
out loud together as though it were  
funny, [...], trading roles so that  
she read in English while you  
stuttered gutturally through the  
Algonkian: Look! The cars are

Un peu plus tard, vous avez lu la  
leçon XIV à haute voix ensemble  
comme si elle était drôle, [...],  
échangeant vos rôles respectifs de  
sorte qu’elle lisait en anglais tandis  
que toi tu balbutiais les syllabes

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<sup>297</sup> Klein-Lataud, “Les voix parallèles de Nancy Huston”, 223.

<sup>298</sup> Specifically, the scholar explains: “La différence la plus notable que j’aie relevée est celle des registres. Souvent, là où l’anglais est standard, le français est familier ou argotique. Voici quelques exemples : « tell you I’m miserable! / je te dis que je suis en train de crever. » « God [...] roared with laughter! / Dieu [...] se fendait la gueule. » « The kids just died and died! / Les enfants crevaient. » « God’s word! / le baratin de Dieu. » « Can you believe it ?! / Est-ce foutrement croyable ? » *Ibidem*, 224.

<sup>299</sup> Koustas, *Les belles étrangères*, 62.

<sup>300</sup> *Ivi*, 63.

coming. *Sâtisit! Itsi-enakâs epoxapoyaw*. They come very fast. *Ixka-ekkamipoxapoyaw*. They come from Winnipeg. *Mikutsitartay omortsipoxapoyaw*. The cars are full of people. *Matapix itortoyitsiyaw enakâsix*. Let us go to the depot. *Konnê-etâpoôp itsi-enakâs-api-oyis.*<sup>301</sup>

gutturales de l'algonkin: Regarde! Les wagons arrivent. (*Sâtisit! Itsi-enakas epoxapoyaw*.) Ils arrivent très vite. (*Ixka-ekkamipoxapoyaw*.) Ils arrivent de Winnipeg. (*Mikutsitartay omortsipoxapoyaw*.) Les wagons sont remplis des gens. (*Matapix itortoyitsiyaw enakasix*.) Allons ensemble à la gare. (*Konne-etapoop itsi-enakas-api-oyis.*)<sup>302</sup>

What remains unchanged in both versions – signals Chaulet-Achour – is the place devoted to the Indian language and culture “le plus inégal des trois piliers qui constituent le Canada”.<sup>303</sup> Huston does not miss the occasion to find new ways to show her readers the relativity of each language and of the obstacles inherent to human communication, as we will also see in the analysis of *The Mark of the Angel/L’empreinte de l’ange* and *Black Dance/Danse noire*. Despite their distant origins, Miranda and Paddon can interweave a dialogue because they

[...] are in some ways representative of their respective peoples, but they're also critical of them. Not only does Paddon attack the colonials for their exploitative behaviour, their hypocrisy and their cynicism, but Miranda criticizes the Blackfoot Indians for their misogyny, their cruelty, their warmongering and macho violence.<sup>304</sup>

In the light of her subsequent production, *Plainsong/Cantique des plaines* already includes the elements that are going to characterize the core of Nancy Huston’s novelistic and translational poetics, i.e., the thematic patterns and stylistic features informed by the passage from one language to the other.

First of all, it is noteworthy that the author superposes her self-affirmation as a ‘real’ writer with the moment of her first self-translation, thus reinforcing the hypothesis – springboard of the present thesis – *that self-translation has become with time a constitutive part of the writer’s poetics*. Constantly reiterating the narration into the other language reinforces her sought-after feeling of ambiguity,<sup>305</sup> for foreignness

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<sup>301</sup> Huston, *Plainsong*, 48-49.

<sup>302</sup> Huston, *Cantique des plaines*, 56-57.

<sup>303</sup> Chaulet-Achour, "Retourner sur les pas des 'ancêtres': travail de mémoire et quête de soi dans *Cantique des plaines* de Nancy Huston.", 7.

<sup>304</sup> Speech of acceptance of the *honoris causa* PhD at the University of Ottawa in June 2010. URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPB4kDj3sQ8>. Accessed January 5th 2017.

<sup>305</sup> Cf. “Towards a Patriotism of Ambiguity”, in *Longings and Belongings*.

within one's home, which is what Huston avows looking for constantly in order to nourish her inspiration for writing fiction. As Kate Averis rightfully observes,

[...] the problematic of identity is a persistent concern in Nancy Huston's corpus, and one to which she has unceasingly returned over nearly three decades of fictional and non-fictional writing since the publication of her first book.<sup>306</sup>

Where Averis uses the word 'identity', in the commonly understood meaning of 'being one, being identical to one's self' – we may superpose the word *alterity*, as we have seen how in Huston's personal biography and literary production the search develops in a double direction. Towards two cultures, two languages, a 'here' and a 'there', 'theory' and 'fiction': the fictional text *Plainsong/Cantique des plaines* strikes a dialogue with the non-fiction texts explaining the genesis of the book, where Huston thematises her Canadian-ness and her French-ness.

Secondly, what first triggered this embracing of her vocation as a novelist was the recovery of her childhood memories, its language and the world it represented for her as a child. For the first time, she found the nerve to confront herself with the innermost part of her Self, the one using the English language: «J'ai écrit *Plainsong* dans une très grande exaltation, un grand bonheur de retrouvailles, avec la langue anglaise».<sup>307</sup> The recovery of this inner core of the adult writer is a crucial step for the novelist who, like Derrida, believes that the source of artistic creation is rooted in childhood memories: «si on met une croix sur l'enfance, on peut pas faire des bons romans. On peut probablement faire des essais très intelligents, même des romans très intelligents, mais *le roman exige qu'on soit un tout*».<sup>308</sup> In *Plainsong*, language and memories are inextricably bonded:

Avec ce livre, mes racines ont pris de l'intérêt pour moi. J'avais toujours dit à tout le monde que je venais d'un pays plat, avec une histoire inexistante, une culture zéro. Et peu à peu, je me suis aperçue qu'il pouvait y avoir de la passion, de la magie et de la matière littéraire dans mes racines. Et ça m'est venu en anglais. J'entendais la musique de l'anglais. Des cantiques, des chansons de cow-boy, et de travailleurs des chemins de fer. Il fallait que ce soit en anglais.<sup>309</sup>

On the narrative level, Canadian history becomes interesting by virtue of the fact that it could be connected and compared to the history of an exotic place such as

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<sup>306</sup> Kate Averis, "Le 'vrai moi': Nancy Huston's Concern for Authenticity" in *Essays in French Literature and Culture* 45 (2008): 2. URL: <http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/id/eprint/6410>. Accessed January 5th 2017.

<sup>307</sup> Nancy Huston, "Ce que dit Nancy" in *Initiales* edited by Alain Girard-Daudon (March 2001):10.

<sup>308</sup> Huston interviewed by Catherine Lalonde, October 22nd, 2012 for *airelibre.tv*. URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCpdSg6XAw>. In *Apprendre à vivre enfin. Entretien avec Jean Birnbaum*, Jacques Derrida writes about the role of childhood in art creation: "si l'écrivain se coupe de son enfance, de ses racines, de sa mémoire onirique, ancestrale, il se prive de tous ses moyens artistiques" (Paris: Galilée, 2005), 34.

<sup>309</sup> Laurin, « Source sûre ».

Haiti....Just like on the linguistic level, the expressions in each language (English and French) become interesting by virtue of their similarity in difference: “‘can of worms’ was a cliché until I learned ‘panier de crabes’ (basket of crabs): these different ways of designating a messy situation became interesting to me simply *because* they were different”.<sup>310</sup> Thematically and linguistically, both situation are relevant by juxtaposition, in the sense that they both exemplify cultural and linguistic relativity: an awareness that should be appropriated by any writer, according to Huston.

Thirdly, although the novel is set in Calgary and Edmonton, the presence of *the foreign* is a constant point of reference and source of literary inspiration. Huston’s novels are never set in a closed mono-linguistic and mono-cultural environment. The presence of the foreign is declined into several shapes: Paddon’s father is Irish; Paddon’s sister becomes a missionary and spends her whole life in Haiti; Paddon’s son Frankie will marry a Haitian and have two children able to work magic; and the most significant is Miranda, Paddon’s Blackfoot lover. Paddon himself is actually a displaced character, only half-heartedly living his daily tasks as a father and a teacher, as if his real destiny had been a different one altogether. These characters “enact the identitarian concerns that Huston explicitly discusses in her non-fictional works”.<sup>311</sup> Moreover, this differentiation of origins and intermingling of far-fetched stories is a mark of Huston’s novels, epitomizing her aspiration for cultural relativization.

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<sup>310</sup> Huston, *Nord perdu*, 46.

<sup>311</sup> Averis, “Le ‘vrai moi’: Nancy Huston’s Concern for Authenticity”, 2.



### 3.2 The Double Identity

The French, self-translated version of *Plainsong*, entitled *Cantique des plaines* won the Governor General's Award in the autumn of 1993 (the very year of its publication) in the category of French Literature, despite the fact that the novel is actually a self-translation and that Huston has no Quebec nationality. The English version was not shortlisted for the Prize and had not made the news in Canada.

As shown previously, self-translation was not much of an object of academic studies and was virtually unheard of in public discourse in the early Nineties. Therefore, the fact that the novel was 'a translation' was perceived as failing the requirements of eligibility for the Prize. Also, the fact that Huston was born in Canada, but had left it at the age of fifteen and had been living in France for twenty years, made her a hardly classifiable subject, if judged by 'traditional' criteria.

Rather than focusing on the content and messages of the book, in fact, the press polemicized about the author's national and linguistic identity. Journalist Nathalie Petrowski (*La Presse*) first contested the fact that the author in question "ha[d] no relation with the territory anymore". Both a Canadian and French citizen – but strangely not French-Canadian – Huston was tagged by outraged Quebec editors and journalists as an "Albertaine defroquée" [unfrooked Albertan] an "Anglophone récalcitrante" [rebellious Anglophone] and "anomalie territoriale" [territorial anomaly].<sup>312</sup> Belonging neither to the French nor to the English Canadian communities, "when Huston's novel wins its award – wrote Kenneth McRoberts – no community celebrates and many in one community are offended."<sup>313</sup> Thus, the Award made Huston "suddenly and unpleasantly famous" in her native country:

Rarely – she confesses – have I felt as schizophrenic as on the day of that prize ceremony – when, on stage in the National Library of Ottawa, in front of a largely Anglophone audience, I was required to read in French an excerpt from a book which – *for once* – I had written in English!<sup>314</sup>

Huston's belonging to the Canadian and the French reading and interpretative communities is the focus of Jane Koustas's study *Les Belles étrangères: Canadians in Paris*, where she highlights that, while Huston is "a recognized figure on the French literary scene, she continues to be identified as a Canadian writer in both

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<sup>312</sup> Cf. Frank Davey, "Big, Bad, and Little Known: the Anglophone-Canadian Nancy Huston", in *Vision/Division. L'oeuvre de Nancy Huston* edited by Marta Dvorak and Jane Koustas (Ottawa: Presse de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2004).

<sup>313</sup> Kenneth McRoberts, *Beyond Quebec: Taking Stock of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 132-133.

<sup>314</sup> Huston, "Knowledge Uprooted", 345. Emphasis by the author.

communities”.<sup>315</sup> Koustas, who researched on Canadian writers and also served on the jury of the Governor General’s Literary Awards, sheds light on the elements in Huston’s novels that appear *exotic* to both interpretive communities, eventually suggesting that this is one of the natural consequences of her ‘exiled writing’.

The representations that Huston displayed about her perceived identity are invariably characterised by a deep ambiguity. In “Towards a Patriotism of Ambiguity”, she writes:

5<sup>th</sup> July [1993] Calgary. I’m reeling. I can’t believe it. The bank teller who sold me traveller’s checks this morning went to Queen Elizabeth High School. She remembers Mr. Wannacott the principal, and Mrs. Reeves the formidable French teacher...Childhood memories in common – something so simple – something I’ve been deprived of for decades. I could have wept. [...] When we leave the hotel to take a walk in the streets of downtown Calgary [...] my son Sacha (in a bitchy mood) flatly declares, “There’s nothing to see here.’ *I resent his saying it, but deep down I agree with him.*<sup>316</sup>

Later in the same text, she describes the neighbourhood of Calgary as “*both magnificent and desolate*”.<sup>317</sup> Again a few pages later, while confessing that the sight of her birth place moves her frequently to tears despite her best efforts, she criticises the vapidness of the Calgary Stampede Parade and tries to give a more precise shape to her distress: “Yes, this is clearly the problem I have with my country: its relentless, distressing, dangerous, damaging, perhaps hopeless modernity. Having effaced its (already short enough) past, it skates on the surface of its present.”<sup>318</sup> What a contrast with the richness and variety of ‘History and histories’ of the Old continent and with the descriptions of her constant amazement of the first years in Paris! As with the English and French languages, the defects of the first are made evident by the contact with the second – and the same goes for the assets. Both become *relevant by juxtaposition*. The ‘woman-she-has-become’ and the ‘woman-she-might-have-become’ transform into literary material precisely on account of their flagrant difference.

Therefore, like the content of her writing after the re-appropriation of the English language – Huston seems to claim for herself an ‘exotic’ identity in the literal meaning of the word, “from the outside”:

Huston sees herself neither as a Francophone writer translating for an Anglophone audience, Canadian or American, nor as a Canadian Anglophone translating CanLit for the French interpretative community, and hence further blurs the distinction between target and source text and implied readers.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Koustas, *Les belles étrangères*, 58-59.

<sup>316</sup> Huston, *Longings and Belongings*, 258-259. Emphasis mine.

<sup>317</sup> *Ivi*, 266. Emphasis mine.

<sup>318</sup> *Ivi*, 268.

<sup>319</sup> Koustas, *Les belles étrangères*, 65.

In comparing Huston's linguistic position with that of 19 other Canadian self-translators, Trish Van Bolderen harshly criticises the use of nationality as a criterion for belonging, especially in studies that aim at a rigorous sociological perspective, since, "although she is indeed Canadian by virtue of citizenship and commonly held perception, and while she is also a self-translator, Nancy Huston is not a Canadian self-translator".<sup>320</sup> It is evident by Huston's own declarations in *Nord perdu* and in *Longings and Belongings* that she does not claim her belonging to the Canadian community, or to any other community, for that matter, least of all one that is recognized by its participant from geo-political borders.

In *Traduttore non è traditore*, an article contained in the collection *Pour une littérature monde en français*,<sup>321</sup> Huston advocates for a *super partes* role of literature and translation that needs to exceed national borders:

Il est essentiel que les écrivains [...] expliquent de façon patiente et répétée qu'il ne sont ni des footballeurs ni des beauty queens ni des partis politiques ni des armées, qu'ils ne 'jouent' pas pour tel pays (ou telle langue), contre tel (ou telle) autre, qu'ils ne font pas la course, et que exécrant toute forme de compétition – linguistique, nationale, régionale –, ils se réjouissent au contraire de rencontrer aussi forts qu'eux, et plus forts qu'eux, leur contemporains ou non, leur compatriotes ou non».<sup>322</sup>

In the construction and development of her *oeuvre*, the novelist praises above all the maintaining of an external, distant point-of-view, nourished by the continuative alternance of languages. Division, 'bi-vision', ambiguity, multiplication of points of view are central to Huston's work to such an extent that they have become stylistic elements. "The central tension of her work", writes Koustas, "lies very much in this duality, division or duplicity of language, world views and identity, through which characters, even the narrator, are strangely distanced or exiled from their immediate environment."<sup>323</sup> From /'nænsi/ to /nãsi/, from New Hampshire to Paris, from English to French. "All of us are dual, at the least. All of us are complex and multi-layered",<sup>324</sup> she writes in *Losing North*. Being aware of the relativity of each language and culture and life experience allows the writer to learn how to identify with the entire world, with the other, and open up to the universals of human experience.

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<sup>320</sup> Trish Van Bolderen, "Huston, we have a problem...: (or what on earth is Canadian self-translation supposed to mean?)" in *Tradução em Revista* 16 (2014).

<sup>321</sup> Nancy Huston, "Traduttore non è traditore" in *Pour une littérature-monde en français* edited by Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud and Eva Almassy (Paris, Gallimard, 2007).

<sup>322</sup> *Ivi*, 152.

<sup>323</sup> Koustas, *Les belles étrangères*, 65. On this theme, cf also Valeria Sperti, "Autotraduction et figures du dédoublement dans la production de Nancy Huston" in *Tradução em Revista* 16 (2014).

<sup>324</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 26.

After visiting Alberta and Calgary after twenty years of absence, Huston writes what could be construed as a programmatic declaration of what her later works will address:

I sometimes find it destabilizing not to fully coincide with any identity – but at the same time, I'm convinced that this uncomfortable coexistence in my soul of two languages and two ways of being is what makes me most profoundly Canadian. The two have not the least desire to merge; some days, they refuse to so much as shake hands with each other; they seem to enjoy existing in a state of mutual irony, sometimes even mockery and antagonism. In a word, they lay claim to all the *ambiguity* of their situation.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Huston, *Longings and Belongings*, 278-279.

### 3.3 Why Self-translating? Editorial vs Aesthetic Reasons

*Cantique des plaines* was first and foremost the result of the repeated refusals of publishing *Plainsong*. Similar contingent reasons prompted many writers to engage in literary self-translation, like Tschingis Aitmatov (1928-2008) who decided to translate his books - first written in Kirghiz – into Russian in order to reach a larger readership and facilitate translation into third languages; or the already mentioned Samar Attar who started to self-translate because her novel *Lina: A Portrait Of A Damascene Girl* – initially written in Arabic – was still unpublished. For her, self-translation was a response and a rebellion to censure.<sup>326</sup>

So far, Nancy Huston has translated all of her novels herself with no exception.<sup>327</sup> Even though editorial and economic reasons might have prompted the first self-translation, it is plausible to think that other, less contingent and more intimate reasons constitute her motivation for engaging in the demanding task of producing two versions of each novel and of some essays.

Huston's self-imposed drive in self-translating goes toward the creation of two equilibrated versions:

Il y a deux versions de tous mes romans, sauf le *Trois fois septembre* qui n'existe pas en anglais (*je l'ai traduit* mais il n'a jamais été publié) [...] pour moi c'est important qu'il ne manque pas une page ou un paragraphe et que l'éditeur américain approuve ce que l'éditeur français approuve et inversement. Je tiens à ce que *les deux versions soient identiques dans la mesure du possible*.<sup>328</sup>

#### 3.3.1 Positive Functions...

The self-translator has repeated in different circumstances that this process improves the first draft, and even that the translated text is 'superior' to the original. This methodological approach to self-translation has manifested itself apparently from the very first text:

Thanks to my long period of suffering over *Plainsong*, I learned that translation could actually be a precious 'quality check' and help me revise the manuscript. When you write a sentence, you can be blinded to its stylistic defects because you're attending to the images and actions; when you come to translate it, however, all its defects become immediately

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<sup>326</sup> Attar, "Translating the Exiled Self. Reflections on Translation and Censorship", 133-134.

<sup>327</sup> *Trois fois septembre* was self-translated into English, even though it has remained unpublished.

<sup>328</sup> Mi-Kyung, « Épreuves de l'étranger », 8. Emphases mine.

apparent; thus, self-translation gives you the chance to eliminate repetitions, sloppy syntax, unclear images...<sup>329</sup>

Self-translation can fulfil different functions that help complete, or enrich, or embellish the first draft. It is not uncommon among self-translators to praise the benefits of translating creative writing. For instance, self-translator Linda Olsson, who writes in Swedish and English, avows that translating what she had written into the other language helped her to overcome a bad writer's block:

[...] someone suggested I should translate what I had written to Swedish, instead of just sitting staring at my screen. And soon, after starting the translation, I found myself back in the story and started writing again. I bought a large screen that allowed me to keep both versions open, side by side, and I continued working on the two versions of the manuscript simultaneously [...] *I think that the two versions influenced each other. I often found myself changing phrases or whole paragraphs in one version after finishing it in the other language. Neither would have been the same, had I written it exclusively.*<sup>330</sup>

The 'crossed pollination' hypothesized by Oustinoff is testified also by South-African writer André Brink, who finds the same positive revitalizing force in this process that illuminates hidden aspects of the first draft. First driven to self-translate in order to bypass censure on his Afrikaans writing, he now keeps on self-translating:

It has somehow come to be part of the way in which I work that I can't do without it; because every language becomes – to put it very simply – a kind of window through which one looks at the world. So if you look at the world through Afrikaans and English you get different aspects of it illuminated. And when I write something in Afrikaans and then I rewrite it in English, the second time around I discover aspects which I missed simply because I'd been writing in another language. So I can change those things in the original. [...] it is a process that really can be never-ending, but at a given moment I have to stop myself...<sup>331</sup>

The need to translate a text forces the author/translator to reread, break down the text into units, analyse it, and understand it, forcibly sharpening one's knowledge of one's own mother language and foreign language alike, and of the world-views they embody.<sup>332</sup> This understanding is accompanied by a sense of amazement for the ways in which the inherent properties of each language shape our very reasoning and imagination: "I feel a bit dizzy when, having translated one of my books, whether from

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<sup>329</sup> Huston, "Finding Freedom in a Foreign Idiom. An Interview with Nancy Huston", 13.

<sup>330</sup> Eva Gentes, "Linda Olsson". April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013. URL <http://self-translation.blogspot.it/2013/04/interview-with-linda-olsson.html>. Accessed December 28th, 2016.

<sup>331</sup> Kerneels Breytenbach, "André Brink on Writing". URL [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH\\_UcQwG2Fg&feature=related](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH_UcQwG2Fg&feature=related). Accessed December 28th, 2016.

<sup>332</sup> That the knowledge of a foreign language is a powerful instrument to gain better knowledge of one's own is no novelty: Goethe wrote "Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiß nichts von seiner eigenen" [He who doesn't know foreign languages knows nothing about his own; *Maximen und Reflexionen, Aus Kunst und Altertum*, 1821]

French into English or the other way around, I suddenly realize that I could never have written that in the other language”.<sup>333</sup>

Ever since *Plainsong*, Huston has written and translated both versions of her novels *before* either is published.<sup>334</sup> The content of each self-translated text is thus shaped *by two languages* at a time. Rita Wilson highlighted this paradoxical status in relation to Francesca Duranti’s *Sogni mancini/Left-handed dreams*:<sup>335</sup> “Both versions function simultaneously as hypotext and hypertext. Neither can be pointed to as the original one, or they both can”.<sup>336</sup>

### 3.3.2...And Negative Effects

Writing and translating a text twice is not immune from obstacles and, albeit many find it fascinating – as any translator can easily understand – it is nonetheless a physically and emotionally demanding operation:

C’était fascinant, il y avait un aller et retour pendant plus d’un an entre les deux langues, parce que la « traduction », ça oblige toujours à voir quelles sont les faiblesses du texte original. Donc, grâce au français, j’améliorais l’anglais et viceversa. [...] *C’était assez fastidieux, c’était très long, c’était un peu comme trainer des pierres.*<sup>337</sup>

Testimonies to the fatigue and frustration caused by self-translation are manifold. For Nabokov it was like “sorting through one’s own innards and then trying them on for size like a pair of gloves”<sup>338</sup> while Beckett deplored “the wastes and wilds of self-translation”.<sup>339</sup> Canadian playwright Chantel Bilodeau, translating from English to French, writes: “I felt like a hamster running around and around in a wheel but never

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<sup>333</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 30.

<sup>334</sup> Appendix I shows a synoptic table of Huston’s self-translated texts.

<sup>335</sup> Milano: Rizzoli, 1996 and New York: Delphinium Books, 2000.

<sup>336</sup> Rita Wilson, “The Writer’s Double. Translation, Writing, and Autobiography.” In *Romance Studies* 27/3 (2009): 190.

<sup>337</sup> Klein-Lataud, “Les voix parallèles de Nancy Huston”, p. 226.

<sup>338</sup> Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the ‘First’ Emigration*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 90.

<sup>339</sup> Quoted in the *Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Ruby Cohn*, Beckett International Foundation, Reading University Library. URL: <http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/special-collections/cohn.pdf>. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

getting anywhere".<sup>340</sup> It is a fluctuating experience, a marriage of opposites, as Salman Rushdie summarized with a metaphor: "Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools".<sup>341</sup> Indeed, when Huston says that "she could never have written that in the other language", the statement needs to be understood both in a positive way (the writer recognizing her originality) ...and in its negative aftermaths (the panicking translator wondering how to render the text in the second language). "The writer had become the translator's worst enemy," writes Michael Idov in relation to his first self-translation of the novel *Ground-up*<sup>342</sup> (from English to Russian): "The first layer of difficulty was my own writing style. Why the hell did I have to use so much alliteration?".<sup>343</sup> For Huston, the gap between her two languages re-enacts the failed marriage of her parents:

Sur le plan psychanalytique, je dirais que c'était comme si je faisais l'aller-retour entre mon père et ma mère, avec le sentiment qu'au fond, si seulement ils voulaient bien s'écouter, ils verraient qu'ils disent la même chose. [On a psychoanalytic level, it is as if I went back and forth from my father to my mother, with the belief that, deep down, if only they listened to each other, they'd realize that they're saying the same thing.]<sup>344</sup>

### 3.3.3 The Burgeoning of an Aesthetics of Redoublement

The writer in the foreign language is, first of all, someone who is conspicuously aware of the *relativity* of language and who draws from this awareness an acute sensibility to the aspects of language. In *Nord perdu*, Huston quotes her model, Samuel Beckett, deploring the fact that he is not yet much studied in his role of "a screamingly funny explorer of commonplaces", because "in a foreign tongue, no places are common". Each and every expression is sifted for its meaning and for its correct use, especially in writing. This sensibility derives, first of all, from the fact that the foreign language is learned through different cognitive patterns than the mothertongue; in Huston's case, the semiotic approach to language and literature offered by Roland Barthes has added another layer to her relation with the French language:

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<sup>340</sup> Caridad Svich, "An Interview with Chantel Bilodeau" on *Asymptote*. URL: <http://www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/an-interview-with-chantel-bilodeau/>. Accessed December 28th, 2016.

<sup>341</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 15.

<sup>342</sup> Michael Idov, *Ground-up* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

<sup>343</sup> Michael Idov, "The Act of Self-Translation", December, 14th 2009. URL: [http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/blog/The\\_ProsePeople/post/The\\_Act\\_of\\_Self-translation/](http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/blog/The_ProsePeople/post/The_Act_of_Self-translation/). Accessed December 29th, 2016.

<sup>344</sup> Mi-Kyung, « Épreuves de l'étranger », 11. Translation is mine.



He definitely contributed to my extreme (not to say hyper) sensitivity to language; he taught me to be wary of (not to say allergic to) 'readymade' expressions, and it is to him that I owe my penchant for parentheses, colons, semi-colons, ellipses...and overlong sentences; I both appreciate and resent this influence.<sup>345</sup>

This feature seems to be shared by other bilingual writers, who, like Huston, are sensible to the musicality of the languages. Mauritian writer Ananda Devi, for instance, stated, "in a way I am in a permanent translation process! I believe most multilingual people tend to *live with the changing music of languages in their head*, and perhaps this colors the way in which we apprehend the world."<sup>346</sup> In describing the bilingual struggles of self-translator Claude Esteban, Michaël Oustinoff writes: "the mixture of languages is not a figment of the imagination. It engenders sometimes *extremely distressing confusions given by a 'hypersensitivity to the sound of words'*, that results in 'the contamination of sense by sound'.<sup>347</sup>

The perception of the language as an object of fascination comes from the possibility of contrasting it and comparing it with the language that was taken for granted as the 'natural' connection between reality and the way to acknowledge it and express it. Accordingly, it seems legitimate to suppose that self-translation, i.e., the process of finding equivalents, or substitutes for the initial text, is a way of relativizing it, making it fragile, dispensable, a version among others, a passage on one's way to other places. Interestingly, Huston's reflections on the very function of literature – and of the novel in particular – go in the same direction, as if she had transformed the lesson coming from bilingualism into a theme to be explored in fiction.

Brink is not the sole self-translator to think that the possibilities opened up by translation and re-translation are virtually unending. Vladimir Nabokov is known to have translated and retranslated his own works and the works of others several times, out of dissatisfaction with the already available translation and in a constant strive for perfection.<sup>348</sup> Huston also dreams of a similar enterprise:

A confession: in putting *this* book together [*Longings and Belongings*], I forgot that "Singing the Plains" had been originally written in English, so I translated it from the French translation « Les Prairies à Paris ». When I compared the two versions, it turned out that *the twice-translated text was superior to the original*. I find this rather

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<sup>345</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 48.

<sup>346</sup> Ananda Devi, "An Interview with Ananda Devi by Her Translator Jeffrey Zuckerman". August 2016. URL <http://frenchculture.org/books/interviews/interview-ananda-devi-her-translator-jeffrey-zuckerman>. Accessed December 28th 2016.

<sup>347</sup> Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d'écriture et auto-traduction*, 53. Translation is mine.

<sup>348</sup> Cf. Michaël Oustinoff, "Vladimir Nabokov ou pourquoi se retraduire" in *Palimpsestes* 15 (2004), as well as Natalia Novosilzov, "De la traducción al original: las autobiografías de Nabokov comparadas" *Livius* 11 (1998).

frightening. Maybe if I translated my books back and forth fifty or sixty times they'd get *really* good!<sup>349</sup>

By this first self-translated text a specific aesthetic conception begins to take shape: one that combines the use of self-translation and its inherent reflection on both languages involved in the process, and the constant programmatic research for the musicality of language (in both French and English), to achieve what Anna Lapetina defines “una scrittura infine ‘sonora’, piegata alla seduzione del fonico”, [a ‘resonant’ writing, bent to the seduction of the phonic].<sup>350</sup> Huston, who is an accomplished piano and harpsichord player, avows that she reads the texts aloud in order to revise it. She aims at forging a ‘language for herself’ situated somewhere between English and French, and what she searches each time she starts a new novel is a specific melody:

[...] sans y réfléchir, sans le faire exprès — je cherche à préserver en français ce que j'aime de l'anglais (son ouverture, son économie, son insolence) et en anglais ce que j'aime du français (sa précision, sa sensualité, son élégance). Le résultat est ce qu'il est ; peut-être a-t-il tendance, parfois (on me l'a dit, des deux côtés de l'Atlantique), à « sonner » français aux oreilles anglophones et vice versa. Ce n'est pas ce que je cherche. Ce que je cherche, c'est... une musique. Tout ce que ma tête charrie pendant le temps de l'écriture — images, voix, bribes d'idées — doit être soumis [...] à la discipline d'une musique. [...] De même, la révision d'un texte littéraire — phase infiniment plus longue et ardue que celle de son écriture — relève pour moi d'une écoute exigeante de son rythme, de sa poésie. J'aime la répétition et j'aime la nonrépétition. Tantôt je pratique l'allitération à l'excès, tantôt je l'évite comme une maladie contagieuse. Je tiens à que chaque phrase participe, de par sa phonétique et sa ponctuation, au chant de l'ensemble. [...] Chaque roman a sa musique spécifique.<sup>351</sup>

This music can be intended in many ways – but primarily as the musical texture of her prose. Indeed, certain passages of her prose stand out for their studied musicality. “I have a musical superego who is very sympathetic and whom I trust completely”, she avowed to Irène Fenoglio, “if reading a text out loud, I find the rhythm displeasing, I change it by ‘ear instinct’».<sup>352</sup> By way of example, consider this passage taken from *Plainsong*,

[...] until there was not even a you left to revel in your aloneness but only the song, the single singing line of notes, the one long lonely modulated plaintive melody, the endless rippling golden unadulterated plainsong.

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<sup>349</sup> Huston, *Longings and Belongings*, 345. Emphasis mine.

<sup>350</sup> Lapetina, “L'unicità dissimile. Il carattere musicale dell'autotraduzione in *Plainsong* / *Cantiques des Plaines* di Nancy Huston”, 69.

<sup>351</sup> Nancy Huston, “Festins fragiles” in *Liberté. La langue des écrivains* 36/6 edited by Marie-Andrée Lamontagne (1994): 12-13.

<sup>352</sup> Huston, “Déracinement du savoir”, 43.

/ən'til ðɛr wʌz nat 'ivm ə ju left tu 'rɛvəl m juər ə'loʊnəs bʌt 'oʊnli ðə sɔŋ, ðə 'sɪŋ  
 əl 'sɪŋɪŋ laɪn ʌv noʊts, ðə wʌn lɔŋ 'loʊnli'mɔdʒjuleɪtɪd 'pleɪntɪv 'melədi, ði 'ɛndləs '  
 rɪpəlɪŋ 'goʊldən ˌʌnə'dʌltə'reɪtɪd 'pleɪn,sɔŋ/ <sup>353</sup>

The phonemes contained in the words ‘plainsong’ (p, l, n, s, g) recur in a non-casual way along the three parts of the climax (the **single singing line of notes** - the one **long lonely** modulated plaintive *melody* - the **endless rippling golden** unadulterated **plainsong**) that embody, with their increasing length and the alliterating adjectives, the sound of the plainsong they are describing, which in turn is iconic to « l'idée d'infinité évoquée par les plaines »[the idea of infinite evoked by the plains].<sup>354</sup>

According to Alice Pick, the superposition of language and music is one of Huston’s salient traits, marking her work from the beginnings to the latest novels.<sup>355</sup> The character of Kristina in *Lignes de faille/ Fault lines* (2013/2014), for instance, is compelled to abandon what she believed to be her mothertongue (German) and so as to overcome the necessary shock she invents her own language to sing ‘without words’. This intimate connection between music and language possibly comes from Huston’s own relationship with – and contrast between – English and French. The foreignness of the language, its not immediate matching of signifier and signified, is the feature that makes it possible to recognize its inherent music, intended as the possible harmonies to be created through rhetoric figures playing with the signifiers of words. As already mentioned above, Huston compares her mother- and stepmother-tongue to musical instruments, each with its own peculiarities and possibilities. Self-translation demonstrates that a melody written for the first *can* be played by the second, because eventually “what is important can be translated” and “est important ce qui est traduisible”.<sup>356</sup>

Analysing the two versions of *Plainsong/Cantique des plaines*, Marie-Noëlle Rinné asserts that the differences characterizing them exceed the changes that are required by any translation, and issue from what she calls the “third language” or the “in-

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<sup>353</sup> Huston, *Plainsong*, 154. The French translation shows an attention for the “jusqu’à ce que tu ne sois plus toi et qu’il ne reste que le chant, cette longue ligne de notes plaintives, cette lamentation immobile: le plain-chant, dans toute sa splendeur monocorde”, *Cantique des plaines*, 172.

<sup>354</sup> Huston, “Festins fragiles”, 14.

<sup>355</sup> By comparing Huston’s experience with the reflections of other self-translators, this drive toward musicality may turn out to be one of the stylistic consequences of the process. Ananda Devi recently avowed that: “when I am writing in French, there are echoes of English, Creole, and Hindi winding into the threads of my sentences, a distant melody that changes the rhythm of the writing, so that the language I am writing in appears to be French but is in fact a hybrid language that reflects my own cultural hybridity.[...] my self-translation of *Pagli* was a similarly fascinating experience in that I knew exactly where the story was going and could let the language guide me. I realized then that my writing is intensely “musical,” in the sense that *rhythms and cadences and alliteration almost precede rational thinking.*” Devi, Ananda. “An Interview with Ananda Devi by Her Translator Jeffrey Zuckerman”.

<sup>356</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 73 and *Nord perdu*, 90.

between language”.<sup>357</sup> The latter might recall the concept of *interlanguage* formalized by American linguist Larry Selinker in 1972<sup>358</sup> to define the linguistic system proper to the adult second-language learner, one which is clearly different from the learner’s native language and from the target language, but linked to both by ‘interlingual identifications’ perceived by the learner. For second-language adult learners, this ‘status’ very rarely develops into full identity with the target language: “no places are common”, summarizes Huston. The “in-between language”, is rather conceived by self-translation scholars, such as Rinné, as an imaginative space of interchange, of dialogue, between the two varieties where the words in one language “ne veulent pas dire” or “do not mean”, a space where the writer can find inspiration for literary creation. Huston’s search for this ‘third language’ follows the path of continual self-translation from one to the other. The ‘third language’ does rarely concretize in single words (like the invented terms quoted in chapter 2, “romamancière”, meaning mother and novelist “étrangéizer”, to make foreign). More often, it leaves traces, under the form of interferences in the passage from the first to the second version of her novels, as the following chapters are going to explore. According to Oustinoff,

L’auto-traduction constitue un *espace propre* où l’auteur est libre non seulement d’entrecroiser les textes selon son bon vouloir [...] mais également de recourir à tel ou tel procédé de traduction selon les circonstances.<sup>359</sup>

It seems fair to suppose that self-translators constantly take advantage of this kind of freedom, to different degrees in each text they choose to self-translate. In fact, within the *oeuvre* of a single author, self-translation can follow very different procedures and originate diverging products. Thus, out of the vast corpus of novels by Nancy Huston, I selected four texts that exemplify the variety of proceedings undertaken during her long self-translating career (from 1993-to the present day), and I am going to analyse them in an order that is meant to suggest an increasing level of stylistic complexity and experimentation in Huston’s translational choices. The first text analysed (*The Mark of the Angel/L’empreinte de l’ange*)<sup>360</sup> could fall into Oustinoff’s category of the *naturalizing translation*, where the author but rarely avails herself of all the freedom accorded by the authority with which the self-translated version is automatically

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<sup>357</sup> Cf. Marie-Noëlle Rinné, « La tierce langue de Nancy Huston », in *Cris Lenguas. Revista electrònica multilingüe del Departamento de Lenguas Extranjeras - Facultad de Humanidades - Universidad de Puerto Rico*. URL: <http://crisolenguas.uprrp.edu>. Accessed May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

<sup>358</sup> Cf. Larry Selinker, “Interlanguage” in *IRAL* 10, 209-231, 1972. The notion was subsequently developed by Stephen Krashen in *Second language acquisition and second language learning* (Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1981) and more recently a description of the phases of development of the interlanguage was made by Marina Chini in *Che cos’è la linguistica acquisizionale*, (Roma, Carocci, 2005).

<sup>359</sup> Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d’écriture et auto-traduction*, 12. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>360</sup> Nancy Huston, *L’empreinte de l’ange* (Arles, Actes Sud, 1998) and *The Mark of the Angel* (London: Vintage, 2000).

invested. Subsequently, *Instruments of Darkness/Instruments des ténèbres*<sup>361</sup> and *Limbes/Limbo*<sup>362</sup> are texts of experimentation with the possibilities offered by translation. The first has English chapters alternating with chapters in French, so that the first authorial (unpublished) version was actually a bilingual book. The second, an homage to Samuel Beckett, is published in a bilingual version that makes it easier for the reader to appreciate the dialogue between the two versions, in particular as regards cultural and literary references. Both books present examples of off-centred self-translation and of *translational re-writing*. The last textual example, *Danse noire/Black dance*,<sup>363</sup> besides being a self-translated text, is a novel that presents examples of self-translation *within* each of the two versions, and a rather experimental use of multilingualism.

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<sup>361</sup> Nancy Huston, *Instruments des ténèbres* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1996) and *Instruments of Darkness*. (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co.,1997).

<sup>362</sup> Nancy Huston, *Limbes / Limbo. Un hommage à Samuel Beckett* (Arles : Actes Sud, 2000).

<sup>363</sup> Nancy Huston, *Danse noire* (Arles, Actes Sud, 2013) and *Black Dance* (Toronto : Penguin Canada, 2014).

## PART II

The first three novels under scrutiny, *L’empreinte de l’ange*, (1998)/*The Mark of the Angel* (2000), *Instruments des ténèbres* (1996)/ *Instruments of Darkness* (1998) and *Limbes/Limbo. Un hommage to Samuel Beckett* (2000) are identified by Huston as offsprings of her ‘identity crisis’ triggered by her motherhood, the realization of her linguistic and cultural exile and the decision to deal with the consequences of her childhood trauma.

In an interview dated 2001 and carried out for *Horizons Philosophiques*, Yi Mi-Kung asks Huston to put her work in relation to that of her model, Samuel Beckett. Unlike such self-translators as Julien Green and Romain Gary, who felt free to “suppress entire chapters”, “si vous comparez les deux versions terme à terme, vous verrez qu’elle sont identique, phrase pour phrase”, states Huston and adds: “en ce qui concerne les techniques de traduction, je suis plus proche de Beckett.”<sup>364</sup>

She then draws a parallel between linguistic choices and narration structure. She sketches the portrait of the typical Beckettian characters, who, “have no plausible names, no family, no ancestors, no trade, no nationality, that is, they are pure spirits, unhappy and starving”; by virtue of their ‘bodylessness’, therefore, Beckett’s characters can acquire meaning for every readership, all over the world, and in this *universality* resides – for Huston – Beckett’s literary genius.

D'une certaine façon, la solution de Beckett est la seule qui soit élégante : on annule le monde. Mais, personnellement, j'ai besoin des histoires, je ne peux pas écrire d'histoires des personnages qui ne sont pas vivants, il faut qu'ils aient un corps, des parents, une maison, etc.<sup>365</sup>

And contrarily to Beckett, Huston feels necessary to keep questioning herself about her relationship with any audience. The question of *identification* – of her readers in her characters and of herself as a writer – unravels through and becomes central in her writing. As for her readership, she asks herself:

Si j'écris l'histoire de jumeaux berrichons sous l'Ancien Régime en France, [...] Qui s'identifie à ça? Tout Berrichon, d'abord et puis les jeunes. [...] on peut aimer un roman parce qu'il vous raconte ce que vous connaissez, ou parce qu'il vous entraîne loin, vous fait rêver à un monde exotique.<sup>366</sup>

As regards her position and the consequences on what she writes, Huston states: «je ne voulais pas être *un écrivain français*; je ne suis pas – je ne peux pas être – un

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<sup>364</sup> Mi-Kyung, « Épreuves de l'étranger », 8.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>366</sup> Mi-Kyung, « Épreuves de l'étranger », 9.

écrivain canadien, je n'ai jamais écrit un mot au Canada. C'est là que j'ai compris que je faisais partie d'un groupe *d'écrivains divisés*. »

From a narratological point of view then, apart from *Limbes*, the text devoted to Beckett – where Huston reproduces precisely one of these bodyless voices turning in circles in the meanders of language – the remaining novels analysed epitomize Huston's drive for a multicultural literature: most of the novels revolve around the stories of characters of different nationalities. For Sara Kippur, Huston's aesthetics

relies on the use of interlingual exchange but [...] places the emphasis more on the character than on stylistic impenetrability. The foreignness of the character can be localized in a *character's speech, accent, and identity*, but rarely to the point of unrecognizability or hermeticism.<sup>367</sup>

In this sense, – unlike Beckett's – her characters are “resolutely un-universal”:<sup>368</sup> they are often migrant, displaced individuals carrying within themselves various signs of far-fetching cultural roots that, when the narration takes place, act as a shield, hindering them from identifying smoothly and completely with the environment they live in and with their fellow human beings.

This typology of characters recur with unfailing frequency to nourish Huston's inspiration: I already quoted Paddon's and Miranda's origins in *Plainsong*; in *The Mark of the Angel/L'empreinte de l'ange*, Saffie and Andrés are both migrants settled in Paris (from Germany and Hungary respectively); the parents of the New-yorker Nadia, one of the protagonist of *Instruments of Darkness/Instruments des ténèbres* are Italo-Scottish and Hungarian; the protagonists of *Prodigy/Prodige* are of Russian origins, while Rénée and Solange in *Trois fois septembre* are French women who moved to the East Coast of the U.S.A.. In *Lignes the faille/Fault Lines*, the four generations of the family portrayed by Huston utterly criss-cross the globe: Kristina moves from Ukraine to Germany, then to Canada, and finally to the U.S.A.; her daughter Sadie moves from New York to Haifa (Lebanon), her son Randall will move back to live in California. *Black Dance/Danse noire* is also an intertwined narration of the biographies of three generations of an internationally-split family: the scriptwriter Milo Noirlac, son of Awinita, a Native American, and Declan, a Canadian son of an Irishman and a Frenchwoman.

These novels are allegedly the product of a literature stemming from, – and directed to – an increasingly multi-ethnic and multicultural society; however, Huston's urgency in preserving such feature in every new novel, cannot be considered accidental. Along with the extensive use of polyphony, the constant presence of music, the multicultural set of characters can be considered one of her stylistic features, in the Saidian

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<sup>367</sup> Kippur, *Writing it Twice*, 44.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibidem*.

definition: “from the standpoint of producer and receiver, the recognizable, repeatable, preservable sign of an author who reckons with an audience”.<sup>369</sup>

Nancy Huston always writes the first version of her novels in the language spoken by the characters in their diegetic world: “J’écris dans la langue que parlent mes personnages”.<sup>370</sup> The choice to redouble her work into the other language could be perceived as contradictory given that it is the first language that in-forms her characters and their interaction. However, form (the self-translation) and content (the multicultural set of character) concur to a unifying poetics. Together with the practice of self-translation, – that demonstrates that a diegetic universe *created within a language and functional to that language* can be translated into another language – the multiculturalism of her plots is a strategy to question and deconstruct the supposed meaningfulness of nationality and cultural belonging. Huston’s spotlight, in fact, is directed upon the universal human sentiments connecting these people and on how they are alike in their reactions to pain, loss, fear, anger, tenderness and love.

In order to give a heuristic perspective on this contemporary self-translator, the selected texts differ from the point of view of the first language of writing and translational choices. The first text analysed, *The Mark of the Angel* (2000)/*L’empreinte de l’ange* (1998) was first written in its entirety in French and then translated into English. *Instruments of Darkness* (1997)/*Instruments des ténèbres* (1996) and *Limbes/Limbo. Un hommage to Samuel Beckett* (2000) were written and self-translated simultaneously, the former resulting in two autonomous monolingual versions and the latter in one bilingual publication. *Danse noire* (2013)/*Black Dance* (2014) was first written in English and subsequently translated into French, although the French version was published first.

Like the vast majority of self-translators, Huston does not comment on her work as a translator in any paratextual element of her novels. There are no forewords explaining the problems posed by the original and the strategies used to solve them. Each of the two version is, therefore, generally presented to the reader as an original work. Moreover, the author is usually quite careful in taking a position in the theoretical debate on her works, seldom using the words ‘translation’ or ‘rewriting’ to define the product of her work in interviews. The word ‘version’ is used more often, as already mentioned above: “Je tiens à ce que les *deux versions* soient identiques dans la mesure du possible”.<sup>371</sup> Huston’s declared ‘translational manifesto’ resembles that of Nabokov, for instance, an author who – like her – also was an allograph translator: “rendering,

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<sup>369</sup> Edward Said, *The World, the Text, the Critic*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 33.

<sup>370</sup> Huston, « Déracinement du savoir », 45.

<sup>371</sup> Mi-Kyung, « Épreuves de l’étranger », 8. Emphasis mine.



as closely as the associative and syntactical capacities of another language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original. Only this is true translation”.<sup>372</sup>

Unlike Nabokov, though, who often manipulated the texts with remarkable additions and modifications, the outcome of Huston ‘second version writing’ is actually, for the most part, a text striving for equivalence. As Christiane Nord reminds us: “The concept of equivalence is one of the most ambiguous concepts in translation studies” and it “implies that various requirements have to be met in all text ranks”.<sup>373</sup> Therefore, when Huston claims that her versions are “identical insofar as possible” we need to give a shape and contour to that ‘possible’. Thus, the two versions of each work were read in parallel, in order to highlight all the parts that showed relevant phenomena of divergence from the norm. With ‘divergence from the norm’, I intend here the difference between a hypothetical allograph translation and the translation authored by Huston. Each self-translation analysis will be introduced by a thematic and stylistic analysis of the novel, so as to provide a context in which to read and interpret all the relevant alterations occurred in translation, as well as to look for patterns linking the translational style to the diegetic world.

The genesis of the first self-translation – *L’empreinte de l’ange* – resembles that of an allograph translation in that the first draft had been redacted in its entirety in one language. The French version was published in 1998. The English version, entitled *The Mark of the Angel*, published by Vintage in 2000, does not explicitly say that the book ‘is a translation’, but it informs the readers that it was “First published in French as *L’empreinte de l’ange*.” According to Carolyn Shread, the latter was nominated “for the French-language Governor’s General Prize and for the translation prize” in 1998, but the following year “the Canadians Arts Council refused to consider *The Mark of the Angel* for the English-language award, on the ground that it was ‘une version réécrite en anglais’”.<sup>374</sup> Ironically then, the French version was prized as a translation from the English, when it actually was the first to be written by the author. In this novel the questions of identity and identification posed above are crucial:

*L’empreinte de l’ange* est aussi un roman qui reflète cette crise-là; c’est un roman situé dans un Paris qui n’est pas du tout paradisiaque, un Paris dans la tourmente de la guerre d’Algérie, avec la question posée à chaque page: «qui s’identifie à qui»? Est-ce qu’une Allemande peut s’identifier aux Algériens, un Juif à une Allemande, vous les lecteurs à un petit enfant franco-allemand, à ces petits enfants juifs, à ces militants algériens, etc? Et jusqu’à quel point?<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Quoted in Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d’écriture et auto-traduction*, 120.

<sup>373</sup> Christiane Nord, *Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-Oriented Text Analysis* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2005), 36-37.

<sup>374</sup> Caroline Shread, “Redefining Translation through Self-Translation: the Case of Nancy Huston”, in *French Literature Series* 36 (2009): 58.

<sup>375</sup> Mi-Kyung, « Épreuves de l’étranger », 8-9.

After a commentary on the novel's content and its contribution to Huston's aesthetic visions, the textual analysis will focus on the aspects that allow the assimilation of self-translation to allograph translation. Like the latter, self-translated texts, in fact, show the recurring pattern of deforming tendencies, which are the focus of descriptive translation studies: common substitutions, usual divergences and convergences, amplifications counterbalanced by reductions, diffusions following condensations, syntactical reorderings, and so on.

Occasionally – but in a quantitatively less significant proportion in *The Mark of the angel* with respect to the subsequent texts selected for the sake of this analysis – the compared versions reveal some points where the Author shows through the Translator, this typifying the peculiarity of any self-translated text.



#### IV. DELAYED SELF-TRANSLATION FROM FRENCH TO ENGLISH

The use of the category of ‘delayed self-translation’ for Huston needs some specifications; it is only partially superposable to the original meaning that Grutman attributed to it in his review of Fitch’s, “Beckett and Babel” in 1991, where it defines a self-translation of a text that was already published. Ever since Plainsong, Huston requires that both manuscripts are approved by both editors (the French one is Actes Sud/Léméac, the one in America may vary) before either is published. In the case of the book we are going to analyse, the process of self-translation started after the French manuscript was written in its entirety.

##### **4.1 Thematic and stylistic analysis of *L’empreinte de l’ange/The Mark of the Angel***

The main theme explored in this novel is the encounter among foreigners. The narration is set in Huston’s chosen hometown, Paris, and begins in May 1957. *Madame Trala-Lepage* retires in her country mansion in Burgundy and her son Raphael Lepage – twenty-eight, orphan of his father – remains the only owner of their elegant Parisian apartment. Raphael is a flutist on the brink of becoming an world- acclaimed professional. Looking for a housekeeper who would take care of his meals he finds Saffie, a new-in-town, 20-year-old German girl. Incredibly laconic and absent-minded, Saffie leaves Raphael dumbstruck. Disregarding his mother’s aversion for the ‘former war enemies’, Raphael hires her on the spot and coincidentally falls madly in love. The fascination for Saffie’s secretiveness and aloof demeanour is so strong that, blind to the girl’s unresponsiveness, Raphael asks her to become his wife. Clearly occupied by other all-absorbing thoughts Saffie ‘opposes no resistance’ to what is happening. Shortly after their wedding, Saffie becomes pregnant but she remains “hermetically sealed around her pain, like an oyster round its pearl”<sup>376</sup>: depressed and apatic, she delves into the housework with unjustified energy. Raphael, although being a devoted and increasingly worried husband, has no clue as to how he can help his wife. Meanwhile, the world outside the unhappy couple – as the omniscient narrator reminds us – is in turmoil:

For instance, since the secret launching of the Operation Champagne last January, a large number of young French conscripts in Algeria have been taught (more or less against their will) how to torture *fellaghas*, and people suspected of being or hiding *fellaghas*, and people suspected of knowing something about the possible hiding places of potential

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<sup>376</sup> Nancy Huston, *The Mark of the Angel* (London, Vintage, 2000), 60.

*fellaghas* – in other words, pretty much anyone and everyone in the native population...Meanwhile the Federal Republic of Germany is on its way to becoming the most affluent country in Europe...Mao Zedong, even as he appreciatively takes in the fragrance of his Hundred Flowers, is warming up for the Great Leap Forward...Russia has sent *Sputnik I* into orbit, inaugurating a brand-new planetary era...And the American president – yes, the selfsame Dwight Eisenhower whose armed forces crushed the *Wehrmacht* in 1945, is starting to cast sidelong glances at a little country called Vietnam.<sup>377</sup>

Like in other novels, such as *Plainsong*, *Instruments of Darkness*, *Fault Lines* and *Black Dance*, the historical background is a staple of the architecture of the narration. While the reader is called on as a witness of the episteme of that era, the two protagonists, unaware of the reality surrounding them, carry on with their lives. After the birth of the baby, Emil (/ə'm'il/ for his francophone father and /'əmil/ for his germanophone mother), Saffie is reminded of her own childhood. The reader plunges into a series of daydream flashbacks that reveal why Saffie act as if she were traumatized: the Allied night raids and bombing over Germany during World War II; Saffie's father collaborating with the government; the death of Saffie's best friend Lotte under her bombed house; the meeting with an agonizing black American soldier, which, in her childish imagination Saffie mistook for the very devil. The twist in the plot arrives when Saffie meets Raphael's instrument maker, András, a Jewish-Hungarian immigrant living on little wages in the *Marais*. Like Saffie, he still speaks a hesitant French. Being both foreigners, and both survivors from the recent war, their empathy is immediate, overpowering their possibly hindering differences. András's *atelier*, with its "ambiance of reconforting plurality", is the symbol for Huston's ideal interaction of cultures and languages:

C'est notamment le seul lieu dans le roman où les langues sont présentées comme étant en accord les unes avec les autres. Les sabirs sont sur un pied d'égalité avec les langues, et les langues se mêlent aux sons d'instruments musicaux. Les frontières entre la langue étrangère et la langue maternelle, entre la voix humaine et le son d'un instrument deviennent brouillées ; les différentes langues et musiques ne sont que des unités sonores qui se mêlent sans distinction à la « pagaille polyglotte ». Si Huston a dit que *L'Empreinte de l'ange* est un livre sur Babel, l'atelier d'András est l'image même du désordre post-babélien. Mais dans l'atelier, ce désordre est paisible et harmonieux.<sup>378</sup>

Thanks to the favourable listening ears of her lover, Saffie finally deals with her painful past. She and her mother were raped by Russian troops invading Germany, and the latter committed suicide shortly afterwards, leaving Saffie and her numerous brothers and sisters alone. Saffie's father, in the meantime, was taking part in the Nazis' project to exterminate Jews. András, on the contrary, tells her as little as possible about the suffering inflicted by the Nazis on his own family and people. Instead, he forces Saffie to confront to their present reality: while the conflict between France and Algeria is

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<sup>377</sup> Huston *The Mark of the Angel*, 60.

<sup>378</sup> Alice Pick, "La langue fantasmée dans *L'Empreinte de l'ange* et *Lignes de faille* de Nancy Huston" in *Migrations, exils, errances et écritures* edited by Corinne Alexandre-Garner and Isabelle Keller-Privat (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2012).

exacerbating, the slums in Paris suburbs are bursting with immigrant workers and their families. In October '61, the atmosphere is so tense that the French government establishes a curfew for Muslims. Andrés who sympathizes for the cause of his Algerian friends, helps organize the march of protest of October 17<sup>th</sup>, which ends in a violent repression and the utter massacre of an uncertain number of Algerians by the hand of the police, under direct order of the Prefect of Paris, Maurice Papon. Andrés's friend Rachid – one of the leaders and fund-raisers of the FLN French Federation – is tortured and killed, then buried anonymously in a communal grave. Andrés, instead manages to return to his workshop in *Marais* and to Saffie and Emil's love.

The character of Andrés is the fictional embodiment of Huston's reflection on the role and power of narration expressed in *The Tale-tellers*.

Why should I tell her? thinks Andrés. After all, I could just as well invent a different story for myself. A story in which Saffie's people wouldn't have gassed mine. A story in which I would have had no uncles and aunts, no grandmothers and grandfathers to begin with, each with their specific shape of nose, curve of neck, colour of eyes, crinkles of laughter, bullets in brain, face crushed by boots...A story in which I wouldn't even have been born in Hungary, and my name wouldn't be Andrés...Why should I tell her the true story instead of the made up one? Just because it happens to be true? How does this truth concern her? Must she really be forced to learn it? *Which* truths are we required to pay attention to, and which can we ignore?<sup>379</sup>

Andrés's words are specular to those of the author, who, in an essay on the themes surrounding the construction of identity, states: "quand j'essaie d'expliquer cela, je rencontre l'incompréhension: 'Quand est-ce que vous retournez chez vous?' – 'mais, jamais'. Quel chez moi? *Pourquoi l'arbitraire lieu de ma naissance aurait-il des droits sur mes désirs actuels? Pourquoi n'inventerais-je mes propres racines?* ».<sup>380</sup>

Two more years pass by before the final *denouement* revealing the descent to the inferies evoked by the narrator in the Prologue. Raphael discovers his wife's betrayal, accidentally, as he drives by the *Place de la Concorde* in a taxi: he recognizes Emil's coloured patchwork parka, held by the instruments maker, while Saffie and the baby are taking a ride on the Ferris wheel. Too scared and enraged to question Saffie directly, he decides to take Emil on a visit to his grandma. On the train, Emil, at Raphael outburst, candidly admits that he feels Andrés to be his real father. In a fit of desperation at seeing his world collapse, Raphael suspends Emil out of the far-end door of the train. Intentionally or by accident, the child slips off his hands and dies crushing on the rails. Saffie hears of the accident from the concierge and simply disappears, never to be seen again. The Epilogue shows Raphael and Andrés still in Paris thirty-five years later, meeting by chance in a Parisian café and recognizing each other under the ravages of pain and passing time: "A long time ago, each deprived the

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<sup>379</sup> Huston, *The Mark of the Angel*, 145-146.

<sup>380</sup> Huston, *Désirs et réalités*, 201. Emphasis mine.

other of the woman and child he loved”.<sup>381</sup> They merely stare at each other in silence. The question that has recurred frequently all over the novel – does it matter now? – comes up one last time. The narration is suspended here, but the story – of war and of human suffering – seems never-ending.

As the two epigraphs to the novel allowed us to forecast,<sup>382</sup> the theme of suffering and, more precisely, of the incommensurability of collective and personal sufferings is one of the leading axes of the novel, as recurrently emphasized: “How can so many worlds exist simultaneously on one little planet?” asks the narrating voice, “which of them is the most genuine, the most precious, the most urgent for us to understand?”.<sup>383</sup> In fact, the reader is confronted with all kinds of human miseries throughout the narration, as in a Dantesque descent into the underworld: adultery, rape, torture, vengeance, war and death.

The ‘mark of the angel’ – which gives the novel its title – refers to every child’s innocence and pureness at the time of its birth. Andrés explains to Saffie that the mark above the upper lip is where the angel puts a finger before a baby is born to make the baby forget everything it has learned before ‘up in paradise’ so that he or she will ‘come into the world innocent’.<sup>384</sup> As the plot deepens and develops, the reader learns that none of these characters is completely ‘good’ and innocent, none of them is devoid of faults. Not Raphael, with his *petit bourgeois* attitudes, not Saffie, unfaithful woman, nor Andrés, hiding illegal weapons in his shelter. Yet, somehow, as we omnisciently get to know their past, we are led to empathize with them, rather than to condemn them: Raphael is redeemed by his unreturned love for Saffie, Saffie and Andrés by their past suffering. Can guilt and innocence coexist within the same individual? Since each of them is faulty, it is difficult to identify completely with one in particular. The reader is told their stories from different perspectives and is invited to try and understand which forces drive each of them. Even though the novel is not polyphonic, the internal focalization, exploring the thoughts and feelings of the three adults, allows the reader to identify with each of them in turns. According to Raffaella Baccolini and Chiara Elefante, Huston multiplies “les formes de témoignage, les expressions de récit de vie, en offrant au lecteur, de toute situation, une vision *qui n’est jamais monolithique mais*

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<sup>381</sup> Huston, *The Mark of the Angel*, 276.

<sup>382</sup> The first, by the Swedish writer Göran Tunström, (a personal friend of Huston’s) tells: “How can we compare sufferings?/ Each person’s suffering is the most important./ But what enables us to go on?/ Only sound, which comes and goes/ like water amongst the stones.” The second epigraph is constituted by a couple of verses from the poem *Enigma* by the Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann, translated by Huston into French and English: “Now, now,/ as music always says,/ don’t cry.”

<sup>383</sup> Huston, *The Mark of the Angel*, 199.

<sup>384</sup> *Ivi*, 155.

*au contraire toujours protéiforme*”, in order to undermine the reader’s certainties about good and evil.<sup>385</sup>

This vision seems to be consistent with Huston’s declared aesthetic – and even ethical – aims. In her essay *The Tale-tellers. A Short Study of Humankind*, she states that “the characteristic of the novel – the way in which it explores the tension between individual and society, between freedom and determinism, and encourages us to identify with people unlike ourselves – make it capable of playing a role in ethics”;<sup>386</sup> and further still, “art’s mission is not to impoverish but to enrich – not to slavishly transcribe the raw material of human existence but, *refracting it through one or several particular minds*, to help us to understand it.”<sup>387</sup> In a very recent interview, this belief is reiterated: “la force de la littérature c’est [...] de fragiliser son ‘soi’ dans des conditions de sécurité, en se projetant dans d’autres ‘soi’, en se mettant dans la peau des autres...avoir leurs yeux, même s’ils ne nous ressemblent pas du tout...». <sup>388</sup> Displayed with different life experiences, different social positions and historical heritages that include war experiences, the reader is not asked to judge the characters’ choices, or take a position in favour of one of them, but just to receive their stories, understand their reasons, their choices. The novel is an instrument teaching us to identify with the foreign, as the author herself declares:

[C’est] la question que j’explore dans *L’empreinte de l’ange*, où je montre un Paris étranger remplis d’étrangers, qui tous perçoivent la ville à leur manière. Et je sollicite l’identification des lecteurs à des choses qui ne leur ressemblent pas. Enfin je pose la question, plutôt continuellement: est-ce qu’on peut s’identifier à ce qui ne vous ressemble pas?<sup>389</sup>

A couple of years after the publication of the novel, Huston also gave her own interpretation as to the horrible ending of the story, one that deals with her own trauma as a child and the healing power of writing:

Entres autres, les romans, pour moi, étaient la possibilité de laisser s’échapper un peu de cette rage contre la violence qui m’avait été faite. *L’empreinte de l’ange* n’est que ça; c’est moi Emil, moi que l’on a jeté du train à l’âge de six ans, avec les trois adultes qui décident de tout, sans tenir compte des besoins de l’enfant, ni de ses questions, ni de son identité etc. Je peux décrire la dynamique du livre ainsi maintenant, mais je ne le savais pas du tout

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<sup>385</sup> Raffaella Baccolini and Chiara Elefante, “L’empreinte de l’ange de Nancy Huston: la traduction narrative des plusieurs traumatismes individuels et collectifs” in *Traduire les savoirs* edited by Danielle Londei and Matilde Callari Galli (Berne: Peter Lang, 2011), 135.

<sup>386</sup> Nancy Huston, *The Tale-Tellers: A Short Study of Humankind* (Toronto, McArthur & Co., 2008) 162.

<sup>387</sup> *Ivi*, 163-164.

<sup>388</sup> Nancy Huston interviewed for the radio program *Le temps des écrivains* (March 19th, 2016) on *France culture*. URL: <http://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/le-temps-des-ecrivains/mots-avec-nancy-huston-philippe-djian-et-frederic-ciriez?xtmc=Nancy%20Huston&xtnp=1&xtcr=3>

<sup>389</sup> Huston, « Déracinement du savoir », 46.



en l'écrivant. Ce livre-là n'aurait pas existé sans cette structure familiale très particulière qui était la nôtre. Bien sûr le roman ne peut se réduire à ça, je l'espère!<sup>390</sup>

Thus Huston compares herself to the character who most precisely lives in-between languages: « Emil connaît un peu toutes les musiques, mais aucune ne lui appartient en propre. Il n'a appris à chanter ni *Le Bon Roi Dagobert* ni *Alle meine Entchen*. » (p. 199) and again: “Il croit qu’il a deux pères : papa le Français etapu le Hongrois. Tandis que les deux vies de sa mère s’ajoutent l’une à l’autre, celles d’Emil s’annulent. Il n’a rien, n’est rien » (p. 198).

Another narrative device that this text has in common with the other selected texts is the *mise en abîme* of the process of narration. The comments of the narrator serve the purpose of drawing the readers’ attention to the subtle difference between historical facts and the fictional nature of the plot we are being told. “Our story begins in the month of May 1957, in the city of Paris” states the first line of the *Prologue*, for instance. But also the narrating voice directly challenging the reader to follow it into the hellish narration:

Oh, be my Dante and I’ll be your Virgil! Give me your hand, give me your hand. Have no fear, I won’t abandon you, I promise, I’ll remain always by your side as we go spiralling slowly down the stairs.<sup>391</sup>

This meta-narrative framework focusing on the voice of the narrator is fully exploited in *Instruments of Darkness/Instruments des ténèbres*, where the voice is directly that of the writer, as we will see later. In *Black Dance/Dance noire*, the metanarrative framework is that of a filmscript draft as it is being written and commented upon by the narrator/filmwriter at the deathbed of his lover, whose life will be the theme of the film.

Huston has often linked this display of literary awareness and reflexivity – albeit being a sign of the post-modern writer in general – one which accounts for rather rigid formal structures, to a sort of pattern, or even cage, she needs in order to write serenely and, possibly, to a direct consequence of her youthful involvement with literary theory. *The Mark of the Angel* is strewn with comments of the narrating voice, seeking the reader’s complicity, warning it to beware, suggesting interpretations. With the final comments the narrator even interrogates itself on the meaning of the story it has just told. As Raphael and Andrés stare at each other, the narrator tells us: “Nothing happened, did it? Or...so little...and such a long time ago...Tantamount to nothing by now...isn’t it?”

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<sup>390</sup> Mi-Kyung, « Épreuves de l'étranger », 5.

<sup>391</sup> Huston, *The Mark of the Angel*, 2. Italics in the text.

Wouldn't that be preferable? We must, after all, recover our innocence before going to meet the angel. Ah yes. All of us are innocent still."<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Not all the critics agree with this interpretation of Huston's poetics. For instance, Frank Davey, discussing about Huston's cold reception by Anglophone-Canadian readers, states that "there is little sense of the local in Huston's fiction, or affection for it, or of the local vs. global dichotomy in which, in much contemporary Anglophone-Canadian fiction, 'local' is the valorized term. Quite possibly, lack informs the 'coldness' that many of her viewers experience. For behind it lies the profound alienation – from place, family, historical continuity – that most of Huston's novels document." Davey, "Big, Bad and Little Known: the Anglophone-Canadian Nancy Huston", 14.

## 4.2 Self-translation Analysis: from French to English

As I have pointed out in Chapter One, like, ‘translation’, the term ‘self-translation’ has come to define both the process and the product resulting from it. To this regard, Grutman and Van Bolderen have highlighted that:

While the process of self-translation seems to possess several features that define it as an original practice or at least a particular category of translation (chief among those features are the potential for bi-directionality and simultaneity, as well as privileged access to private sources and the – albeit reconstructed – memory of original intention), *it is much harder to pinpoint what sets self-translated texts apart as products.*<sup>393</sup>

Indeed, in self-translation studies ‘top-down analyses’ – those that start by theoretical considerations and only afterwards bend on the versions of the text to seek comparison and identify peculiar phenomena – largely exceed the number of ‘bottom-up analyses’, i.e., those that consider the texts only, disregarding paratextual and extratextual factors, such as the bio-bibliography of the author, the events that drove him/her to self-translation, his/her aesthetic aims, and so forth.

The fact that the process undertaken by the author transfers the authority onto the translation, often leads scholars to consider self-translated texts as entirely ‘out of the norm’. It is true, as Michaël Oustinoff points out, that “tout texte auto-traduit possède du fait de son auctorialité même un statut particulier” [each self-translated text has a peculiar status deriving from its authoriality], but this should not lead us to neglect, or to omit altogether, the great role played by ‘doxal’ translation in its construction.

Huston uses the term ‘translation’ to describe how she proceeds to create her second versions: “la *traduction*, ça oblige toujours à voir quelles sont les faiblesses du texte original. Donc, grâce au français, j’améliorais l’anglais et viceversa ».<sup>394</sup> The process *does* actually start out as a translation: decoding the first text, interpreting its meaning and finding corresponding solutions, synthesizing its function in the second language. Christiane Nord points out that “Since the translator is only one of many possible Source-Text receivers (and not really a typical one at that) her or his opinion of the source text cannot be regarded as being definite”.<sup>395</sup>

However, this particular source-text receiver coincides with the source-text sender and is automatically better placed to judge which aspects and functions of the source text need to be given priority in the shaping of the target text. Additionally, although the target text will be from time to time a mixture of all the variations in the spectrum that

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<sup>393</sup> Grutman and Van Bolderen, “Self-translation”, 329.

<sup>394</sup> Klein-Lataud, « Les voix parallèles de Nancy Huston », 226.

<sup>395</sup> Nord, *Text Analysis in Translation*, 36.

starts from ‘transcription’, all the way through through ‘word-for-word translation’, ‘literal translation’, etc., to ‘free translation’, it will eventually be received as the output of a free-from-constraints ‘text production’.<sup>396</sup>

Moreover, the particular situation in which this self-translation takes place allows for a peculiar revision of the original text. As the interpretive process forces the author to bend over her own text and to ‘read it through the mirror of the other language’, the *faiblesses* of the first version are revealed: unclear passages, inelegant turns of phrases, a euphonic possibility that was not exploited in the first place, and so forth. This process could possibly involve all the levels of the text and from being a ‘simple’ translation, it thus turns into something closer to a revision of the original. While translators may also ultimately be regarded as reviewers of the text in that their interpretation of it may make it clearer, more explicit, etc., the self-translator may actually intervene on the ‘original’ text, and rewrite parts of it.

The instruments with which to compare and contrast the two twin texts remain the traditional instruments of translation analysis. Close reading shows that Huston’s second versions have a lot in common with allograph translations on all textual levels. For instance, let us compare in the first paragraph of the novel the order of translation units, intended as ‘the smallest segment of utterance whose signes are linked in such a way that they should not be translated individually’:<sup>397</sup>

L’Histoire qu’on va lire commence en mai 1957, à Paris. La France est en pleine effervescence: dans les douze années depuis la fin de la guerre elle **a eu droit** à vingt-quatre gouvernements et à quatre-vingt-neuf propositions de révision de sa Constitution. Mais les gens ne s’en préoccupent pas trop: d’après un sondage récent, seulement 41% des conversations française portent sur la politique, alors que le sujet numéro un, avec un score de 47%, c’est Brigitte Bardot.

Our story begins **in the month of** May 1957, **in the city** of Paris. France is sizzling with nervous energy. In the twelve years since the end of the war, the country **has gone through** twenty-four governments and eighty-nine proposed amendments of the constitution. But people don’t seem too concerned – according to a recent survey, only 41 per cent of French conversations revolve around politics. Subject number one, with a score of 47 per cent, is Brigitte Bardot.

The order and length of the translational units is generally respected. The only relevant modification regards the expression ‘a eu droit’ [literally, has had right to] with ‘has gone through’, which fails to report the ironic undertone of the former. The two additions in the first sentence, (“in the month of”, “in the city of”) arguably serve the

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<sup>396</sup> Cf. Nord, *Text Analysis in Translation*, 33 and following.

<sup>397</sup> Jean-Paul Vinay, and Jean Darbelnet, *Comparative Stylistics of French and English. A Methodology for Translation* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995), 352.

purpose of maintaining a certain length and rhythm – provoking similar prosodic effect when read aloud - that would otherwise be lost; moreover, without these additions, the order of the complements would vary, thus displacing the emphasis (cf. “Our story begins in Paris, in May 1957”).

Jane Grayson, who analysed the translations by Nabokov in *Nabokov Translated. A Comparison of Nabokov's Russian and English Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) labels those passages where the target text differs significantly ‘minor and major reworkings’. Michael Oustinoff, backing his argument with Walter Benjamin’s reflection on *Umdichtung* (poetic transposition), criticises the use of these categories to analyse self-translated texts, and suggests, instead, the use of ‘transformations transdoxale’ [transdoxal transformations] to define “non seulement l’ensemble des opérations traductives que la traduction doxale s’interdit habituellement, mais également – et surtout – celui des opérations au moyen desquelles l’œuvre peut pivoter sur elle-même en offrant un versant qui soit le produit d’une transposition poétique.” Unlike the works of other renowned self-translators, such as Gary and Green, the texts self-translated by Huston are not characterized by either major or even minor reworkings, at least not on the level of *overall structure, chapters, and paragraphs*, which are symmetrical in all the texts analysed, except for the single case of *Plainsong* (see 3.1.1). Some phenomena that could be labelled ‘rewriting’ (in the terms of translation analysis) or ‘translational rewritings’ (*réécriture traduisante* in the terms used by Oustinoff) occur though, on the level of the *single sentence and turn of phrase*.

The use of labels to identify these phenomena differ, but the substance remains the same: there are inevitable transformations in the target text and these may always be justified by the fact that the *author* made them. We therefore rely on the fact that ‘source-text sender’ and ‘source-text receiver/target-text sender’ are the same person and thus free to make whatever aesthetic choice they like. Or, on the opposite side of the range, we may choose to impute these ‘transformations’ to the intrinsic differences between the two languages involved in the process. Either choice does not lead the analysis very far. Indeed, what we should look for in the analysis of self-translated texts is *patterns of recurrent solutions* implemented to solve problems posed by the linguistic transfer and see how the style of the author under study is being informed and eventually affected by such patterns of choices.

#### **4.2.1 Euphonies: Alliterations, Assonances and Rhymes**

Huston has talked and written profusely about the use of French as a literary language. The aesthetic nourishing her prose in her second language focuses on the sound and rhythm, constituted by the harmony of syntactical and phonetic choices, in short, on the musicality of the sentence:

The French I use in writing has all the advantages and drawbacks of an acquired idiom. Whether I deploy slangy or sophisticated vocabulary, simple or convoluted syntax, it is something I have “learned” and used as convincingly as I can. My earliest texts in French, which date back to the mid-1970s, are rife with puns. This was partly a sign of the times (Jacques Lacan and Hélène Cixous were then making “plays on the signifier” very fashionable), but it also betrayed *my pathological awareness of the language itself. Foreigners are far more conscious of phonetical rubbings and rhymings than native speakers.*<sup>398</sup>

Accomplished musician, Huston has declared in a recent interview that, for her, “les mots sont une forme de musique”.<sup>399</sup> Besides influencing her creative writing, this ‘musical’ approach to the language matters greatly in her approach to translation. Indeed, it matters to such an extent that, sometimes, the aesthetic function of the signifier takes precedence over the need to transfer the signified: “le rythme, la phonétique, c’est-à-dire la musique en général, pour moi sont primordiales. Donc souvent, *j’ai été prête à sacrifier le sens précis des mots pour préserver un certain nombre de syllabes, ou pour préserver une alliteration*”.<sup>400</sup> More easily and comfortably than common translators, self-translators can take the liberty to justify in these terms the negligence of a meaning over the musical balance of the sentence. And in fact, at the phonetic level of the text Huston most fully exploits her authority and is not willing to let someone else take over: “[S]ince rhythm and phonetics are of the utmost importance to me, I wouldn’t trust anyone else to translate my work into one of these languages.”<sup>401</sup>

Some sentences feature remarkable consonances and alliterations, as in the following description of spring, « à son acmé d’éclosion, de floraison, de poésie à pétales et à parfums. » [a sɔ̃n- akme dɛklozjɔ̃, dɛ flɔʁezɔ̃, dɛ pœzi a petal e a parfɛ̃] (p. 27) which means literally, ‘at its peak of hatching, of flowering, of poetry made of petals and perfumes] is translated “in full bloom and blossom, bursting with petals and poetry and poignancy” [ɪn fɒl blu:m ænd 'blɒsəm, 'bɜ:stɪŋ wɪð 'petlz ænd 'pɔ:tri ænd 'pɔɪnənsɪ] (p.16). The comparison of the two versions makes it all the more evident that the second text is built on a similar pattern of sound repetitions, rather than on the literal meaning of the first version: the chiasm in the French (akme dɛklozjɔ̃) is maintained in the English (fɒl blu:m). The same goes for the alliteration of **p** in the second part of the sentence while in the first part, the repetition of the phonemes **s** and **ɔ̃** in the French is substituted by the repetition of **b** and **m**.

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<sup>398</sup> Huston, “The Mask and the Pen”, 63. Emphasis mine.

<sup>399</sup> Interviewed for the radio program *Le temps des écrivains* (March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016) on *France culture*. URL: <http://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/le-temps-des-ecrivains/mots-avec-nancy-huston-philippe-djian-et-frederic-ciriez?xtmc=Nancy%20Huston&xtnp=1&xtcr=3>. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>400</sup> Klein-Lataud, “Les voix parallèles de Nancy Huston”, 224. Emphasis mine.

<sup>401</sup> Huston, “Finding freedom in a foreign idiom”, 13.

The same phenomenon occurs also elsewhere in the text with repetitions maintaining the same pattern of the first version though not the same consonants: « Le hasard a voulu que tous les autres hommes soient déjà partis rejoindre leurs *épouses épuisées* et leurs *bébé braillards* » (p. 98) [literally, ‘exhausted wives’ and ‘bawling babies’]. In this case, as well, the focus is on the pattern of the same isocolon, that, following the grammar of each language, is NOUN+ADJECTIVE in French, and ADJECTIVE+NOUN in English: “It so happens that all the other men have gone to join their *spent spouses* and their *bawling babes* [...]” (p. 76). Also, where the French version uses standard and familiar terms (*braillard*) the English version displays an uncommon, more sophisticated, expression (*spent spouses*) that draws attention to its phonetic texture and, therefore, to the repetition.

Sometimes this research for euphony is limited to the second version of the text. For instance, the climatic juxtaposition of three adjectives in the first version in this sentence: « après, elles sont épanouies, radieuses, comblées... » (p. 71) [literally, ‘blooming, radiant, fulfilled’], is exploited to create a consonance: “...afterwards, they’re **radiant, resplendent, ravishing...**” (p. 53) and a repetition of the final phoneme ‘ənt’ in the first and second adjective.

There are other examples showing how Huston has often taken the opportunity to amplify or reinforce the euphonic effect in the English text. In a passage describing Raphael accompanying Saffie to do some paperwork, the man: « discute plaisamment avec les employés ronchonners et renfrogné, au visage fermé et au verbe fruste » (p. 63) [discusses pleasantly with the grumbling, sullen employees, with their dispiriting expressions and laconic responses]. Besides maintaining the original patterns of alliteration in the adjectives describing the employees, (*ronchonners et renfrogné – sullen, scowling*), the English version also adds the information that Raphael is successful in obtaining the attention of his interlocutors because the addition of two verbs is needed to maintain the images of the ‘turgid tongues’ (*verbe fruste*) and of the ‘masks of boredom’ (*visage fermé*) in their position at the end of the sentence, even though their order is inverted. Also, the images are rendered with different modulations<sup>402</sup>: the part (*tongue*) for the whole (*visage*), and the concrete (*mask*) for the abstract (*verbe*): “striking up conversations with the sullen, scowling employees, *loosening* their turgid tongues and *cracking* their masks of boredom” (p. 46). This attention to the possible euphonies to be revealed through the second language is a trait Huston has in common with other self-translators. Analysing Nabokov’s prose, Jane Grayson writes: “All the novels, [...] contain one or two examples of added or

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<sup>402</sup> Intended as a variation in the form of the message, obtained by a change in the point of view. Cf. Vinay and Darbelnet, *Comparative Stylistics of French and English. A Methodology for Translation*, 89.

elaborated figures. Alliteration is also a feature of the translations”.<sup>403</sup> By comparing Huston’s experience with the reflections of other self-translators, this drive toward musicality may turn out to be one of the stylistic consequences of the process. Self-translator Ananda Devi recently avowed that:

[...] when I am writing in French, there are echoes of English, Creole, and Hindi winding into the threads of my sentences, a distant melody that changes the rhythm of the writing, so that the language I am writing in appears to be French but is in fact a hybrid language that reflects my own cultural hybridity.[...] my self-translation of *Pagli* was a similarly fascinating experience in that I knew exactly where the story was going and could let the language guide me. I realized then that my writing is intensely “musical,” in the sense that *rhythms and cadences and alliteration almost precede rational thinking*.<sup>404</sup>

In the examples examined so far, alliteration mainly serves an aesthetic purpose, but there are also cases where alliterations and rhymes rather have a narrative function. For instance, Andrés confuses two terms containing similar sounds, and this is revealing of the character’s lack of fluency in French language, a way to remark his foreignness in the Parisian context: « – Je suis une planche (‘plank’, ‘board’), dit-il, voulant dire ‘planque’ (‘hideout’, ‘stash’), et comme Saffie fronce les sourcils d’incompréhension, il faut qu’Andrés lui explique. » (p. 226).

As any allograph translator would have been entitled – and required – to do in this case, Huston starts by finding the translation to the second term, the one whose meaning is relevant in the context (‘stash’ for *planque*) and only afterwards she looks for a quasi-homophone to complete the exchange: “ ‘This is a slash,’ he says, meaning a stash, and Saffie frowns uncomprehendingly. So Andrés goes on to explain.” (p. 187).

In another instance, Huston recurs to the lexicalisation of the pronunciation of the word ‘sweetie’ in order to reproduce the rhyme between ‘moi’ (/mwa/) and ‘chocolat’ (/ʃɔkɔla/), while the other rhymes are sacrificed to meaning, which, in this particular context, is necessary to distinguish between the character of Andrés, and his social extraction in particular, and that of Emil, heir of a rich bourgeois Parisian family:

Mon papa  
Est un bourgeois  
Ma grandmère  
Est propriétaire  
Et moi ? et moi ? et moi ?

-Moi j’aime le chocolat ! s’écrie Emil  
[...] (p. 249)

My papa  
is a bourgeois  
My grandma  
is a landowner  
And me? And me? And me?

“I want a sweet-ee!” cries Emil [...] (pp. 207-208)

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<sup>403</sup> Jane Grayson, *Nabokov Translated: A Comparison of Nabokov’s Russian and English Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 123.

<sup>404</sup> Ananda Devi, “An Interview with Ananda Devi by Her Translator Jeffrey Zuckerman”. August 2016. URL <http://frenchculture.org/books/interviews/> Accessed December 28th 2016.



### 4.2.2. Idioms

The first strategy usually applied to translate idioms or fixed expressions is, as suggested by Mona Baker, “finding an idiom of similar meaning and similar form”,<sup>405</sup> on condition that it fits the style, register and rhetoric of the target text in a way comparable to their counterparts in the source text. The chosen expression may happen to have a similar meaning but a different form displaying different lexical items. In general though, when the source text shows an idiomatic expression, the target text shows a corresponding idiomatic expression, adjusted to the target context if need be. For instance, the French expression *casser la croûte*, literally ‘breaking bread’, have a meal together, is translated by Huston with the idiom, ‘to have a bite’: « – Alors venez, je vais vous montrer la cuisine en bas, et on cassera la croûte ensemble; comme ça ce sera fait... – Casser quoi ? » → “Well, then, come on downstairs. I’ll show you round the kitchen and we can have a bite to eat together – that will be one thing out of the way.’ – ‘A bite?’.” (p. 21). In both dialogues, Raphael’s proposal is not understood by Saffie, who, having just started to learn the language, is unfamiliar with idioms. Throughout the two versions there are numerous examples of idioms translated along these lines:

Mais le silence de Saffie le frappe *de plein fouet*. Il accuse le coup. Se calme, se tait. (p. 15)

Saffie’s silence, however, strikes him *with the force of a blow*. Calms him down. Shuts him up. (p. 5)

Emil ne se sépare jamais de Saffie. A près de six ans, il est toujours *fourré dans ses jupes*, c’est épouvantable ! se dit soudain Raphaël. (p. 308)

Emil never leaves Saffie’s side. At the age of six, he’s still *tangled up in her apron’s strings*. That’s bad, Raphael suddenly realizes. (p. 260)

*Fouet* literally means ‘whip’, and the whole expression means ‘with full force’; the second expression invokes two different synecdoches to represent the image of a mother: both *jupes* (skirt) in French and ‘apron’ in English have the same synecdochic meaning.

Similarly, a list of pejorative terms used by the French to refer to German people is adapted to the target culture, while maintaining the exact number and degree of uncouthness:

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<sup>405</sup> Mona Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. (London: Routledge, 2011), 76.

Sa mère ne disait ni les *Boches* ni les *Chleuhs* ni les *Fridolins* ni même les *Allemands*, elle disait simplement *ils* et du reste, le plus souvent, elle ne disait rien du tout [...] (p. 20)

His mother called them neither *Krauts* nor *Boches* nor *Jerries* nor even *Germans*, she simply said *they*, in fact more often than not she didn't say anything at all [...] (p. 9).

When Huston intervenes on the form of the first idiom, adding an element, for instance, as in the following example: « La mère de Raphaël lui avait donné de méticuleuses instructions à ce sujet a semaine d'avant, en lui cédant l'appartement parisien pour se retirer avec ses *armes, bagages et domestique* dans leur propriété en Bourgogne » (p. 17), the same creative addition is adjusted to the second text:

His mother had given him careful instructions on this subject the previous week before she packed up – *lock, stock, barrel and maid* – to leave for their house in Burgundy, handing over the Paris apartment to him. (p. 6)

Both expressions mean 'completely, entirely', and both are built in the semantic field of weapons (*armes* meaning weapons and *lock stock and barrel* referring to the parts of a gun).

Some French idioms that have no corresponding expression in English, instead, are translated with standard paraphrasis. For instance: « Du reste, que savait Raphael de cette femme, cette...quel était son nom, déjà ? Un nom à *dormir debout*. » (p. 57), which literally means 'that makes you sleep standing', meaning something nonsensical or far-fetched, is rendered as: "What, indeed, did Raphael know about this woman, this...whatever her name was? A ludicrous-sounding name." (p. 41). Similarly, the expression *laisser passer un ange*, ('let an angel go by'), used when there is sudden silence in the middle of a dialogue, is paraphrased: « Andrés, qui tient toujours la montre au-dessus du visage d'Emil, *laisse passer un ange*. » (p. 151); "Andrés is still swinging the watch above Emil's face. *There is a long silence*." (p. 120). The same goes for the proverb thought by Raphael when he says: « Ma mère a téléphoné tout à l'heure, dit-il, (*à menteur, menteur et demi*). » (p. 309) which means literally 'to a liar, (be) a liar and a half' and translated as: "My mother called," he says (if *you* can tell lies, so can I)." (p. 261) as well as for the idiomatic expression "*en voir des vertes et des pas mûres* » literally 'green and unripe things', meaning shocking or incongruous things, and metaphorically having been through annoying or painful experiences: « Est-elle vierge ? se demande Raphaël en arrivant carrefour de l'Odéon et en s'engouffrant dans le métro. Sûrement pas, avec cet air qu'elle a. On dirait qu'elle *en a vu, des vertes et de pas mûres*. » (p. 38)

Is she a virgin? wonders Raphael, arriving at the Odéon intersection and plunging down the stairs into the Métro. Surely not, if I'm any judge of women. Looks as if *she's seen her share of life*. (p. 25).

Huston seems to aim at a strategy of compensation though, since some standard expressions or terms in the source text are rendered with idioms, like in the following examples. The verb *s'en aller*, 'to go away' becomes 'to take to one's heels', i.e., to run away: « Il faut à tout prix le lui cacher, cet amour – et ce pendant un bon moment – pour ne pas l'offusquer, l'effaroucher, lui donner un prétexte pour *s'en aller*. » (pp. 29-30) → “He knows he'll have to hide his love – and for a good while, too, so as not to put her off, scare her, give her a pretext for taking to her heels” (p.18). This process occasionally involves amplification too; for instance, the sentence « ...oui, décidément l'idée lui plaît. Toujours *deux choses à la fois*, Raphaël. Le pauvre. » (p. 135), which could be translated into 'always doing two things at a time', is instead amplified with an idiomatic expression that means 'to do two things at a time' as well as 'to solve two problems with a single action': “Yes, Raphael definitely thinks this is an excellent idea. *Can never resist the pleasure of killing two birds with one stone.* Poor soul.” (p. 107).

As demonstrated by the examples of translation where Huston strives to maintain the euphonies and to provide equivalent metaphors and idioms, the general tendency of the translated text – when it diverges slightly from doxal strategies, as in the case of significantly amplifying translations – is to privilege smoothness and cultural transparency. The present analysis thus seems to justify the judgement of the Council for the Governor's General Award, who defined this version as an “inspiring and inspired translation that is faithful to the original without being slavish or literal”.<sup>406</sup> An instance where translation is not slavish is indeed the following translation of a prayer:

Faible nous sommes, et craintifs, et surtout las, las. Aveugles et muets nous sommes, les yeux bandés par nos propres mains, la gorge obstruée par nos cris. Nous ne savons guérir notre douleur, seulement la transmettre, la donner en héritage. Tiens chéri. (p. 291)

The formal style created on the syntactical level by the anticipation of the copula (the standard order would be *nous sommes faibles*) is rendered by the repetition of a formula common to Anglophone liturgies:

*May the Lord have mercy upon us*, for we are weak and fearful – and, above all, weary. *May the Lord have mercy upon us*, for we are blind and dumb – blindfolded by our own hands, gagging on our own screams. *May the Lord have mercy upon us*, for we are incapable of healing our pain; capable only of passing it on, bequeathing it to others as their inheritance. Here, darling. (p. 245).

Indeed, it seems by a parallel reading that Huston makes every effort to deploy the same (qualitative and quantitative) effort of inventiveness in the two versions, probably favoured by the fact that she can also correct the source text when need be. An eminent example in this sense is the pun built on the surname of Raphael's mother, Madame Hortense Trala-Lepage, where Trala, an invented surname, derives from the

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<sup>406</sup> Quoted in Koustas, *Les belles étrangères*, 69.

French word *tralala*, meaning ‘razzle-dazzle’ to indicate the pompous character of the aging woman. The expression *sans tralala* means ‘without ostentation’, ‘without fuss’. In order to say that Raphael and Saffie get married alone, with a very simple ceremony the scene is conveyed with a simple sentence: « Ils sont mariés. Une simple cérémonie civile, *sans Trala*. » (p. 64) The translation into English detangles all the meanings contained into the surname (without family and without ostentation), exploiting the idiomatic expression ‘no frills, no fuss’, to build a tricolon parallelism: “They’re married. A simple civic ceremony. *No frills, no fuss, no family*.” (p. 47).

### 4.2.3 Culture-bound References

The tendency toward the construction of an understandable diegetic universe for an Anglophone readership is also reflected by the scarce and scattered presence of culture-bound references. Different strategies are implemented to achieve the task. In case of an initialism – such as *FFI* – that is familiar to the francophone readership, but is less likely to be so to an Anglophone readership, the meaning is specified: « il avait l’âge de le faire, il avait quinze ans et ne rêvait que de rejoindre les rangs romantiques des *FFI* » (p. 22); “he could have then, he was fifteen and longed to be part of the *Forces Françaises de l’Intérieur*” (p. 11).

At a certain point, Huston quotes an historical Parisian construction company, funded in 1884 and still active today, which, at the time when the novel is set owned sand and gravel deposits along the Seine River: « Ne cille pas, à la hauteur de l’Hôtel de Ville, devant les énormes dunes de sable des *entreprises Morillon-Corvol*, qui servent de toboggans aux gamins du quartier. » (p. 137). In the English version the reference to the name of the company is eliminated: “She doesn’t bat an eyelash as she approaches City Hall and a series of giant sand dunes come into view, with dozens of neighbourhood kids careening down them, using them as slides.” (p. 108)

However, this strategy, far from simplifying the reading, results into a rather obscure image, since no additional information is used to explain the presence of these ‘giant sand dunes’, which remain an unexpected element for the Anglophone readership – even for those who are familiar with the city of Paris. Elsewhere, explicitations and paraphrasing succeed in adapting the culture-bound references in the French text into unproblematic references for the Anglophone readers, such as in the following example:

Y traînent, buvant du thé ou du vin chaud, tâtant de différents instruments de musique, parlant chacun sa langue ou son sabir : jazzmen américains, violonistes yiddish *de chez Goldenberg* (Saffie est déroutée d’entendre leur langue si proche de l’allemand), prostituées et travestis de l’hôtel borgne du numéro 34 (géré par l’épouse d’un policier en flagrante transgression de *la loi Marthe Richard*) [...] (p. 212)

The *Goldenberg* restaurant was an institution of the Jewish quarter in Paris; while the *Marthe Richard* law, which passed in 1946, made prostitution houses illegal:

All sorts of individuals drop in to spend an hour or two drinking tea or mulled wine, trying out various instruments and chatting together in a weird assortment of languages – jazzmen from the United States, Yiddish violinists *from Goldenberg's delicatessen* (Saffie is amazed at how much their language resembles German), prostitutes and transvestites from the brothel down the street at number 34 (run by a policeman's wife in flagrant defiance of *the 1946 no-tolerance law*) [...] (p. 175)

#### 4.2.4 Foreign Language Interference

Previous studies comparing and contrasting the two versions of *L'empreinte de l'ange/The Mark of the Angel* have highlighted the similar use of foreign languages in the two versions. In the article “Nancy Huston's Polyglot Texts: Linguistic Limits and Transgressions”,<sup>407</sup> Genevieve Waite highlights that Huston makes use of “parsimonious instances of foreign words and phrases” in German, Italian, English, Hungarian, and Latin in the French version and German, Hungarian, Latin, Italian and French in the English version. German is the language used to evoke Saffie's childhood memories in various occasions; they refer to songs and nursery rhymes and are maintained in both versions of the novel:

The wind kept tearing the sheets out of their hands before they could pin them to the clothesline, and they'd run to pick them up on the lawn... then hang them up again, all the while singing together in harmony, *Kommt ein Vogel geflogen...* (p. 83)

*Alle meine Henchen schwimmen auf dem See [...] Köpfchen in das Wasser, Schwänzchen in die Höh...* no, the humming vibration you feel in *Mutti's* flesh comes from her song, not from the bombers, but then there's no denying it any longer, what they hear behind the song is indeed the familiar drone [...] (p. 90)

Saffie realizes – it's *der Teufel*, the devil... *Wer hat Angst vorm schwarzen Mann?* Who's afraid of the big black man? (p. 100).

He must understand, András – he must or they'll miss the turn - Guten Abend, Gute Nacht, Mit Rosen bedacht, Mit Nelken besteckt, husch, unter die Deck'. Morgen Früh, wenn Gott will, wirst du wieder geweckt...Nauseous, she breaks off. (p. 171)

As for the use of Italian and Latin remarked by Waite, it is actually limited to some scattered expressions: “Her superiors [...] were forced to admit that given their objectives (economic miracle and *tutti quanti*), her performance was simply not good enough” (p. 27); and “ses supérieurs [...] furent contraints de reconnaître qu'au vue des objectifs qui étaient les leurs (miracle économique et *tutti quanti*), cette jeune femme

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<sup>407</sup> Genevieve Waite, “Nancy Huston's Polyglot Texts: Linguistic Limits and Transgressions” in *L2 Journal* 7 (2015).

ne faisait pas le poids” (p. 40). As for the Latin, the expressions “*ad nauseam*” (p. 86), and “*ad infinitum*” (p. 199) are used in the English version to translate “à satiété” (p. 76) and “à l’infini” (p. 239); while “*sine qua non*” is unvaried on page 176 of the French version and page 218 of the English version. As regards Hungarian, then, only three words are used by Emil to refer to Andràs, “Apu” (papa), “Edesapa” (father), and “Apuka” (daddy). Based on these examples, Waite suggests: “Instead of overpowering the text, these additional languages provide the reader with a sense of cultural, historical, musical, and linguistic authenticity”.<sup>408</sup>

While agreeing with Waite on the contribution of the foreign words to the authenticity of the diegetic universe of the novel, I would suggest that there are also other ways in which the interference of the foreign language on each monolingual narration intervenes through the process of self-translation. Metalinguistic comments in the French version, for instance, are not translated into English, as this would clash with the diegetic world recreated in the second version: the Anglophone readership being aware that Saffie, a German, is speaking French in Paris, even though the narration is represented in English. The English dialogue lacks the indications on how Saffie is adapting to the French culture: she has learnt to say ‘mais oui’, ‘mais non’ like any Frenchwoman. ‘Aber’ cannot be used in this manner:

-Ça ira ? demande-t-il à Saffie, ses yeux réitérant la question que pose sa voix.

“Will you be all right?” he asks Saffie, his eyes reiterating the question.

-Mais oui.

“Of course.”

Elle a appris à dire *mais oui, mais non*, comme une Française. On ne peut pas utiliser *aber* de cette manière.

“Here’s the phone number... (p. 82)

-Voici le numéro... (p. 106)

Similarly, a comment on Saffie’s pronunciation is rendered in a neutral manner:

Sa voix est grave, douce et un peu rauque : une voix à la Dietrich, moins les simagrées. *Elle ne dit pas ch à la place de j*. [she does not pronounce ‘ch’ instead of ‘j’] (p. 15)

Her voice is soft, deep, husky – a Marlene Dietrich sort of voice, minus the mannerisms. *Her accent is by no means grotesque*. (p. 5)

This dissimilarity contribute to a slightly different perception of the ‘French Saffie’ with respect to the ‘English Saffie’, as it also happens with the other characters and to a

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<sup>408</sup> Waite, “Nancy Huston’s Polyglot Texts: Linguistic Limits and Transgressions”, 109.

higher degree, as shown in Chapter V, although for different reasons. The different intrinsic rhythm and musicality of the two languages – their differently characterised prosody – greatly affects this perception, of course. For instance, when Saffie avows her origin to András, and she needs to do so in a wary manner, in the French version the scene is described as follows: « Temps. Elle n’a pas envie de le dire. Elle le dit. -Je suis Allemande. Temps. » (p. 142). In the English version, an adverb is added to modify the reader’s perception of Saffie’s voice, possibly because the French pronunciation of ‘Allmande’ /alma~d/ carries for Huston a synesthetic connotation that is lacking in the sound of the word ‘German’. Thus, an adverb is added: “A pause. She doesn’t want to say it. She says it. *Softly*. ‘I’m German.’ A pause.” (p. 112).

Another consequence of the translation into English is the effacement of the effect created by multilingualism within *L’empreinte de l’ange*. When, as a little girl in Germany, Saffie first sees a Black American soldier, she mistakes his asking for help in his own mothertongue for an evil magic formula:

Maintenant elle entend sa voix aussi, répétant le même mot encore et encore. ‘Water!’ dit-il. ‘Water! Water!’ – le mot de sa magie noire, le mot pour la mort de son peuple à elle, ‘Please, little girl! Please, get me some water!’ [...]

[...] and now she can hear his voice as well, repeating the same *alien* word over and over, ‘Water!’ he croaks. ‘Water! Water!’ – the word of his black magic, the word for the death of her people – ‘Please, little girl! Please, get me some water!’. (p. 100)

In the English version, a narratological adjustment is made necessary, i.e. the addition of the adjective ‘alien’ to signal the situation of misunderstanding, which should otherwise be inferred exclusively by the context.

Like she did with idioms, Huston compensates by inserting French terms in the English version, as in the translation of « Ils ignorent tout de Camus, n’ont pas lu une ligne de ses romans, ne savent même pas que c’est *un Français d’Algérie*. » (p. 81), into : “They know nothing about Camus, haven’t read a line of his books, aren’t even aware that he’s *a pied noir – a Frenchman born in Algeria*.” (p. 61). Possibly, though, the term *pied noir* might have been present in the original writing and might have been erased from the published version for editorial reasons. A similar translational choice is made for the sentence: « En réaction, deux cent cinquante Algériens de Paris, originaires de cette région, *venaient de s’engager dans l’armée française*. » (p. 45), which becomes, “In response, two hundred and fifty Algerians from the Melouza region *have decided to become harkis, joining the French army in its effort to put down their own people*.” (p. 31). The effect obtained is that the English version – by specifying the name of the soldiers – seems to be written from an external point of view, rather than by a francophone voice – and for a readership less familiar with the historical events regarding France.

Only in one case Huston decided to maintain a French wordplay in the English version: « Le mot même de ‘mairie’, ce matin, ressemble à un anagramme de ‘marié’. » (p. 64), where the English version (even though the word ‘married’ displays the same sounds) shows the two foreign words *mairie* and *marié*: “This morning, the very word *mairie* (town hall) looks like an anagram of *marié*.” (p. 47) arbitrarily providing the translation for the former and not for the latter, which can be inferred from the context.

Signs of Huston’s sharp linguistic hyper-awareness,<sup>409</sup> especially towards the foreign language, shows through the narration in different manners. When she describes Saffie’s linguistic blunders, for instance, the text seems to echo Huston’s personal observations on her own learning:

-Tablier, murmure-t-il. Ça s’appelle un tablier. -Oui, dit Saffie. Tablier. Je pensais tableau.  
Tablier. J’étais confondue. (p. 35).

While *tablier* means ‘apron’ and *tableau* means ‘painting’, the two words have the first phoneme in common. Like for Saffie, Huston’s learning of French passed through omophones :

Other French words are stored in my brain in phonetic groups: there’s a whole drawer reserved for nouns ending in –eau, for instance. If I speak without thinking, it’s as if I were grabbing words out of the drawer at random, and I’m quite capable of saying *tableau* (painting) or *rideau* (curtain) instead of *plateau* (tray).<sup>410</sup>

The translation in this case recurs to lexemes belonging to the same semantic field, but that could not be mistaken by second language learners on account of any omophony, as though the learning of English did not follow the same pattern of association among words: “Apron,” he murmurs. “It’s called an ‘apron’.” “Yes,” says Saffie. “Apron. I was thinking ‘napkin’. Apron. I was confusing.” (pp. 22-23).

#### 4.2.5 Characters Representation

Another instance where the translation slightly modifies the perception of the diegetic universe in comparative reading, is how characters are presented and the relations among them.

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<sup>409</sup> Cf. the notion of ‘surconscience linguistique’ minted by Lise Gauvin: « conscience aiguë de la langue comme objet de réflexion, d’interrogation, d’enquête mais aussi de transformation et de création. » [acute awareness of the language as a object of reflection, study and investigation, but also of transformation and creation], in *Langagement. L’écrivain et la langue au Québec*. (Montréal, Boréal, 2000), 209.

<sup>410</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 42.



Raphael's mother, whose main traits are mentioned above, is quoted by her surname in the French version: "Raphaël s'était penché par la fenêtre [...] – mais – hurlement hystérique de Mme Trala-Lepage, vrillant le tympan de son fils musicien – 'Qu'est-ce que tu fais ? Tu es fou ? Referme la fenêtre, mon Dieu !' » (p. 21-22). In the English version, the woman is called by her first name: "[...] – and then – Hortense's hysterical scream piercing the eardrum of her musical offspring – 'What are you doing? Have you gone berserk? Shut the window, for God's sake!'" This is one of the very few places where this character's name is mentioned. This difference is not negligible, in that it creates an impression of closeness for a character who turns out to be at a certain distance from the events, as they unravel toward tragedy. (p. 10)

The representation of Raphael also varies slightly. When he first opens the door of his apartment to meet Saffie, whose arrival brusquely causes him to interrupt his flute rehearsal, we read: « La porte s'ouvre avec violence. Flot de lumière dans la pénombre du couloir. Ça va pas, non ? » (p. 15). The aggressiveness of the expression *ça va pas*, [literally, 'that's not ok'], largely depends on the intonation of the voice. In this case, the information that this is an expression of irritation is in the movement accompanying it: the door is opened *avec violence*, i.e., violently. In the translation, the violence is transposed also into Raphael's words: "The door is flung open. Light floods the shadowy hallway. 'What the hell...!'" (p. 5). The images present in the first version, door being flung, light invading the corridor (floods-*flot*), hell-*violence*, are compensated in the translation, but the result is a less poetic and more descriptive sentence, that – in such a crucial scene, contributes to create the image of a Raphael who is rather cooler toward the woman he will fall in love with.

A similar issue is at stake in the first dialogue between Saffie and Andrés, where we see them fall in love with each other. Here, however, the tangible difference between the two versions is of a syntactical nature.

-Vous êtes de quel pays? Demande-t-elle [...]

-Andrés, à votre avis? [...]

-Je ne sais pas.

-Tu ne sais pas ?

-Non, dit Saffie, ravie de cette intimité accidentelle. [delighted with their accidental intimacy]

-Et Budapest, vous savez ?

Inopinément, Andrés est revenu au vous. [Suddenly, Andrés has turned to use *vous* again] (p. 141)

Here, the accidental intimacy takes on a linguistic form, the switching from the respectful and distanced *vous* to a more familiar second person pronoun *tu*. These are both translated as 'you' in English, but correspond to different degrees of intimacy, as

though one called another person either by that person's surname or name. In English, the last sentence is simply erased in the English version. We thus miss András's (accidental?) mis-use of French and the scene is deprived of its romantic undertones.

"You come from what country? She asks him [...]"

"*András* – what do you think?" says the man. [...]"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"No," says Saffie, her heart thumping inexplicably.

"And Budapest, you know?" says András.

#### 4.2.6 Revisions

There is one single case of major revision that needs to be signalled and this regards meaningful numbers; namely, those of the victims of the Franco-Algerian war. The French version states:

La guerre a coûté la vie à trente mille Français [30,000 Frenchmen] et à près d'un million d'Algériens [nearly one million Algerians] quand les accords d'Evian, en mars 1962, entérinent enfin l'indépendance de l'ancienne colonie. (p. 292)

in the English version, while the number of French victims remains the same, the second figure is unexpectedly revised:

When the Evian Agreements finally ratify the former colony's independence in March of 1962, the war has cost the lives of thirty thousand Frenchmen and over three hundred thousand Algerians. (p. 246)

A slight variations occurs shortly afterwards, when we read: "Des dizaines des milliers de harkis, probablement entre cent et cent cinquante mille, sont tués pour faits de collaborations." (p. 292). Where the French is very careful at keeping the information uncertain, commencing vaguely 'des dizaines des millier', and providing a possible span, the English version is more direct: "Thousands of harkis, probably as many as 150,000, are killed for having collaborated with the French". But shortly afterwards, where the French version is more precise in stating the French victims on the Algerian territory: "cinq à dix mille Français sont massacrés", the English is vaguer, "several thousand French people are slaughtered in the mêlée" (p. 247). While the second and third example are representative of Huston's carefulness in shaping each version for a different readership, the first difference (1 million vs. 300,000) can hardly be explained on the same basis. Possibly, a revision was esteemed necessary (on the recommendation of readers?) while the first text was already in print.

#### 4.2.7 Text Reception

In *Les belles étrangères: Canadians in Paris*, Jane Koustas criticizes the narrative mechanism in Huston's novel transferred symmetrically from the French source text to the English target text: "the ever-present narrator, this Brechtian distancing perhaps more familiar to the French interpretative community", as well as the use of the present tense as the equivalent for the French *présent historique*, maintaining that these "typically French stylistic techniques" make Huston appear "foreign to the Canadian community".<sup>411</sup> For the sake of example, Koustas quotes a passage where Huston deploys her sarcasm on the Parisian bureaucrats:

Nowadays the minute you set foot in a Paris administrative service, you enter into a state not far from ecstasy. [...] all the employees have made love that very morning; their faces are still tender and touched; they stare at you moist-eyed and listen to your problems with the deepest sympathy [...]<sup>412</sup>

Thus, Koustas claims that "Huston is clearly describing France from an insider's standpoint and both the sarcasm of the above passage and mapping out of Paris would be lost on most Canadian readers." As she already highlighted for *Plainsong*, this particular standpoint is Huston's most relevant characteristic. The English text 'sounds as a translation' from an exotic original, but at the same time, her peculiar use of the French language, pulling together formal and informal language, elevated and standard style, fuels her being perceived as a *foreigner* by the French interpretative community:

Quand je rencontre des lycéens, ils s'étonnent souvent des ruptures du style dans mes romans, *les passages abrupts du style 'soutenu' au style 'familier'*. Pourquoi faites-vous cela me demandent-ils. Et je dois leur avouer que *je n'en sais trop rien*. Mais je dois le faire parce que ça me plaît, me réjouit...et qu'il est plus facile pour moi étrangère que pour eux autochtones de transgresser les normes et attentes de la langue française.<sup>413</sup>

Once again, this feature is recognized and even gladly embraced by Huston herself, who has made an asset of this estrangement that she once defined through the blend *étrangéité*. Each of the two texts resulting from self-translation may appear 'as if it were written in a foreign language'. However, the examples of translational solutions analysed so far show that the self-translator devotes a balanced care to maintain where possible, the rhythm, the wordplays, the images of the first version, and to compensate

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<sup>411</sup> Koustas, *Les belles étrangères*, 69-70.

<sup>412</sup> Huston, *The Mark of the Angel*, 45.

<sup>413</sup> Huston, *Nord Perdu*, 47. Emphasis mine.

those elements that are inevitably lost due to the intrinsic features of each language elsewhere in the text.



## V. SIMULTANEOUS BILINGUAL WRITING AND SELF-TRANSLATION

Simultaneous self-translation, as outlined in 1.3.2, defines the practice of starting the translation into a second language before the first-language version is completed and thus enjoying the possibility of going back and forth between the two, taking inspiration from any version to nourish the other. For self-translation scholar Jan Hokenson, “equilibrating two sign systems frightened with different cultures enables the writer to pursue unfamiliar kinds of literary experiments”,<sup>414</sup> that result in innovative texts.

According to Kippur, almost all of Huston’s self-translations can be defined as ‘simultaneous’, because both versions are completed and approved by the editors before either is published.<sup>415</sup> Indeed, the author has stressed the advantages of a process that allows her to adjust and improve her twin versions.

Among her vast production, though, there are two texts in particular which stand out, each in its own manner, because they are the outcome of a hybrid practice that starts with an act of bilingual creative writing, passes through the filter of self-translation (in the two directions) and results in the production of two monolingual editions, published autonomously or side by side in the same book. More precisely still, *Instruments of Darkness/Instruments des ténèbres*<sup>416</sup> was written as a bilingual text, in that the process of writing simultaneously involved the two languages, English for the frame narrative and French for the actual narrative, in alternating chapters. The second, *Limbes/Limbo. Un hommage à Samuel Beckett*<sup>417</sup> was also written by alternating the two languages, but in a disorderly manner. Self-translation then redoubled the first version and the outcome was a bilingual edition. The text in English is published on the left page in round characters, while the French text is published on the right page in italics.

Given their peculiar genesis, the analysis of these two twin texts will aim at investigating how self-translation can be exploited within the mechanisms of the novel, to say it with Sara Kippur, “not just [as] a paratextual fact but [as] a metatextual

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<sup>414</sup> Hokenson, “History and the Self-translator”, 40.

<sup>415</sup> Cf. Kippur, *Writing it twice*, 32-33.

<sup>416</sup> Nancy Huston, *Instruments des ténèbres* (Arles: Actes Sud: 1996) and *Instruments of Darkness* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1997).

<sup>417</sup> Nancy Huston, *Limbes / Limbo. Un hommage à Samuel Beckett* (Arles : Actes Sud, 2000).

feature”,<sup>418</sup> leaving its linguistic and thematic marks on each of the two sides of the text.

### **5.1 Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of *Instruments of Darkness/ Instruments des ténèbres***

Huston’s French novel *Instruments des ténèbres* was published by Actes Sud (Arles) in 1996, whereas its English twin – entitled *Instruments of Darkness* (from a line in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*) – was published by Little, Brown and Co. (Toronto), the following year. *Instruments des ténèbres* was awarded the prize *Goncourt des lycéens* and the *Prix du Livre Inter*. It was also shortlisted for the *Prix Femina* and the Governor General’s Award. It is dedicated to Ethel Gorham ‘guardian devil’, an American, personal friend of Huston’s and author of the novel *My tailor is rich* (1998), which was translated into French by Huston and published by Actes Sud in 1998.

This novel is unique within the body of Huston's works, because it represents, both linguistically and thematically, the writer’s status of dividedness between two languages and cultures and her struggle to make them coexist harmonically in literary creation.

The thematic dividedness is evident from the very beginning, at least for the Anglophone readership. The *Table of Contents* that introduces the English version,<sup>419</sup> in fact, shows that the novel will be constituted by two different texts, intermingled like two snakes spiralling one around the other: *The Scordatura Notebook* and *The Resurrection Sonata* (after a musical composition by violinist Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber 1644-1704, a master of the *scordatura*).

The two narrations are characterized by completely different chronotopes. The first, whose chapters are marked by dates spanning from one August 31<sup>st</sup> to August 9<sup>th</sup> of the following year - is a metanarrative framework. It is the personal notebook of Nadia, a 49-year-old American writer living in Manhattan. In this self-diegesis, Nadia (or Nada, as she renames herself after the Spanish translation for ‘nothing’) collects observations on the novel she is writing and on the fatigue of literary creation, along with philosophical musings, literary quotations and autobiographical reminiscences. Nadia is the fictional author of the second part of the narration: *The Resurrection Sonata*, which is the story of two orphan twins – a boy, Barnabé, and a girl, Barbe Durand –

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<sup>418</sup> Kippur, *Writing it twice*, 37.

<sup>419</sup> In the French version, the *Table de matières* is at the end of the narration.

covering their whole troubled lives as a destitute servant-maid and as a monk, respectively, in the Berry of the seventeenth century.<sup>420</sup>

The linguistic dividedness of the novel, is covert, invisible for the ‘innocent’ reader, as each of the two versions is published as monolingual. Moreover, the French version does not state anywhere that half of the chapters were translated from the English, whereas the English version merely signals the indication “Title I. Title II: *Instruments des ténèbres*” in the paratextual elements. Were it not for the author’s declarations in interviews, we would not know that, the language of writing being that of the diegetic universe, Huston alternately wrote a chapter in English (the notebook of Nadia in the United States) and the following in French (the story of the two late seventeenth-century twins in the countryside of Berry).<sup>421</sup> Kippur labelled this plan an “idiosyncratic writing process” in that it suggests that “a story can be more deeply embedded in the language of its original production and, by extension, less connected to its translation”.<sup>422</sup> We will see however, that the practice of engaging self-translation in each and every case, as well as the very use of language (scarcity of idioms, culture-bound references, etc.) make Huston’s stories more universally translatable than such initial parametres may suggest.

It is true, though, that the setting of the narration called for the language in which the first writing occurred and that the process acquired a character of regularity, at least according to the author’s own statements: «Tous les trois jours, je me reposais d'une langue sur l'autre et y puisais un regain d'énergie.»<sup>423</sup> After the novel was completed, she translated each chapter into the other language. It is not clear whether she intended to publish the book in its original form for a bilingual readership, and she was impeded by insurmountable editorial obstacles, or rather, if this approach to bilingual literary creation was merely as she declared, “a sort of challenge, a gauntlet I threw down myself, to say let's play the game and enjoy it instead of worrying about it, accept this duality, the bilingualism, and the fact that you're different people.”<sup>424</sup> Indeed, this is

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<sup>420</sup> This kind of structure is one of the typical features of the postmodern novel, according to Stefano Calabrese, who clarifies that this *mise en abyme*, where the text takes its distance from what is being narrated through an immanent irony, throws a shadow of mendacity on the whole process. Calabrese hypothesizes that this structure ‘kills’ both the characters and the ‘plot’; I will not discuss narratological aspects more in detail in this theses, I will just suggest that this does not seem to be the case with Huston’s application of metanarrative frameworks. Cf. Stefano Calabrese, *www.letteratura.global. Il romanzo dopo il postmoderno* (Torino, Einaudi, 2005),30.

<sup>421</sup> Sperti, “Autotraduction et figures du dédoublement dans la production de Nancy Huston”, 74.

<sup>422</sup> Kippur, *Writing it Twice*, 33.

<sup>423</sup> Huston, «Français dans le texte», in “Français dans le texte.” in *Télérama* (1997) URL: <http://www.telerama.fr/livre/francais-dans-le-texte.69949.php>. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>424</sup> Carolyn Shread, “An Interview with Nancy Huston.” in *The Journal of 20th-Century Contemporary French Studies* 2.2 (1998).



the first novel in which the need to let the two languages coexist and take nourishment from each other also found a mirroring thematic representation.

Besides this linguistic redoublement, then, the theme of doubling embodies into different motifs in this novel. The first and most evident is clearly the bipartition in the structure of the narration: *The Scordatura Notebook*, though presented as ‘reality’, is actually the fictional part. The *Resurrection Sonata*, instead – the novel-within-the-novel – therefore presented as fiction, is actually based on, or at least inspired by, a true story drawn from historical documentation, as declared by the author in the paratextual annotations: “Several episodes of the *Resurrection Sonata* were inspired by actual events related in André Alabergère, *Au temps des laboureurs en Berry, Cercle généalogique du Haut-Berry*, 1993”. The reference to music, recurring with different functions throughout Huston’s *oeuvre*, is used here with a symbolic purpose: *scordatura* “means distuning, discordance [...] That’s me. I’m the mistuned instrument” says Nadia at the beginning of the novel when she explained the title of her diary. At the same time, “the most unearthly, the most inhuman scordatura in the history of the violin [...] was that used by Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber in his *Resurrection Sonata*”.<sup>425</sup> The *Scordatura notebook* nourishes the *Resurrection sonata* symbolically as well as in terms of content as we are going to see.

Secondly, the doubling can be found in the physical image of twin characters: on the one hand, Barbe and Barnabé (“Boy me”, Barbe calls him) – each paramount for the deployment of the other’s story. About the consonance between motifs of the novel and the alternation of languages in its redaction, Valeria Sperti hypothesizes that:

Souvent la configuration du double qui est exposée dans la narration cache des consonances autobiographiques. En fait, cette première expérience de rédaction bilingue, occasionnée par les deux contextes hétérolinguistiques du roman, s’accompagne d’autres éléments significatifs. Le plus évident est celui de la gémellité: Barbe a un frère jumeau, Barnabé. Leur naissance, les séparant en tant qu’individus, scinde l’élément féminin de l’élément masculin: s’agit-il d’une métaphore de deux langues qui s’alternent dans le roman?<sup>426</sup>

The motif is embodied not only in the French twins: Nadia is also coupled with a male *alter ego*, her literary muse, a “fine invisible daemon”, her “lying ally” which is evoked with different names by the writer (“My ghost is an unholy one – he is my dirty-faced guardian angel, my djinn, my dragon, he breathes fiery wit into my ear”).<sup>427</sup> Both female characters, Nadia and Barbe, will evolve throughout the narration to the detriment of their male counterparts. Barbe, sentenced to death for having concealed her pregnancy (result of a relation with her master) and having abandoned her still-born baby, is substituted *in extremis* on the gallows by her exceptionally look-alike

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<sup>425</sup> Huston, *Instruments of Darkness*, 28.

<sup>426</sup> Sperti, “Autotraduction et figures du dédoublement dans la production de Nancy Huston”, 74.

<sup>427</sup> Huston, *Instruments of Darkness*, 25.

twin brother, who chooses to sacrifice for the salvation of his sister, thus fulfilling a prophecy they were made as children. From being an extremely miserable, star-crossed servant, Barbe becomes a “healer, consoler, spell-lifter, angel-maker and broken-heart repairer” and will live to be over a hundred years old. Like Barbe, Nadia also miscarried a pregnancy in her youth: an event that marked her forever. If the first entries of her diary show a woman intimately devastated and completely dominated by her *daemon*, who revels in hatred for her world and fellow human beings, (“Hydrangea with their dowdy pastel puffs win first prize for my hatred. People who exclaim over hydrangea come in a close second.”), at the end of the book – thanks to the sublimation of her experiences in the *Resurrection Sonata*, Nadia manages to free herself from the ill-fated dependence.<sup>428</sup>

Besides the similarities between the two protagonists, the reader is enabled to draw parallelisms also between other characters of the two texts: the positive influence exerted on Barbe by Hélène, the jovial inn-keeper, is mirrored by the relationship between Nadia and her mother’s former best friend, Stella. Both have lost a child: a girl in the case of Hélène, a boy in the case of Stella.

Apart from being linked by the doubling of the same motifs, the two intertwined texts are also more directly anchored one to the other by the narrator’s comments, explaining, for instance, the genesis of Barbe and Barnabé’s story:

“*But this novel, Nada. This one, at this time. Why?* I think because I need now, at the age I have reached, more than ‘midway on life’s journey’, to come to terms with the death at birth of my twin brother, and the disaster of my parents’ marriage”.<sup>429</sup>

In addition, there are subtle intertextual references constituted by echoing sentences, i.e. by the repetition of very similar formulations, which give the reader the impression that Nadia is taking inspiration from her own life experiences in order to write Barbe’s story. For instance, a remark on her own mother in Nadia’s *Notebook* echoes what she wrote in the previous chapter, when she described the death of Marthe Durand in giving birth to Barbe and Barnabé:

The time she almost died, the *blood was literally flooding out of her*, she was being emptied of her substance, I was in the room beside her and I heard *her screams turn gradually into sighs – almost like sighs of pleasure*.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> As to this twist in the plot, Huston declared: “That was one of the most thrilling writing experiences I’ve ever had - to watch Nada changing under my eyes. It was, along with Plainsong, one of my happiest writing experiences. Another thrilling thing was switching places between apparent reality and apparent fiction; Barbe Durand was both a true story and the novel-within-the-novel.” in Wigston, “Nancy Huston Unbound”. Online available at [http://www.booksincanada.com/article\\_view.asp?id=3118](http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=3118). Accessed October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

<sup>429</sup> Huston, *Instruments of Darkness*, 27.

<sup>430</sup> *Ivi*, 30. Emphasis mine.

“Her own blood is flooding out of her” [...] “Marthe’s screams grow further apart and begin to sound more and more like sighs, almost like sighs of happiness”.<sup>431</sup>

Again, the little melody sung in chapter V of the *Resurrection Sonata* by the twins’ mother, Martha, the little shepherdess, is the same melody Nadia used to hear her own mother (an accomplished violin player) sing, as she recounts 5 chapters later in the *Scordatura Notebook*.

With this strategy, Huston traces a parallel between literary creation and personal life experience in the character of Nadia: a sort of *mise en abîme* of her own experience with literary creation, one which, along with other features of Nadia, made some critics identify the latter with Huston herself: American, similar age as Huston, writing about France, spreading her diaries with expressions in French, interest for word etymologies and wordplays.<sup>432</sup> The writer obviously belied this hypothesis in an interview: “Everyone who doesn’t know me, who doesn’t know I’m a happily married woman with kids, very stable, predictable, thought that I was Nada.”<sup>433</sup> A superposition that is nonetheless justifiable when considering some of Nadia’s declarations, which are ‘dangerously’ similar to Huston’s own declarations of poetics. Here follows an example:

I too need to be double, duplicitous, two-timing, I thrive on division and derision, I never cease to compare, contrive, seduce, betray, translate. My heart and cloven like the devil’s hoof. English, French. I am enamoured of all things French. (Save the people).<sup>434</sup>

Or again: “I intend to stop with the nevers and forevers, the alls and nothings. I intend to embrace mixtures and mitigations, content myself with pieces of perfection (as in: pieces of music).”<sup>435</sup> Rather than identifying the character with the author – notwithstanding the undeniable echoes provided by the two voices – Nadia represents the typical Hustonian character, placed in the uncomfortable middle, in-between languages, in-between cultures, dealing with differences, interweaving relations with the Other (here embodied by a daemon, the Other, *par excellence*) and harmonizing, within itself, most heterogeneous elements.

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<sup>431</sup> Huston, *Instruments of Darkness*, 18. Emphasis mine.

<sup>432</sup> Cf. Valerie Raoul, “L’autre langue fécondatrice” in *La francophonie sans frontières : une nouvelle cartographie de l’imaginaire au féminin* edited by Lucie Lequin and Christine Mavrikakis, (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001).

<sup>433</sup> Wigston, “Nancy Huston unbound”.

<sup>434</sup> Huston, Nancy. *Instruments of Darkness*. Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1997, p. 24-25.

<sup>435</sup> Huston, Nancy. *Instruments of Darkness*. Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1997, p. 314.

## 5.2 Alternate Writing Analysis

«J’ai écrit la partie new-yorkaise en anglais, et la partie berrichonne en français et puis j’ai traduit vice et versa. C’était la crise d’identité du début des années ’97.»<sup>436</sup> The coincidence of the diegetic language with the language of the settings described by Huston, decays inevitably when each chapter of the novel is translated into the other language in order to obtain a monolingual text for publication. In the light of this apparent contradiction, Sara Kippur righteously asks:

How then can we reconcile Huston’s imperative to self-translate in light of the competing imperative to write in the language of her characters? Why would Huston seek an accord between the language of composition and the language of narrative plausibility, only to have this logic ostensibly undermined at the moment of translation?<sup>437</sup>

For Kippur, ‘foreignness’ is actually always-already present in Huston’s first versions: either because the characters speak with an accent, especially her francophone characters, or because they epitomize Huston’s hyperawareness of language: for instance, we witness their interior monologues as they ponder on the meaning and origins of words and we hear them mispronounce foreign words, as is the case of Saffie in 4.2.4). As examples of this aesthetics of ‘translatedness’, Kippur brings the comments on the “untranslatability of language, and particularly of poetry” by Renée and Solange in *Trois fois septembre* and the “unconventional rhetoric choices” of Randall in *Fault Lines*. The scholar’s parameters, though, seem applicable also to some characters previously encountered in the present analysis (Saffie and Andrés, indeed) and for those analysed below (see Neil, Awinita and Milo in *Black Danse/Danse noire*).

These are nonetheless thematic results of self-translation. But what are the linguistic implications? Does the continual mental and practical switch between the two languages (every three days!) have aftermaths on the syntactical, lexical, and morphological levels of the texts? The mastering of a second language allows the relativization of one’s own mother language facilitates the questioning of its taken-for-granted use, breaks the supposedly ‘natural’ connections between perception and expression of reality, between signified and the signifier. In other words, one is dispossessed of one’s instrument to express the world and given, instead, multiple choices that can sometimes be quite destabilizing. This indecisiveness seems to be an asset, an *atout*, for writers. Marcel Proust famously said that any writer should express him/herself *like a foreigner* in his/her own mother tongue. This seems an easier goal to attain for a bilingual, i.e., someone who has a term of comparison for one’s one mother language. Bruno Clément, who analysed the bilingual work of Samuel Beckett,

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<sup>436</sup> Huston, “Français dans le texte.” In *Télérama* (1997) URL: <http://www.telerama.fr/livre/francais-dans-le-texte.69949.php>. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>437</sup> Kippur, *Writing it Twice*, 34.

maintains “Il me semble que l’objectif final de Samuel Beckett ait été une *non-maîtrise* de l’anglais maternel, que seule aurait rendu possible la pratique (maladroite et imparfaite) de la langue française” [It seems to me that the ultimate goal of Samuel Beckett was a non-mastery of his English mother language, that would be made possible only by the (clumsy and imperfect) practice of the French language].<sup>438</sup> For Nancy Huston, the ‘non-mastery’ of both languages may not be precisely a goal, but it surely has been described as a non-negligible consequence of her peculiar ‘linguistic biography’. Paradoxically, each and every one of her texts may be thought as written ‘in translation’.

Such *translatedness* should *a priori* be even more visible in the texts that owe their origin to a process of bilingual writing. A textual analysis will better clarify how and to what extent this inherent reflection on the impact of a language on the story being told is shaped by bilingual writing and reshaped by self-translation.

### 5.2.1 Prose Rhythm

The rhythm of Huston’s prose – intended in its largest connotations, included prosody and intonation – and the construction of her sentences, are very similar in English and French. Let us compare for instance the beginning of the *Resurrection Sanata*, initially written in French and translated into English. The graphic representation line by line is meant to favour the tracing of each corresponding element:

*Une bougie.*

A candle.

*Et puis: une forêt de bougies, de tailles différentes, allumées, tremblotantes, **frémisantes** car dans la pièce il u a beaucoup de va-et-vient,*

And then – a forest of candles of different lengths, burning, trembling, **the flames flickering** because there is so much rushing about in the room,

*on sent de l’angoisse dans l’air,*

the smell of fear in the air,

*des jupes de femmes qui bruissent autour de leurs pas rapides, efficaces,*

women’s long skirts swishing as they take fast, effective steps,

*des pas de paysannes silencieuses **et pressées**, aux lèvres serrées, comprimées*

silent peasant women with pursed, tightened lips,

*ce n’est pas seulement l’angoisse qu’on sent dans l’air, non c’est la mort, une odeur de mort,*

it is not only fear one smells in the air, no it is death, the smell of death,

*et toutes les quelques minutes les cris de **celle** qui chantait si joliment déchirent l’air,*

and every few minutes the screams of **the shepherd-girl** who used to sing so beautifully rent the air,

<sup>438</sup> Bruno Clément, *L’oeuvre sans qualités Rhétorique de Samuel Beckett* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 240. Emphasis mine.

les cris de la petite Marthe Durand qui **n'arrive pas** à accoucher,  
 the screams of young Marthe Durand **trying** to give birth,  
*des cris à vous figer le sang, à vous glacer le sang,*  
 the sound of it is enough to curdle your blood, turn your blood to ice,  
*mais d'elle le sang n'est ni figé ni glacé, d'elle le sang se déverse à flots,*  
 but her own blood is not curdled nor frozen, her own blood is **flooding** out of her,  
**on l'a allongée** sur une paillasse pour absorber ce liquide vermillon,  
**the women have laid her down** on a paillasse to absorb the vermilion liquid,  
**à la lumière des bougies** les femmes scrutent anxieusement le visage de la pauvre parturiente,  
 they stare anxiously into the face of the poor girl in labour **by the flickering candlelight**,  
 elle savent qu'elle ne va pas y arriver,/ qu'elle ne s'en sortira pas,/ la petite bergère à la voix  
 argentine,  
 they know she is not going to make it,/ the little shepherdess with the silvery voice/ will not pull  
 through,  
*elle n'a que dix-sept ans et elle est trop affaiblie déjà,*  
 she's only seventeen years old and already her strength is ebbing away,  
*ses amies ont peur parce que la matrone confirmée n'a pas pu venir, étant elle-même malade et*  
*alitée,*  
 her friends are fearful because the confirmed matron, herself ill and bedridden, was unable to come  
*et aucune d'elle ne se sent l'autorité de prononcer les mots de l'ondolement in extremis,*  
 and none of them **has** the authority to pronounce the words of private baptism *in extremis*,  
 il va bientôt falloir aller réveiller M. le curé...<sup>439</sup>  
 soon they will have to go and waken the parish priest.<sup>440</sup>

Both texts are characterized by a paratactic haunting prose, with long periods of coordinate clauses and independent sentences, separated by commas instead of full stops, thus forcing the reader to read in one single breath. The parataxis, a styleme of Huston's, emphasizes, in this particular context, the urgency of the moment she is describing. From the point of view of translation, this syntax – given the similarities between the two languages that share some ancestors – favours a word-for-word translation. The word order in the two versions is, by and large, so similar that they might seem superposable, almost like the voice of a foreign interpreter following and dubbing an original speech after having subdivided the speech into small translational units.

At certain points, the texts are almost superposable in that syntactic and phonetic levels are similar (cf. *sur une paillasse pour absorber ce liquide vermillon*-> on a paillasse to absorb the vermilion liquid). The tendency of the English version is toward precision: (*frémisantes*-> the flames flickering; *celle qui*→ the **shepherd girl** who; *on l'a allongée* → **the women** have laid her down; *à la lumière des bougies* → by the **flickering** candlelight). Where a literal translation would have lengthened the

<sup>439</sup> Huston, *Instruments des ténèbres*, 18.

<sup>440</sup> Huston, *Instruments of Darkness*, 17.

sentence too much with respect to the other version, as in “aucune d’elle ne **se sent** l’autorité de prononcer les mots de l’ondoïement” [literally none of them feels as if she had the authority ...], Huston prefers a less literal translation aimed at maintaining the rhythm of the sentence (“none of them **has** the authority to pronounce the words of private baptism”).

In one case, the English version seems to verge on self-censure: in fact where the French version deliberately states that “*Marthe* [...] **n’arrive pas à accoucher**” (does not manage to give birth), the English reports that Marthe is “**trying** to give birth”. Of course, a reasoning on the length and rhythm of a more literal translation might account for this choice as well as for others in the same portion of text, but it would certainly be interesting for future research to explore the theme of self-censure in self-translation towards one’s native language.

### 5.2.2 Isomorphisms

Parallel reading sheds light on another aspect that is forcibly shaped by self-translation, and that is the insistence in both texts on rhetorical figures of euphony. The use of the term *isomorphism* here is not intended as in Polish linguist Jerzy Kuryłowicz,<sup>441</sup> who meant the absolute identity or parallelism of content and form of a sign by it. Here it is used in its literal sense – ‘having the same form’ – and is applied not to the significant and the signified of the same sign, but to the net of relations between Language 1 signifiers (English or French) and Language 2 signifiers (French, or English), especially on the level of phonetic repetitions, along similar syntactical structures. Isomorphism is used in the present case to mean, following Douglas Hofstadter:

When two complex structures can be mapped onto each other in such a way that, to each part of one structure there is a corresponding part in the other structure, where ‘corresponding’ means that the two parts play a similar role in each structure.<sup>442</sup>

Instead of being found in one language only, these structures are found in both. The phonetic and morpho-syntactic level of the text is in fact devoted to the search for a distinctive music Huston maintains she aims at while writing fiction. A parallel reading of the two versions of the novel shows how the repetition of phonetic parallelisms is a styleme of Huston’s self-translations. In approaching the process of self-translation,

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<sup>441</sup> Jerzy Kuryłowicz, “La notion de l’isomorphisme” in *Esquisses linguistiques* (Kraków, Polska Akademia Nauk, 1960), 16–26.

<sup>442</sup> Douglas, R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 49.

the self-translator gives priority to this level of the text, to such an extent that she neglects the meaning of the signified in order to preserve the form – or similarly built forms – of the signifier. Given the generosity with which this strategy is adopted all over the text, it could also be employed in a translation into a third language. Let us consider a selected range of examples:

- 1) La parturiente se débat encore, lutte en hurlant de toutes ses forces contre les mains sans douceur, les mains malpropres de paysannes qui la retiennent, la restreignent – elle s’arc-boute mais les autres la plaquent sur la paillasse...

/la pɑʁtyʁjɑ̃t sɑ debɑ ãkɔːʁ, lyt ɑ̃vɛlɑ̃dɑ tut se fɔʁsɑ kɔ̃tʁɑ le mɛ̃sɑ̃dusœːʁ le mɛ malpʁɔpʁɑ də peizɑn ki la kɔtʃɛn, la kɛstʁɛɲ –ɛl sɑkbut mɛ lez-otʁɑ la plak syʁ la paias/ (p.19)

Young Marthe is still struggling, still screaming, she strains with all her strength against the ungentle, unclean peasant hands that pin her down – screaming, she arches her body against them but the other press her back onto the paillasse.

/jʌŋ Marthe ɪz stɪl 'strʌɡlɪŋ, stɪl 'skriːmɪŋ, ʃiː streɪnz wɪð ɔːl hɜː streɪθ ə'ɡɛnst ði ˌʌn'dʒɛntl, ˌʌn'kliːn 'peɪzənt hændz ðæt pɪn hɜːdɑʊn – 'skriːmɪŋ, ʃiː 'ɑːfɪz hɜː 'bɒdi ə'ɡɛnst ðɛm bʌt ði 'ʌðə prɛs hɜː bæk 'ɒntə ðə 'pæliəs/ (p.18)

In the French version, in example 1), we find article+noun (“*les mains*”) repeated twice, first with the addition of an adverb “*sans douceur*” (without gentleness), then with the addition of an adjective “*malpropres*”, (dirty); the two verbs, preceded by the personal pronoun, are almost homophones “*la retiennent*” (hold her)/ “*la restreignent*” (restrain her). In the English translation, the repetition is maintained on the adjectives, which are both formed by means of the pattern [privative ‘un’ + adj.]: “ungentle, unclean”. The second part of the parallelism is not replicated here. As a sort of compensation though, the simple indication “*se débat encore*” of the preceding sentence is redoubled into “still struggling, still screaming”. Shortly afterwards, when in the French version the peasants “*la plaquent sur la paillasse*”; in English the expression is doubled ‘they press her back onto the paillasse’ (repetition of the plosive sound) and ‘they pin her down’ that reiterates and reinforces the image and the sounds of the French text.

Example number 2) shows another isocolon rendered in translation with creative solutions: “*sans lits et sans habits, sans linges et sans meubles*”. Instead of giving precedence to the repetition of the adverb (neither nor/neither nor), the translator here focuses on the homophony (*lits* and *habits* are also rhyming), which is displaced onto the second part of the sentence, where Huston translated both *linges* and *meubles* with a synecdoche: ‘a stitch of linen’/‘a stick of furniture’.

- 2) Sans lits et sans habits, sans linge et sans meubles.

/sɑ̃li e sɑ̃z-abi, sɑ̃lɛ̃z e sɑ̃mœbl/ (p. 38)

With neither a mattress nor a shirt, not a stitch of linen or a stick of furniture.

/wɪð 'naɪðər ə 'mætrɪs nɒt ə ʃɜːt, nɒt ə stɪʃ ðv 'lɪnɪn nɔːr ə stɪk ðv 'fɜːnɪʃə/ (p. 36)



The third example shows the repetition of a certain phonetic pattern; observe how the fricative and the dental alternate in the expression “fillette méfiante et futée”. In English, a similar effect is created by the repetition of *f* and *s*, not only in the final syntagma “shrewd and mistrustful little girl”, but also by reiterating the two sounds along the sentence (shunted and shoved around/ stroked or spanked).

- 3) À force d’être trimballée, bouscoulée, caressée et fessée par des mains toujours différentes, Barbe devient une fillette méfiante et futée.

/a fɔksə detkə tkɛ̃bale, buskule, kəkese e fese pak de mɛ tuʒuʁ difekã:t, bəkə dəvʒjɛn fiʒet mefjãt e fyte/ (p. 39)

Because of being forever shunted and shoved around, stroked or spanked by different hands, Barbe turns into a shrewd and mistrustful little girl.

/bɪ'kɒz ɒv 'bi:ŋ fə'reɪvə 'ʃʌntɪd ænd ʃʌvd ə'raʊnd, strəʊkt ə: spæŋkt baɪ 'dɪfrənt hændz, Barbe tɜ:nz 'mtu: ə ʃru:d ænd ,mɪs'trʌstfʊl'li:tl gɜ:l/ (p. 37)

Similar phenomena happen when the direction of the translation is the other way around, i.e., when the first version is in English. In example 4) the same sound is maintained in the French version. (Cf. “smooth, sleek and straightforward-sailing-like-a-figurehead-siren as” and “*les eaux, cette dame lisse, luisante et puissante*». In the last couple of examples, the anaphoric repetition of labial and liquid sounds (“bleak, black brain”) is substituted by the anaphoric repetition of fricative and liquid sounds (« *cerveau sombre et sinistre ce*»). Sometimes, the anaphoric repetition of the same phonemes can be very similar in both version as shown in the last example with the reiteration of plosive phonemes.

- 4) I am by no means as smooth, sleek and straightforward-sailing-like-a-figurehead-siren as I like people to believe.

/aɪ æm baɪ nəʊ mi:nz æz smu:ð, sli:k ænd streɪt'fɔ:wəd- 'seɪlɪŋ-laɪk-ə-'fɪgəhed-'saɪərən æz aɪ laɪk 'pi:pl tu: bɪ'li:v/ (p. 74)

Ah ! je ne suis pas, beaucoup s’en faut, cette figure de proue fendant les eaux, cette dame lisse, luisante et puissante que j’aimerais donner à voir au monde.

/a! zə nəsuɪ pa, bɔku sãfo, sɛt fiɟyʁ də pʁu fãdãlez-o, sɛt dam lis, lɥizãt epɥisãt kə zɛmʁɛ dɔne a vwaʁ o mã:d/(p. 79)

- 5) Bleak black brain this morning.

/bli:k blæk brem ðɪs 'mɔ:nɪŋ/(p. 232)

Cerveux sombre et sinistre ce matin.

/sãbʁ e sinistʁə sɛ matɛ̃/ (p.252)

- 6) When I think of the huge cleated clodhoppers he jogs in now.

/'kli:tɪd 'klɒd,hɒpəz/ (p. 50)

Quand je pense aux tatanes titanesques qu’il met maintenant pour aller faire son jogging

For reasons of space, the list of examples is here limited to six but could easily be much longer. The diffusion of isomorphisms, along with the prosodic trends sketched in 5.2.2, which are strictly linked to the former aspect, bear witness to Huston's style being greatly influenced by her bilingualism and by her continual switch between languages. Further linguistic research on these levels of the text will show how self-translation impacts on each version, importing stylemes that are each time typical of the other language and thus contaminating (positively, not like a virus but like a vaccine) the system and opening it 'to the foreign'.

### 5.2.3 Culture-bound References

In this self-translation, Huston confirms her tendency to use a domesticating approach where culture-bound references are concerned. Huston seems to have a preference for references to literature and popular culture and these tend to find an equivalent: for instance, "L'histoire de Jeannot et Margot" quoted at page 43, becomes "the tale of Hansel and Gretel" in the English version, and "Tom Thumb" (p. 239), the nickname Nadia gives to her unborn child, becomes "Tom Pouce" in the French version (p. 261).

The culture-bound references that are functional to the coherence of the diegetic world, instead, remain usually untouched in translation; this happens, for instance, when Nadia is describing one of his former lovers, an American literary critic:

He used to sing to me in a terrific deep voice Paul Robeson songs, old trade union songs from the Thirties, Broadway musicals, *If Moses Supposes* – but that was acting too... (p. 238).

Il chantait d'une belle voix de basse les chansons de Paul Robeson, des vieilles chansons syndicalistes des années trente, les comédies musicales de Broadway, *If Moses Supposes*...Mais cela aussi était un jeu. (p. 259).

It is worth noting that the name of the singer and the title of the musical piece are both accompanied – in both versions – by a definition 'old trade union songs' and 'Broadway musicals', that make those references understandable to a wider public than the Anglophone or Francophone readerships. References of this kind are very limited in number, making the interlingual switch almost unproblematic in this respect.

#### 5.2.4 Play-on-words

Huston has repeatedly declared her love for all sorts of play-on-words and she used them abundantly in her early writing. Consider, for instance, the titles based on homophones or quasi-homophones: *Histoire en amybe* (on 'histoire en abyme'), *Jouer au papa et à l'amant* (on 'au papa et à la maman'), *Je veux faire l'amère*, (on 'Je veux faire la mère'). This is often the case in her essayistic writing, which is exclusively carried out in French, to such an extent that they could be considered a mannerism. One of her recent cd-books in collaboration with three male artists is entitled *Le Mâle entendu*<sup>443</sup> – literally, the male being listened to – a pun on 'le malentendu', the misunderstanding. Her latest collection of short essays is entitled *Carnets de l'incarnation*. On the other hand, play-on-words are quite rare in her novels.

In *Instruments of Darkness/Instruments des ténèbres* there is only a couple of meaningful play-on-words that could not be neglected in self-translation as they have consequences on the depiction of the main characters. The young Barbe – unwelcomed host in the umpteenth 'foster family' – is teased by the boy of the house, same age as she, but taller, who forces her to play 'fish and fisherman', Barbe being the fish obliged to squirm on the dirty floor of the attic in order to avoid the fishing rod, but the boy eventually manages to hurt her, making her nose bleed. A couple of lines later, the French version unproblematically states:

On décide de l'envoyer au catéchisme en même temps que le garçon de la maison. Naissent alors, dans l'esprit de la jeune femme, plusieurs malentendus inextricables. Comme on va l'initier à la notion du péché précisément en compagnie de son bourreau du grenier, le mots de *pêcheur* et de *pêcheur* seront pour elle à jamais confondus et elle aura du mal à comprendre pourquoi le Christ a choisi ses disciples parmi les pécheurs, pourquoi il a dit 'Je suis le pêcheur des hommes'.<sup>444</sup>

Barbe will remain victim of this mondegreen (misinterpretation of a phrase as a result of near-homophony), because she superposes the term *pêcheur* (sinner) to *pêcheur* (fisherman); she will have a hard time distinguishing between the notions of Good and Evil ever after. Given that such a small remark has meaningful consequences on the construction and perception of Barbe's character as a whole throughout the novel, the translation into English does not go without saying. For the sake of fidelity to the text, Huston is forced to maintain the original French terms and to explain them in brackets:

The family decides to send her to catechism lessons with their son, thus creating several inextricable confusions in her mind. Because she is taught the notion of sin in the company of her attic torturer, the words *pêcheur* (fisherman) and *pêcheur* (sinner) will forever be

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<sup>443</sup> Nancy Huston, *Le mâle entendu. Avec le Trio Jean-Philippe Viret* (Paris: Méliisse, 2012).

<sup>444</sup> Huston, *Instruments des ténèbres*, 43-44.

superimposed, and she will find it baffling that Jesus should have chosen His disciples among sinners declaring “I am the sinner of man.”<sup>445</sup>

In the second example, the play-on-words is originally read in the English version where Nadia is addressing her unborn baby:

*Les morts sont les invisibles, mais ils ne sont pas les absents...*How can anyone be so stupid as to think they don't *matter*? (pardon me for saying so Tom Thumb, but your father was truly, spectacularly stupid. Imagine believing in Discourse but not in ghosts!) One need not be matter to matter. You matter a great deal to me my darling. (p. 266)

*Les morts sont les invisibles, mais ils ne sont pas les absents...*comment peut-on être assez bête pour croire qu'ils n'ont pas d'importance? (Excuse-moi, Tom Pouce, mais ton père était d'une bêtise vraiment spectaculaire. Croire au Discours et ne pas croire aux fantômes : c'est un comble !) Point n'est besoin d'exister pour compter. Tu as énormément compté dans ma vie, mon ange. (p. 290-291)

The literal translation of the French version would be “one does not need to exist in order to matter”. While the English text is based precisely on the distinction between physical, material existence and existence tout court (the former not being a prerequisite for the latter), the translation flattens the reasoning.

These are the only two plays-on-words to be found throughout the novel. The absence of this particular form in fictional writing – as well as the relative scarcity of idiomatic, culture-bound expressions – could possibly be accounted for by the programmatic need to translate everything into the other languages that may act – consciously or unconsciously – as a discouraging *arrière-pensée*.

### 5.2.5 The Untranslatable

As remarked for idioms, culture-bound references and play-on-words, Huston is timid in using those part of the language which are commonly esteemed as untranslatable. Now and then though, where need be to obtain a particular effect, she cannot resist to display a foreign accent. In *Instruments of Darkness*, Stella, the funny, slightly overweight Jewish friend of Nadia's mother, at a certain point imitates the English version the American Southern Black accent in order to make Nadia laugh at her misfortunes:

Oh, Stella – how come to terms with the fact that there will be no Day of Reckoning whatsoever!”

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<sup>445</sup>Huston, *Instruments of Darkness*, 41.

“Fraid not, deah,” said Stella, finishing off her last milky drop of tea and setting her cup down with a clink. “Nope – ain’t nobody up der dat’s lookin’ down at us and gohn’ do our reckonin’ for us. We all jes’ gotta reckon wif what we got as bes’ we cain.”

Her imitation of the Southern Black accent was superb. (p. 56)

As the scene is set in New York, Huston is not allowed to use a regional accent in the French version; the solution here is a free translation aimed at preserving the comic effect:

Oh, Stella...comment se résigner à l'idée qu'il n'y aura aucun Jugement d'aucune sorte ? Ni Premier, ni Dernier, ni jour d'expiation, rien du tout ?

-C'est dur, je sais bien, dit Stella, avalant sa dernière tasse de thé au lait et faisant tinter sa tasse en porcelaine dans la soucoupe. Mais au fond, ajouta-t-elle, ce n'est pas parce qu'il n'y a pas de Demerdeur Suprême qu'on est obligé de rester dans la merde. (p. 59)

### 5.2.6 The Writer '*mis*' en abyme

The passages in the text where this technique of alternate writing has left more traces is possibly in the character of Nadia/Nada, the writer protagonist of the *Scordatura Notebook*. This character has been often depicted as the *mise en abyme* of the writer herself,<sup>446</sup> who finds in writing a way of overcoming the traumas of her past and who takes inspiration from personal experiences to construct her fiction. The comparison is favoured by the fact that, like Huston's, Nadia's speech in the English original version, is studded with expressions in French, originally signalling the interference of the foreign language in her interior monologue as she is writing her fiction – *The Resurrection Sonata* – in the French language.

The examples reported below show how, in contrast with the completely monolingual French version, the English version offers a more nuanced representation of this character, who develops her observations by prompting on the suggestions evoked by the French expressions as in the first and second examples. As highlighted by Sara Kippur, this love for metalinguistic comments, for reporting how characters pronounce their words (has seen formerly with Saffie), is one of Huston's typical stylistic traits:

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<sup>446</sup> Valeria Sperti points out that “Dans ces jeux de télescopage, le Carnet s'impose comme le double fictionnel de la rédaction accomplie par Nancy Huston et comme une mise en abyme de la composition romanesque de la Sonate, corroborant l'importance de l'écriture dans la définition identitaire tant de Nancy que de Nadia.” [In these mechanism of telescoping, the *Notebook* stands out as the fictional double of the writing carried out by Nancy Huston and as a *mise en abyme* of the novelistic composition of the *Sonata*, corroborating the importance of writing in the definition of identity for Nancy as much as for Nadia] in Sperti, “Autotraduction et figures du dédoublement dans la production de Nancy Huston”, 77.

The formal experimentation of the modernist novel transforms, under Huston's pen, into a literal embodiment of foreignness both through the characters, whose improbable, accented or nonfluent language periodically punctuates an otherwise fluent and transparent narrative, as well as through her commitment through self-translation, which actively dislocates characters from the familiarity of their native tongues intrinsic to Huston's language of composition.<sup>447</sup>

By contrast, the Nadia of the French version, deprived of her relation with linguistic alterity is a slightly more flattened character who happens to make reference to the English language only in one case (see example VII.)

<p>The Devil is double, an oxymoron, a marriage of opposites. <i>Fourchu et fourbe</i>. (p. 24)</p>	<p>Là encore le Diable est double, oxymoron, mariage des contraires. <i>Fourchu et fourbe</i>. (p. 26)</p>
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<p>God is One – whence his consummate dullness. Even when He's Three, He's One. The devil is the Other. "<i>L'Autre</i>", the French also called him, for centuries. (p. 24)</p>	<p>Dieu est Un : c'est bien pourquoi Il est assommant. Même quand Il est Trois, Il est Un. Le diable, comme chacun sait, est 'l'Autre'. (p. 25)</p>
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<p>The material world conspires to defeat me. I am by no means as smooth, sleek and straightforward-sailing-like-a-figure-head-siren as I like people to believe. <i>Au contraire</i>. Each morning I stride out into the world head high, [...] by the end of the day I am alone in the arena. (p. 74)</p>	<p>Le monde matériel s'acharne à ma défaite. Ah ! je ne suis pas, beaucoup s'en faut, cette figure de proue fendant les eaux, cette dame lisse, luisante et puissante que j'aimerais donner à voir au monde. Chaque matin je sors de chez moi, tête haute [...] en fin de journée je me retrouve à genoux, seule dans l'arène. (p. 79)</p>
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<p>It's all a matter of electricity.</p>	<p>Tout est electricité.</p>
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<p>The bolt out of the blue.</p>	<p>Coup de tonnerre dans un ciel bleu.</p>
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<p><i>Coup de foudre</i> – love at first sight – Ronald describing how he was 'thunderstruck', 'lit up from inside', 'tingling' when he first set eyes on Elisa. Oh the mysteries that roil and boil in there. Life. Love. Deep, dark, unfathomable. (p. 154)</p>	<p>Ronald, décrivant ses sensations quand il a posé pour la première fois les yeux sur Elisa : 'foudroyé', 'illuminé de l'intérieur', 'fourmillant'... Que d'énigmes foisonnent là-dedans ! La vie. L'amour. Mystères profonds, impénétrables. (p. 167)</p>
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<p>Ever since then, skinniness has been connected in her mind with horror and she has done everything in her power to avoid it, for herself and for her family. Never that. Never ever that again, or</p>	<p>À partir de ce jour, la maigreur est devenue pour elle synonyme d'horreur et elle a tout fait pour l'éviter, à elle-même et à ses proches. Plus jamais ça. Plus jamais jamais</p>
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<sup>447</sup> Kippur, *Writing it Twice*, 45.

anything that resembles it. Eat, eat. *Bon* ça, ni quoi que ce soit d'approchant. Mange, *appétit!* (p. 209) mange. *Bon appétit!* (p. 227)

Appointments in seedy apartments – Rendez-vous dans des appartements  
how many? Five? Ten? I would go alone. miteux : combine y en-a-t-il eu? Cinq ? Dix ?  
The *faiseurs d'ange*, the angel-makers, J'y allais seule. Les "faiseurs d'ange", comme  
as the French call them (are you an angel disent les Français (est-tu un ange  
now my love?) were a filthy lot. (p. 240) maintenant, mon amour ?), étaient des  
messieurs ignobles (p. 261)

What are you talking about, Nada? Qu'est-ce que tu racontes Nada?

Where is the thing itself? I mean, is Où est la chose même ? Je veux dire, *the real*  
there any such thing as the real thing, *thing* existe-t-elle, oui ou non ? En dehors du  
apart from Coca-cola? (p. 132) Coca-cola ? (p. 145)

Self-translation operated on alternate writing can thus have different effects on different levels of the text. The use of idioms, culture-bound terms and references, accent and other variously untranslatable items inherent to the language of writing are used parsimoniously by the author in the first version, and adapted or reported in the translated version with the main intent of keeping a reader-oriented perspective.

Where self-translation acts in depth, instead, is on the prosody and the euphonic figures where the phonetic and the morphosyntactic level of the text play together to achieve aesthetic effects that are comparable in the two versions.

Huston's prosody and her privileging euphonic solutions (involving syntactical and rhetorical choices) seems to be modelled by the continuous movement back and forth the two languages, both at the moment of bilingual writing and in the consequent passage through self-translation. The preference for parataxis over long cumbersome sentences favours the linguistic transfer. The 'surconscience linguistique', the linguistic hyper-awareness developed through her detour writing in a foreign language (cf. 3.3.3) is also transferred – through translation and in direct writing – to her native tongue.

### 5.3 Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of *Limbes/Limbo. Un hommage à Samuel Beckett*.

*Limbes/Limbo. Un hommage à Samuel Beckett*, is Huston's most paradoxical test of self-translation. If in novels the use of idioms, culture-bound references and other 'untranslatable' stylemes is reduced as we have seen earlier, in this text the original aim was precisely to collect a list of all these linguistic phenomena:

Le texte original est un mic-mac innommable, ce n'est pas compréhensible pour des gens qui ne sont pas bilingues. Et ensuite, *mon but était d'écrire quelque chose d'intraduisible*, comme Beckett avait dit 'innommable'. Moi, je voulais écrire l'"intraduisible". Et évidemment, la première chose ensuite, puisque je suis très attachée à la transgression des tabous, je me suis mise à le traduire dans les deux directions.<sup>448</sup>

Along with Romain Gary,<sup>449</sup> Samuel Beckett is one of Huston's most cherished authors, an inspiration and a model she measures herself up to, and to which she has frequently paired herself in reason of their similar experience as expatriates in France and advocates of the demanding task of self-translating. The 'Limbo' chosen for the title of Huston's homage, is associated with an existential condition proper to many of Beckett's plays and novels, one which Huston recently attributed also to her own status. In her recent autofiction *Bad Girl. Classes de littérature*, published in 2014, she addresses her not-yet-born self – which she incidentally calls Dorrit – telling her future and tracing a parallel with the Irish author in an effort to single out the experiences that have influenced her writing career:

Comme Beckett, tu quitteras ta mère patrie et feras semblant d'appartenir à une autre. Tu ne seras ni d'ici ni de là, mais *de l'entre-deux, c'est-à-dire de nulle part, assignée aux limbes à perpétuité*. Vu que la vie dans les limbes est une punition, tu te sentiras coupable, auras l'impression d'avoir commis un meurtre. Et ce n'est pas faux. Ta victime, c'est la femme que tu aurais dû devenir. Tu l'assassineras, à l'âge de vingt ans, puis tu passeras ton temps à mentir pour dissimuler ton crime. Le fait de t'être installée dans une langue et dans un pays étrangers t'obligera à mentir tout au long de ta vie adulte, tout comme tu as menti au long de l'enfance. Tu feras semblant que ton pays d'adoption est ton pays, et sa langue ta langue – de même que, dans l'enfance, tu as fait semblant que ta belle-mère était ta mère.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Huston, "Deracinement du savoir", 47. Emphasis mine.

<sup>449</sup> Cf. Huston's essay *Tombeau de Romain Gary* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1995), where she proposed an interpretation of Gary's novels on the basis of his biography. Huston repeatedly emphasized her sympathy for the French-naturalized author, particularly for his being a polyglot and cosmopolite author like Beckett and like herself. "Très vite j'ai vu que la question que tu incarnais – dans ta vie, dans ton œuvre, mais aussi et surtout dans la relation entre les deux – était celle de l'identité au sens le plus mathématique du terme, à savoir, être un, coïncider avec soi-même" [Soon, I realized that the issue you embodied – in your life and in your work, but also and above all in the relation between them – was the issue of identity in its most mathematic meaning, i.e. to be one, to coincide with one's self] *Ivi*, p.14.

<sup>450</sup> Nancy Huston, *Bad Girl. Classes de littérature* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2014) 104.



Beckett is “un frère en depression. Un grand-père en fait, mais en littérature la consanguinité est immédiate”, maintains Huston in “Le rôle vagi: Samuel Beckett” a chapter devoted to the analysis of the Irish self-translator’s *oeuvre* and biography in *Professeurs de desespoir*.<sup>451</sup> With him Huston shares, “l’Irlande dans le sang, le whisky dans la gorge, la musique dans l’âme”; and while she reproaches him his nihilism and misogyny, she also avowes that “Sam je le trouve désopilant et je lui pardonne, je lui plus-que pardonne, je l’aime”.<sup>452</sup>

Both exiled in France, though in different periods and for different reasons, Beckett and Huston – as many other expatriate writers – developed a peculiar relationship with French as an instrument for literary creation. Besides their languages and the practice of redoubling their works, for Kippur they also share “a sense that self-translation enables an ironic stance vis-à-vis language”.<sup>453</sup> However, as Helen Penet-Astbury points out in “Limbo of (in-)different language(s): Samuel Beckett/Nancy Huston”, this common background led to very different – almost opposite – aesthetic results:

Beckett’s work moved always closer to silence – becoming more and more abstract, and less and less Irish (or French, for that matter), Nancy Huston has taken the risk of putting her own life, and her own nationality, at the heart of her literary creation.<sup>454</sup>

Surely, the self-translation of *Limbes/Limbo. Un hommage à Samuel Beckett* - published in 1998 – is a case in point in this direction. From a narrative point of view, this text is unique in Huston’s *oeuvre*, always alternating between novels and non-fictions. The short text is a reinterpretation of Beckett’s monologues and dialogues, usually played by characters whose bodies are variously hindered:

Les corps seront, d’une façon ou d’une autre, contraints à l’immobilité: emprisonnés dans des vases (*Comédie*), enterrés jusqu’au cou dans le sable (*Oh, les beaux jours!*), empêtrés dans une tranchée (*Comment c’est*), allongés en permanence sur le dos (*Compagnie*), confits dans l’attente (*En attendant Godot*); quant au narrateur de *L’Innommable*, il se trouve planté dans une ‘jarre’ qui l’engloutit progressivement.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Nancy Huston, *Professeurs de desespoir* (Arles: Léméac/Actes Sud, 2004; not self-translated into English). Her analysis of the evolution of nihilism(s) through the Twentieth century includes chapters on Arthur Schopenhauer, Samuel Beckett, Emil Cioran, Jean Améry, Charlotte Delbo, Imre Kertész, Thomas Bernhard, Milan Kundera, Elfriede Jelinek, Michel Houellebecq, Sarah Kane, Christine Angot, and Linda Lê. A selection of authors that Huston justifies as personal “avec tout ce que cela implique d’arbitraire et d’incomplet”. *Ivi*, p. 15.

<sup>452</sup> *Ivi*, 71.

<sup>453</sup> Kippur, *Writing it Twice*, 42.

<sup>454</sup> Helen Penet-Astbury, “Limbo of (in-)different language(s): Samuel Beckett/Nancy Huston” in *Essays in French Literature and Culture* 45 (2008): 102.

<sup>455</sup> Huston, *Professeurs de desespoir*, 72.

In a search of a very low degree of existence, then, and of a silence that they cannot obtain.<sup>456</sup> Huston's character is also construed as an almost-disembodied Voice of which the reader is overhearing the stream of consciousness – occasionally addressing Samuel Beckett himself. The text starts with a direct reference to Beckett's play *Comment c'est* and to his narrative aesthetics in general:

How it is.

*Feeling (rotten word) feeling so close to old Sam Beckett these days. Close the way Miss Muffet is close to the spider. Having come at last to see why the reductio ad absurdam, the people scarcely people, all of them stopped, stymied, paralysed, plunged into blackness and silence, they cannot move they cannot talk they cannot see, they are pure minds struggling to discover the first words and especially a reason to pronounce them, there is really no world no reality no country, all signifiers are indifferent but equal, nothing matters, no mater even dolorosa, we are back in the womb or else already in the tomb – no matter, [...]*

*Comment c'est.*

Me sens (sale mot, sentir) si proche du vieux Sam ces jours-ci. Proche...comme le Petit Chaperon rouge est proche du loup. Ayant compris enfin pourquoi le *reductio ad absurdam*, des gens à peine des gens, tous frappés d'immobilité, de stupeur, d'irréalité, plongés dans le noir et le silence, incapables de bouger parler voir, de purs esprits s'efforçant de découvrir les premiers mots et surtout une raison de les prononcer. Pas de monde pas d'époque pas de pays, tous les signifiants sont insignifiants, égaux, l'égalité dans l'indifférence, rien ne compte, rien n'a jamais commencé, on est de nouveau dans le berceau ou alors déjà dans la tombe, c'est kifkif [...]

It is remarkable how Huston's commentary on Beckett's first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*,<sup>457</sup> is in practical terms a summary or a plan for her own homage to the Irish self-translator: "un délire verbal obscène, presque illisible à force de calembours et d'allusions littéraires. Dès ce tour premier livre, le personnage principal aspire à s'extraire de l'existence physique pour ne plus être qu'un esprit."<sup>458</sup> *Limbes/Limbo*, in fact, is a dual-language edition of a pastiche where Huston makes large use of the clichés of each language, of idioms and literary quotations – i.e., all the parcels of language that "vient des autres" – tossing them in the body of her text and drawing from French cultural and literary references for the French side of the text,

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<sup>456</sup> Cf. De la Motte, Annette. "Samuel Beckett: apothéose de l'écriture du silence" in *Au-delà du mot: une "écriture du silence" dans la littérature française au vingtième siècle*. (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004).

<sup>457</sup> Work written in 1932 and published posthumously: Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, New York: Arcade and Dublin, Black Cat Press, 1992.

<sup>458</sup> Huston, *Professeurs de désespoir*, 74. Emphasis mine.

and from English cultural and literary references for the English side, occasionally creating points of intersection through translation.

This self-translated text is paradoxical for at least two reasons; the first, as we observed at the beginning of this paragraph, is that she writes ‘the untranslatable’ and then self-translates it straight away. Secondly, because it is inspired in form and content to a writer whose whole *oeuvre* was paradoxical. Huston explains in *Professeurs de désespoir* that she also believes that the nihilist drive distinguishing the playwright is contradicted by the *form* through which such content (or *lack* of content, reduction to non-sense) is expressed:

Cette aspiration au néant est dite et redite tout au long de l’œuvre beckettienne. Mais elle est également *contredite*, et fortement. *Par l’humour d’une part. Mais aussi par le soin incroyable qu’apporte l’auteur à la construction de ses phrases.*<sup>459</sup>

Not only Beckett’s texts are finely chiselled, they are also usually translated into his other language. Surprisingly enough, Huston does not comment on Beckett’s practice of self-translation – the most evident trait she shares with him – and that surely constitutes the strongest, more blatant contradiction to Beckett’s wish to achieve silence. Indeed, if the aim is the annihilation of language, why then choose to repeat, transpose, translate, say it all over again into another language?

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<sup>459</sup> Huston, *Professeurs de désespoir*, 87. Emphasis mine.

## 5.4 Bilingual Version Analysis

The 1998 bilingual edition *Limbes/Limbo* is based on a former single bilingual text written for the most part in English, with some short interjections in French, and dated February 1997 according to Jane Elizabeth Wilhelm who received permission by the author to publish this original version on *Palimpsestes*, thus making it available online.<sup>460</sup> On comparison, it is possible to note that the published text was reordered and amplified with respect to the first draft; the French parts were translated into English, and a second version in French was created out of the first one, recuperating the original French passages and filling the remaining gaps.

### 5.4.1 Language interference as translational strategy

Given its particular genesis and the overtly Beckettian style of the texts, as well as the face-to-face editing, the two versions seem to have been created to dialogue between themselves. “[T]he two versions of the text complete each other and communicate between them as in a dialogue”<sup>461</sup> writes Jane Elizabeth Wilhelm, while, according to Nicola Danby,<sup>462</sup> the “French and English counterparts create a double reading or a combined meaning which is greater than each of the meanings contained in the texts if examined individually”. The translational tendencies that constitute such ‘dialogue’ between versions can be sorted out into two main categories: ‘form-led translations’ and ‘cultural translations’.<sup>463</sup> As I have highlighted in relation to euphonies in the previous translation analyses – form-led translations are central in this work as well: Huston focuses on the rhythm intrinsic to each language so as to create what Danby defines as ‘interdependent bilingual complementarity’:

“Blood, black, thump, whump. Clot. Shut.”

“Sang, pan, vlan. Clos. Caillot.”

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<sup>460</sup> Available at <https://palimpsestes.revues.org/549?file=1>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

<sup>461</sup> Cf. Wilhelm, « Autour de *Limbes/Limbo* : un hommage à Samuel Beckett de Nancy Huston », 8.

<sup>462</sup> Cf. Nicola Danby, “The Space Between: Self-Translator Nancy Huston’s *Limbes / Limbo*”. *La Linguistique* 40/1 (2004): 85.

<sup>463</sup> For a complete list of the phenomena cf. her Master thesis “The space between: Self-translators Nancy Huston and Samuel Beckett” (June 2003, York University).

According to Danby, the chiasmic translation of the couple Clot. Shut /klot. ʃʌt /– Clos. Caillot, /klo. kajo/ creates “a nearly identical phonetic effect”.<sup>464</sup>

What is even more interesting, in my opinion, is that the bilingual version, allowing the reader to be in touch with both texts at once and inviting to switch from one to the other, creates such interferences in the reader’s mind – as it probably did in the translator’s mind. Indeed, the English ‘clot’ risks to be pronounced as if it was a French word, (i.e., third person of the verb *clorre*, *il clot*, to close, to end), thus creating a very powerful evocation of the proximity of the two languages in the writer’s mind. Such effect is amplified by the abundance of nominal sentences and onomatopoeias.

This dialogue occurs also on other levels of the text. Danby evokes the terms ‘cross-language communication’ to explain Huston’s use of homophonic words referring to two different objects in English and French. The original passage was bilingual:

Remonter de l’effet à la cause. Sérieux, maintenant. Fini de rire. Si vous riez c’est la rate qu’on va vous arracher. Où se trouve la *rate*, d’ailleurs? I smell a *rate*.

While the first occurrence of the word *rate* refers to the spleen, the second occurrence, though written with a final ‘e’, is homophonous of the English ‘rat’. That is precisely what it becomes in the published version:

[...] we’ll rip out your spleen. Where exactly is the spleen, anyhow? I **smell a rat**. (p. 24)

[...] c’est la rate que l’on arrachera. Où elle est d’ailleurs, la rate? **Il y a un os**. (p. 25)<sup>465</sup>

The comment ‘I smell a rat’ in the English version would be utterly non-sensical in that context if it weren’t for the presence of the French version to contrast it with. There is another particular passage that makes the case for this intertextual and interlinguistic dialogue:

Oh! To be released from the obligation to live in any tongue! To relinquish language, once and for all! To **vanquish lanquish**. That’s a good one. Well, so-so. (p. 28)

Ah ! ne plus être dans aucune langue. N’être. La bonne blague. Enfin, couçi couça. (p. 29)

In analysing this passage (where the French text is the original and the English its translation), Ioanna Chatzidimitriou stated:

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<sup>464</sup> Danby, “The Space Between”, 85.

<sup>465</sup> *Ivi*, 89.

The self-translation radically alters the meaning of the original French by omitting the verb 'to be' and any allusion to birth. [...] The ambiguity '*n'être/nâître*' is glossed over by a timid gesture at languish – appearing in the text in the phonetically corrupt form 'lanquish' – in view of its ultimate containment as articulated by the militarily aggressive 'vanquish' and 'quish', an obsolete noun signifying thigh armor, present in both 'vanquish' and 'lanquish'.<sup>466</sup>

The wordplay based on the homophony of *n'être* (not to be) and *nâître* (to be born) is the epitome of Beckett's aesthetics according to Huston, as we can infer from the above-mentioned analysis of the Irish author in *Professeurs de desespoir*.<sup>467</sup> Likewise, in its *crescendo* up to this point, the text has made very clear that 'to be' can only mean 'to-be-in-language'; there is an ontological correspondence between 'being' and 'being in language'. Rather than a reference to 'languor', then, it seems legitimate to read 'lanquish' as the *distorted pronunciation of a francophone speaker* of the English word 'language'. Therefore, there could be a correspondence between 'to vanquish language' and '*ne pas être*' or '*ne plus être*'. This interpretation would also justify the subsequent comment 'That's a good one. Well, so-so.', a comment that is the precise translation of the French equivalent and that refers precisely to a single-word-pun. Ultimately then, the meaning is not altered in the passage from one language to the other; on the contrary, the translation is enriched with the contact of the foreign language and the two texts can interweave a meaningful and productive dialogue.

#### 5.4.2 Translational Rewriting

Danby reports a few examples to show what she defines 'cultural translations', procedures superposable to the commonly known translational strategies of culture-bound references. Far from using the strategy of generalization, Huston aims in this text at domesticating every reference for the target text readership. In the opening page of the book, for instance, a reference to a famous nursery rhyme is translated into a reference to an equally famous bedtime story: "*Feeling (rotten word) feeling so close to old Sam Beckett these days. Close the way Miss Muffet is close to the spider.*" is rendered with "Me sens (sale mot, sentir) si proche du vieux Sam ces jours-ci. Proche...comme le Petit Chaperon rouge est proche du loup ». Wilhelm agrees with Danby in defining this translation strategy as « essentiellement cibliste » [essentially target-oriented],<sup>468</sup> and, in this regard, she shows what happens in the text when

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<sup>466</sup> Chatzidimitriou, "Self-translation as Minorization Process: Nancy Huston's Limbes/Limbo", 33-34.

<sup>467</sup> Incidentally, at the end of this chapter, she quotes her own pun in the last sentence: "La paix enfin. N'être."

<sup>468</sup> Wilhelm, "Autour de Limbes/Limbo", 65.

Huston deals with literary quotations, suggesting that her aim is “to go toward the reader all the while keeping a certain freedom,<sup>469</sup>

Ainsi, elle traduit le vers d’Andrew Marvell « Had we but world enough and time, this coyness, lady, were no crime » par un autre vers célèbre tiré d’un poème de Rimbaud, « Voyelles » : « Voyelles, je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes » (Limbes/Limbo : 32-33). Si le contenu des deux vers n’est certes pas le même dans cette adaptation assez libre, l’impact sur le lecteur est similaire dans les deux langues dans la mesure où les deux références sont très connues.<sup>470</sup>

If we give a closer look at the excerpt analysed by Wilhelm, though, we see that the verses she takes into consideration are both preceded and followed by other literary quotations. At the beginning of this section, the Voice laments the impossibility of stopping its own blabbering, all the while being aware of the impossibility of saying anything new under the sun. Thus, the English excerpt begins with: “I have found my own language at last, a language comprehensible to myself alone”...to reveal the irony behind this statement right away: “Boy, are you guys ever naïve. It’s time to face the music. Stand on your own two feet.” It proceeds:

Look where all your getting has gotten you. Facts, fictions, facts. Good, better, best. Never take a rest. Drink to me only. Had we but world enough and time, thy coyness lady were no crime. How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. Not marble, not the gilded monuments of princes. Tiger, tiger, burning bright. Rhinoceros, rhinoceros, in the night. Fill me full and stab me dead but do it like a gentleman. (p. 30)

Regardez ou cela vous a menés, de toujours vouloir aller quelque part. Du vrai, du faux, du vrai. Bing, bang, bong. Ne jamais se reposer. Il pleut dans mon cœur. Voyelles, je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes. Je sais combien il faut, sur la colline en flamme. Des pierres nues et sans squelette, o ma statue. O mon rhinocéros. Poignardez-moi s’il le faut, mais faites-le comme un gentleman. (p. 31)

“On a tous un peu une ‘tête-poubelle’, – reminds us Huston, offering a key to read similar phrases in *Limbes/Limbo* – où traînent de vieux souvenirs de lecture, de poésies, des choses apprises par coeur. Cela me vient bien sur en anglais [...] il fallait que je trouve des correspondances en français.”<sup>471</sup>

These remembrances are embedded in the text to demonstrate that all the language that we esteem we are creating anew, is actually a second-, a third-, an umpteenth-hand tool: everything has already been said. Huston represents here what she felt to be Beckett’s distinguishing feature: a disgust for the being-in-language and a wish to be reduced to silence. However, the Voice cannot help dragging on relentlessly, repeating the same old refrains. Verses are quoted randomly as the Voice remembers them, in

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<sup>469</sup> Wilhelm, “Autour de *Limbes/Limbo*”, 70.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>471</sup> Huston, “Déracinement du savoir”, 47.

bits and pieces, from Ben Jonson's 1616 poem "Song To Celia" (Drink to me only with thine eyes...); the above mentioned Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress"; Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Sonnet 43", (How do I love thee? Let me count the ways./ I love thee to the depth and breadth and height/ My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight/ For the ends of being and ideal grace.); William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 55", (Not marble, not the gilded monuments of princes shall outlive the pow'ful rhyme...); and, finally, a pastiche with William Blake's verses from "The Tyger" (Tyger, tyger, burning bright./ In the forests of the night...) and the title of a French play by Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros*. The French version, which, as Wilhelm remarks, is target-oriented as it evokes those literary quotations that every reader may recognize as famous verses – even though the author and date may not be immediately evident. Thus, *Il pleut dans mon cœur* is a mondegreen of a verse from "Il pleure dans mon cœur" by Paul Verlaine (...comme il pleut sur la ville); there is a verse taken from Rimbaud's "Voyelles", then one from Baudelaire's "L'âme du vin" (Je sais combien il faut, sur la colline en flamme,/De peine, de sueur et de soleil cuisant/ Pour engendrer ma vie et pour me donner l'âme); from Paul Eluard's poem "L'égalité des sexes" (Tes yeux sont revenus d'un pays arbitraire/ Où nul n'a jamais su ce que c'est qu'un regard/ Ni connu la beauté des yeux, beauté des pierres,/ Celle des gouttes d'eau, des perles en placards,/ Des pierres nues et sans squelette, ô ma statue).

When read autonomously, the two versions sound equally stuttering, equally built on unfinished sentences and united by means of feeble syntactical links, but their bond is made evident by at least a couple of elements. In both versions, the Voice seems to be addressing an interlocutor, so that we can draw a parallel between the 'lady' of the English version, and the '*statue*' of the French one, but the identity of this second entity is maintained ambiguous, as it is invoked to 'stab me dead but do it *like a gentleman*'/ "*poignardez moi s'il le faut, mais faites-le comme un gentleman*". The Voice ponders on the lack of originality of language and evokes the writers that have come before it, mocking them through de-contextualized quotations that lose their original meaning to build a new 'absurd' text whose sound is vaguely familiar but whose ultimate function remains opaque. The dialogue between the two texts is such that it would be difficult to establish which came first, had we not the original text at our disposal. Occasionally, the literary quotation is selected only for the second version, as in the case of the following examples:

Heroism consists in hanging on one second longer. Hang on in there ! From the neck. Till death doth. (sic) (p. 52)

L'héroïsme consiste à tenir une seconde de plus. Tiens bon là ! Je te lance une corde. Pour te pendre. Au gibet noir, manchot aimable, dansent, dansent les paladins. (p. 53)

Then what do you stand for? And what do you write for? And what makes you go on breathing in and

Qu'est-ce que cela représente ? à quoi ça rime ? Pourquoi écrire, pour commencer ? Je veux te



out, day in day out, come rain or come shine, come hell or high water, 'twixt the devil and the deep blue sea? Hm? (p. 38)

raconter, ô molle enchanteresse!  
Pourquoi vouloir raconter à tout prix, qu'il vente ou qu'il pleuve, entre Scylla et Charybde? Hein? (p. 39)

In the first, a juridical English sentence ('Till death doth ensue') is replaced by verses from Rimbaud's *Le bal des pendus*; in the second, the English text shows a climax of idioms referring to the choice between the two situations, while the translated version is adorned with a verse by Charles Baudelaire. Moreover, this passage clearly shows how the two versions are weaved together: the idiom *choisir entre Scylla et Charybde*, meaning 'to choose between two evils', also exists in English: "choose (or be) between Scylla and Charybdis", but – in this case – the French translates the synonymic expression 'twixt the devil and the deep blue sea'. The effect is the creation of a powerful link with the first version that would not be imaginable if the text were not published in a bilingual edition.

The references to literary quotations interwoven in the text are more numerous than previously highlighted by scholars;<sup>472</sup> the phrase quoted by Wilhelm in relation to Lewis Carroll's quotation ("The time has come, the walrus said..." , 'translated' into a reference to Verlaine) is also preceded by other references from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* ("Out, out, brief candle!"), the title of a 1961 musical (*Bye-bye Birdie!*), and the cliché salutation that everyone knows either from silent movies, or Disney movies, or the 1961 James Darren song, or, more recently, the Looney Tunes comics (*Farewell, cruel world!*):

O let me gaze awhile upon thy tender visage! Nay nay I say! Out, out, brief candle! Bye-bye birdie! Farewell cruel world! The time has come, the walrus said – and it congeals for an instant, gives you something to chew on, then dissolves, melts in your mouth, rejoins the flux, the sewage, the random writhing mess (p. 12)

O, laissez-moi contempler votre tendre visage. Que nenni, vous dis-je! Adieu, monde cruel! Salut les mecs! La marquise sortit à cinq heures – et en un instant cela se cristallise, vous donne quelque chose à vous mettre sous la dent, puis se dissout, vous fond dans la bouche, rejoint le flux, le tout-à-l'égoût, retourne à l'entropie grouillante (p. 13)

Some references were adapted in the transfer from the original bilingual text to the two published versions. At a certain point, for instance, the unpublished draft shows:

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<sup>472</sup> Marie-Claire Merrigan pointed out that Huston's "Hommage a Beckett est en outre parsemé de références à l'oeuvre ainsi qu'aux personnages beckettians (ainsi, son dialogue débute avec la phrase « How it is » I « Comment c'est », d'après les romans auto-traduits de Beckett parus respectivement en 1964 et en 1961), mais également il d'autres figures tutélaires telles que William Shakespeare, Lewis Carroll ou William Blake dans la version anglaise, et Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Rimbaud ou Paul Verlaine pour la version française. »

My tailor is rich and my soprano is bald. Here's a chair, here's a second chair, and here are seven hundred thousand chairs in the same tiny room. Here's a rhinoceros. Only a Rumanian in Paris could have come up with the rhinoceros. A rose is a rose is a rose, and so forth. Dixit Stein.

“My tailor is rich” is the first sentence proposed to francophones who wish to learn English in *L'Anglais sans peine*, written by Alphonse Chérel in 1929; universally known and made fun of by the French, it was also quoted by Eugene Ionesco, in *La cantatrice chauve* (hence, “my soprano is bald”), who is also the author of *Les chaises* and *Rhinocéros*. The passage ends with a famous verse by Gertrude Stein, from her 1913 poem "Sacred Emily", which is replaced by the title of one of her books in the rewritten versions:

My tailor is rich and my soprano is bald. Look, here's a chair, here's another chair, here are seven hundred thousand chairs in the same little room. Here, have a rhinoceros. [...] Le monde est rond, dixit Stein the stone. (p. 26)

My tailor is rich et ma cantatrice est chauve. Tiens!, voici une chaise, tiens! En voici une autre, tiens ! voici sept cent mille chaises dans la même pièce minuscule. Bon, prends un rhinocéros. [...] Le monde est rond, dixit Stein. (p. 27)

There are also references to pop culture, in the form of pop songs' titles or lyrics, such as George Gershwin's “The man I love” (“Maybe Tuesday will be my good news day. Maybe not.” p. 32 ), which is kept in the French version in italics; the Irish pop song *Molly Malone* (“She died of a fever and no one could save her – bad rhyme, that one – and that was the end of sweet Molly Malone”, p. 24), translated with a reference to a nonsensical French nursery rhyme (“Une souris verte, qui courait dans l’herbe – mauvaise rime, celle-là – on l’attrape par la queue” p. 25). Finally, the song “Hazy Lazy Crazy Days of Summer” by Nat King Cole is quoted on page 44 in the English version, while for “Oh my darling Clementine, you are lost and gone forever” at page 50, there is no substitution in the French text.

The opposite is also true. The French text is interspersed with culture-bound references that do not find any correspondence in English, such as “S’agit-il d’épater les bourgeois...” (‘to astonish the bourgeois’, expression attributed to Baudelaire, p. 21); the motto “il n’est pas de sot métier” (i.e., ‘no job is idiotic’, p. 35); “sinon, du Ricard” on p. 37 is a wordplay on the famous slogan of the French anise-based long drink, Ricard (*Un Ricard, sinon rien!*, A Ricard or nothing!); “Am, stram, gram, pic et pic et colegram” (a children’s counting rhyme, p. 39); the motto “elle en a vue des vertes et des pas mures” (p. 41); and *fissa fissa* (‘quick quick’), a calque used in French and deriving from Arabic.

English nursery rhymes being part of popular culture are also quoted, or misquoted, in the text, such as for instance “Mister Lister kissed his sister” (wordplay on “Mister Lister sassed his sister” from *Father Fox's Pennyrhymes* by Clyde Watson; not translated with culture-bound references or idioms in the French version) and “Sticks

and stones can break my bones” (p. 37), translated with a motto: “Qui trop embrasse mal étreint” (p. 38). Unsurprisingly, there are no rules in these quotations, so that Shakespeare can be quoted alongside with *Peter Piper*, insofar as it serves the rhythmic repetition of sounds, which is also the principle governing the translated version (which also builds a pun on the homophony between *au choix*, ‘at your choice’ and *o, chois!* Drop it! Consider also that the original text was the French one and that the last segment was not present; it was possibly added to reproduce the sound effects of the English version:<sup>473</sup>

A qui profite le crime? That is the question. Compared to that, to be or not to be is twaddle. Or piddle. Take your pick. I pick piddle, Peter picked a pecker. (p. 28)

A qui profite le crime? Voilà la question. A côté de celle-là, être ou ne pas être, fadaises. Ou farandoles. Au choix. O, chois ! Cha che chaurait chi ch’était drôle.<sup>474</sup> (p. 29)

Where possible, the translation is based on isomorphic relations, as the comparison between “Twaddle. Or piddle,” and “*falaises. Ou farandoles*” possibly shows.

Another instance where the foreign language intervenes directly in the translation to create interlingual puns is found in the following bilingual passage from the first draft, where Huston quotes Roland Barthes:

La langue est fasciste, elle vous oblige à dire. Quel sexe. (Oh !) Quel temps. (Un temps de chien.) The present is very tense. By the time you get to the second syllable you're out of it; the first syllable is already past.<sup>475</sup>

In the published English version showed in the following table, the last added sentence – “I wouldn’t put a dog out in this tense” – plays on the identity of the words ‘tense’ (*temps*) and ‘whether’ (*temps*) in the French language:

Language is fascistic; it forces you to specify. What sex. (oooh-la-la!) What tense. The present is very tense. By the time you get to the second syllable you’re out of it; the first is already past. I wouldn’t put a dog out in this tense. Home at last. (p. 34)

La langue est fasciste, elle oblige à dire. À dire par exemple quel sexe. (Oh !) Quel temps. (Sale !) Le présent, si vite passé. En moins de temps qu’il ne faut pour le dire. Dès qu’on arrive à la deuxième syllabe c’est fini. La première est déjà passée. Enfin chez soi. (p. 35)

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<sup>473</sup> The original passage showed: “À qui profite le crime ? Voilà la question. À côté de celle-là, Être ou ne pas être : fadaises. Ou farandoles. Au choix. O choir.”

<sup>474</sup> “Ça se saurait, qui c’était drôle”.

<sup>475</sup> At the inaugural lesson of the Collège de France in 1977: « La langue, comme performance de tout langage, n'est ni réactionnaire ni progressiste ; elle est tout simplement fasciste. »

*Limbes/Limbo* is a text that *stages* the performance of translation. Some factors concur to this effect:

1) the fact that it is published in a dual-language format, which is a direct consequence of the content of the narration, an homage to bilingual writer, French-English self-translator, Samuel Beckett;

2) the fact that the reader does not know which version comes first and which is the translation encourages to give equal status to either version and to read back and forth, from English to French, and vice versa, thus appreciating the different figures of speech;<sup>476</sup>

3) the fact that literary references are target-oriented and designed to remind the reader, not only of the linguistic side of the process of translating, but also of its cultural underpinnings.

Hence, in this bilingual edition, author and translator are given equal importance and equal visibility. Self-translation and its inevitable pitfalls are staged from the very beginning. While the English version shows: “*Get it in Ing-lish. Shoved Wedged./ Lodged in the language like a bullet in the brain./ Undelodgeable. Untranslatable.*”, the French version goes: “*iCaramba !/ Encore raté!* » The French version can be understood as a comment on the untranslatability inherent to every human language, also by virtue of an intertextual reference. Huston, in fact, uses the expression *encore raté!*, (‘failed again!’) as a commentary to the English version later in the text where the Voice makes the umpteenth invocation for silence:

What I wanted to say was – Basta.  
Two syllables. Foiled again. [sic] You  
fiend! You villain! You basta! Your  
turd! (p. 38)

Ce que je voulais dire c’est : Basta.  
Deux syllabes. Zut, encore raté.  
(p.39)

The wordplay based on the assonance between the Italian word *basta* (enough already!) and the English ‘bastard’ which is split in half (You *basta!* You *turd!*) in a sequence of vulgar epithets.

However, the same opening sentence can be read under a different light. In a more metaphorical reading, what is straightaway declared “[u]ntranslatable” in English was,

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<sup>476</sup> According to Karas, the original is usually printed on the left-hand page and the translation on the right-hand page, and this is the case of *Limbes/Limbo*. But the paratext explains: “Les deux versions, l’anglaise et la française, sont de l’auteur”. Thus, the editing might just be a coincidence. Cf. Hilla Karas, “Le statut de la traduction dans les éditions bilingues: De l’interprétation au commentaire,” *Palimpsestes* 20 (2007). URL: <http://palimpsestes.revues.org/100> (Accessed 8th September 2016). Eva Gentes analysed the editorial choices of publishing bilingual editions such as *Limbes/Limbo* in “Potentials and Pitfalls of Publishing Self-Translations as Bilingual Editions” in *Orbis Litterarum* 68/3 (2013).

*de facto*, translated into French. Therefore, “*encore raté*” could be a defiance to the English declaration, in the same manner as the practice of self-translation is a contradiction of Beckett’s eagerness for silence and nothingness. *Limbes/Limbo* is a carefully interwoven dual-sided tapestry: each side can be understood and appreciated on its own, but each gains at being read in comparison with its twin. “Je suis celui qui est. Et ça fait deux” [I am who I am, that makes two] quotes the French version, “and never the ‘twain shall meet”, answers the English text. Self-translation turns into a metalinguistic commentary and finally gains visibility for each reader, either monolingual or bilingual.

## VI. A LINGUISTIC ENTANGLEMENT: MULTILINGUALISM AND SELF-TRANSLATION

In the chapter of the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies* devoted to the connections between multilingualism and translation, Rainier Grutman points out that, while multilingualism within the same literary text is a practice going back to ancient times, it is getting more and more common in the age of postmodernism and globalization where ‘heterolingualism’ in the text requires contextualization:

In literary poetics, ‘multilingualism’ stands for the use of two or more languages within the same text. Those languages are not always ‘foreign’, however. The medieval habit of interspersing vernacular poetry with Latin phrases, and the code switching between Spanish and English in recent Chicano writing both attest to a blurring of linguistic boundaries.<sup>477</sup>

It is also worth noting here, before analysing the interactions between multilingualism and self-translation in Huston’s recent novel, that Grutman and Dirk Delabastita pointed out how the academic interest for the use of multilingualism *in fiction* gained momentum in correspondence with the *cultural turn* in translation studies (concurrently with the research on the practice of self-translation) and that it needs to be considered as a sign of the current episteme, i.e., that of a globalised, multilingual world:

The increasing use of either translation or other languages (that need not be entirely ‘foreign’, for the reasons given by Denison) as a device in fictional texts does more than just draw the reader’s attention to their texture and technique (this latter point was made a long time ago by the Russian formalists in their classical essays on ‘foregrounding’). Crucially, it also provides a comment about our socio-cultural values and the state of the world we live in. In that respect, fictional representations of multilingualism on the one hand, and of translation on the other, ultimately lead us back to a common reality, that is, if we understand ‘translation’ not just as an abstract or ‘technical’ operation between words and sentences, but as cultural events occurring, or significantly not occurring, between people and societies in the real world.<sup>478</sup>

In the light of the scopes of self-translation studies presented in Chapter I, the two scholars significantly add also that “this viewpoint entails a radical questioning of traditional divisions between disciplines such as history, sociology, linguistics, translation studies, and literary studies”, thus seemingly advocating – like most self-translation scholars – a trans-disciplinary turn in translation studies.

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<sup>477</sup> Rainier Grutman, “Multilingualism and Translation” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* edited by Mona Baker and Kirsten Malmkjær (London: Psychology Press, 1997), 157.

<sup>478</sup> Dirk Delabastita and Rainier Grutman (eds.), *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism. Special issue of *Linguistica Antverpiensia New Series* 4* (Antwerp: University of Antwerp, 2005), 13-14.

While nowadays multilingualism is quite commonplace in multimodal communication targeting the mass (popular films, advertisements, websites, etc.) through the simultaneous presence of two languages in different modes (one oral, one in subtitles, for instance), it is pretty uncommon to witness a *quantitatively extensive* use of heterolingual excerpts in fictional writing in the printed form.<sup>479</sup> Moreover, such use of multilingualism would strike in an author as famous as Huston in metropolitan France, as it has more in common with the post-colonial mode of writing typical of borderland zones (e.g., Chicano literature), had we not repeatedly assessed Huston's strenuous defence of her *étrangéité* within the French literary panorama and her recovery of an interest in her native country, Canada, which is incidentally characterized by widespread phenomena of diglossia.

As we have seen in the progression of the self-translations analyses, Huston has worked her way toward the use of multilingualism within the same text, by a progressive increase of sperimentality with her twin versions. While modifying both versions through self-translation, – much more so when the first draft was bilingual (Chapter V)- she occasionally let the 'foreign' tongue (i.e., either French or English, depending on the text's basic language) intervene and show its presence, either physically – with short excerpts – or evoked by unconventional expressions and accents, that suggest their 'translatedness' within the diegetic context.<sup>480</sup>

No novel in Huston's whole production so far, however, is as multilingual as *Danse noire*,<sup>481</sup> the (should I say 'mainly') "French" version of *Black Dance*.<sup>482</sup> While the language of narration is French, the text shows a *massive* presence of foreign languages in dialogues and footnotes: English, German, Portuguese, Canadian French and the lexicalization of various different regional varieties of both French and English punctuate this exceptionally polyphonic novel.

Besides being a multilingual novel, this text gives prominence and visibility to self-translation in an inedited fashion, both within Huston's production and within the corpus of self-translated texts *tout court*. According to Valeria Sperti, *Danse noire* both theorizes and practices the co-presence of *writing* and *self-translation* visually also for the monolingual reader, as "le pouvoir créatif de la fiction et e l'autotraduction se

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<sup>479</sup> The quantity of foreign language present largely exceeds the examples considered by Delabastita and Grutman as the most significant among XXth century multilingual novels, i.e., Thomas Mann's "Walpurgisnacht" chapter in *The Magic Mountain* (Der Zauberberg, 1924) and Guillermo Cabrera Infante's prologue to *Three Trapped Tigers* (Tres tristes tigres, 1965), in Cuban Spanish and American English. Cf. Delabastita, Dirk and Grutman, Rainier. (eds.) *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism*. Special issue of *Linguistica Antverpiensia New Series*, 4, Antwerp: University of Antwerp, 2005.

<sup>480</sup> Cf. Kippur, *Writing it Twice*.

<sup>481</sup> Nancy Huston, *Danse noire* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2013).

<sup>482</sup> Nancy Huston, *Black Dance* (New York: Black Cat, 2014).

déroulent contemporanément sur la page”,<sup>483</sup> thanks to the voluminous presence of footnotes providing immediate translation for the dialogues in foreign languages.

For its audacious multilingual drive, no less than for its narrative complexity, the book has also received many critiques,<sup>484</sup> as we will see in detail in the part devoted to self-translation analysis. For reasons of opportunity, the analyses will focus on those aspects of the text that differentiate this from the other self-translations selected, although it forces us to disregard further equally relevant features of the text. As done for the text previously analysed, the outline of thematic contents and stylistic features of the novel will shed light on the peculiarities of its self-translation.

### 6.1 Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of *Danse noire/Black Dance*

“Vingt ans après *Cantique des plaines*, *Danse noire* explore les racines enfouies et les fruits parfois difformes de l’identité canadienne... et de l’identité tout court.” wrote Huston in the presentation of this book, one which gathers a large number of the themes and motifs characterizing Huston’s exploration of her literary identity: the Canadian landscape, the reappropriation of the English language, the acceptance of a false bilingualism and a hybrid cultural heritage, the insiring presence of a third ‘other’ to nourish literary creation. *Black Dance/Danse noire* stands midway between a celebration and the umpteenth questioning of these elements, as it carries the most recognizable Hustonian traits.

Huston has always cherished a preference for complex, sophisticated structures for her novels, which enable her to enjoy more freedom in the content of each section, whose ‘boundaries’ are established in advance.<sup>485</sup> The structure of *Black Dance/Danse noire* is a mixture of filmscript and musical score.

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<sup>483</sup> Valeria Sperti, « Vassilis Alexakis et Nancy Huston au miroir de l’autotraduction », in *Interfrancophonies 6* edited by Paola Puccini (2015): 84. DOI: 10.17457/IF6\_2015/SPE. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Emphasis mine.

<sup>484</sup> Critiques related precisely to its display of multilingualism and translation. Quebec journalist Richard Boisvert provokatively writes “Si certains lecteurs français ont de la difficulté à avaler le dernier Nancy Huston, c’est parce que le livre est truffé de dialogues en anglais et que la traduction en « québécois rustique » qu’on trouve en bas de page leur tape sur les nerfs.”, Richard Boisvert “Danse noire de Nancy Huston: le rythme du cœur” in *Le Soleil*, 06 octobre 2013. URL: <http://www.lapresse.ca/le-soleil/arts/livres/201310/05/01-4696945-danse-noire-de-nancy-huston-le-rythme-du-coeur.php>. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>485</sup> This tendency is constant in her last works. Huston’s latest novel *Le club des miracles relatifs* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2016), also displays a complex multi-layered structure. It is divided into seven main parts, each constituted by four chapters: the first devoted to the third-person narration of present-time action; the second is a flash-back on the protagonist’s family; the third is a third-person narration of a moment



Paul Schwartz, sitting by the bedside of his lover, Milo Noirlac, who is dying of AIDS, is writing down a film script recounting Milo's adventurous life. The 10 chapters (constructed as scenes and reporting editing techniques such as light and camera directions) explore all the phases of Milo's story and are orderly intertwined with an equal number of chapters focusing on the pregnancy his mother Awinita (a teenage Cree prostitute in Montreal), as well as chapters recounting the life of Milo's paternal grandfather, Neil Noirlac. Formerly Neil Kerrigan, Milo's grandfather is an Irishman who briefly fought in the Easter Rising and, after having cowardly betrayed his comrades, is exiled to Canada where he failingly nurtures his boyish dream of becoming a great writer outclassing his friend, James Joyce, and his idol, William Butler Yeats.

The film-script arrangement served multiple purposes. As a narrative device it allows the writer to describe scenes *in medias res*. ("Okay, this is just a suggestion...INTERIOR-DAY. The camera finds Milo Noirlac – greying mahogany ponytail hanging halfway down his back, black cowboy hat [...]” p. 3; “CUT to Paul Schwartz, his new suit now clammy and wrinkled [...] – and Milo Noirlac, as above minus the Stetson” p. 7). Secondly, it provides the writer with a further ‘space of freedom’, allowing her to insert amusing comments on the way of proceeding (“Come on, keep talkin’ you indolent Quebecker. You know how films work: for the first ten minutes, the audience is infinitely tolerant and will accept whatever you choose to flash at them, but after that you’d better start making sense” p. 8); or on the intention of reviewing boring, badly written dialogues (“Problem, Milo. Familiar problem: what to do with boring dialogue...Nah, skip it. Maybe shoot the scene from the far side of the room, over by the jukebox” p. 40); this is supposed to compensate for the rather dramatic content of the narration:

C'était aussi pour m'amuser et amuser le lecteur, parce que sinon, le contenu n'est pas très rigolo tout le temps. Donc, il y a des découpages, comme vous dites, de plus grande liberté, de détente. [...] J'aime bien inclure le lecteur dans le processus de l'écriture. Je peux écrire exprès de mauvais dialogues.

And this leads to a third observation: perhaps more significantly in the light of the houstonian peculiarities seen so far, this device serves once again as a *mise-en-abyme* of the act of writing. For Huston, the strategy of keeping a distance between herself and the substance of what she is writing seems to be specular to the *faire-semblant*, the make-believe, the “theatre” of speaking a foreign language.<sup>486</sup>

This particular structure – like that of *Instruments of Darkness*, and previously of *The Goldberg Variations* – was also (and unsurprisingly) inspired by Huston's passion for implementing music as a metanarrative device. We have seen from previous novels

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in a woman's life (seven different women who meet the protagonist) and the fourth is a first-person narration of the protagonist, Varian McLeod.

<sup>486</sup> Boisvert, “*Danse noire* de Nancy Huston: le rythme du cœur”.

that music became a paradigmatic feature in Huston's novel, either by providing cultural references to depict a particular context, as in *Plainsong*, or by informing a metanarrative structure, like in the former two cases. In *Black Dance/Danse noire*, music intervenes in both modalities. First of all, by pacing each of the three main characters' lives on different rhythms:

I'm a pianist and love to work in rhythms and I've always enjoyed passages in musical pieces that have *one rhythm against the other*. I wanted to do something like that. One character we would be with us for 50 years, (Neil Kerrigan) Milo for a shorter period of time and with Awinita, we are only really with her for a year. The words travel at different rates, different speeds through these three chronologies. I really like the fact that a non-chronological progression sparks different meanings. The past can shed light on the present, of course, but the present also sheds light on the past.<sup>487</sup>

Besides this differentiating function, music also serves a unifying purpose. In fact, Milo discovers by chance during a trip to Brazil, that the rhythm of the Capoeira (the mixture between dance and martial art) rings an intimate calling for him, as if it subconsciously reminded him of the rhythm of his mother's ancestors. Thus, a written transcription of the famous rhythm ("Ta, ta-da Da, ta, ta-da Da") was added during the revision of the manuscript all over the novel as a sort of unifying element to draw links between Neil, Awinita and Milo:

Il y avait une première version avant le voyage, et, ensuite, ce rythme-là est venu irriguer le roman tout entier. C'est aussi une image qui représente le rythme des Amérindiens, le rythme des battements de coeur d'Awinita, et ainsi de suite.<sup>488</sup>

The Capoeira is the device to build a *structure-within-a-structure*: besides the encasing in the film-script work-in-progress, the novel is split into ten parts bearing the name of a specific move (namely: *laidanha, ginga, moleque, malicia, terreiro, floreio, malandro, saudade, negaça, bicho falso*). Each of the latter is then subdivided into three other parts according to the name of the protagonist (Milo, Awinita, Neil) followed by the time span taken into consideration in that specific section.<sup>489</sup>

Milo's life is recounted through large time spans, and more attention is given to the years of his childhood and adolescence. Abandoned by his mother who cannot afford to bring him up and by his father Declan (an unemployed drunkard), Milo stays with five different foster families, where he is treated more and less unkindly, before his grandfather gets to know of his existence and takes Milo with him to live in the family household, managed by Milo's pedantically catholic aunt Marie-Thérèse. As highlighted by Kate Averis in relation to *The Mark of the Angel*, in Huston's novels "the

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<sup>487</sup> Eric Volmers. "Calgary-born Nancy Huston crosses continents, languages and generations for new novel, *Black Dance*" in Calgary Herald online, published 16<sup>th</sup> October 2014. URL <http://calgaryherald.com/entertainment/wordfest-calgary-born-nancy-huston-crosses-continents-languages-and-generations-for-new-novel-black-dance>. Accessed 14th September 2016.

<sup>488</sup> Boisvert, "*Danse noire* de Nancy Huston: le rythme du cœur".

<sup>489</sup> As in, for instance: *Ladainha* 1. Milo, 2010/1990. Neil, April 1910. Awinita, March 1951.

narration draws links between History and individual histories, highlighting individuals' roles as both agents and victims of History".<sup>490</sup> Huston's historical background are vividly depicted and thoroughly researched. In the abovementioned *Plainsong*, as well as in *Fault Lines/Lignes de faille* and in her most recent novel *Le club des miracles relatifs*,<sup>491</sup> Huston shapes her plot upon the background of a meaningful contemporary historical moment, more often than not a moment of conflict: the conquest of the West and the decimation of First Nations, for instance; different aspects of World War II (the "Lebensborn" project, the Shoah); the Algerian war of Independence; the Vietnam war (in *Trois fois Septembre*). In *Black dance/Danse noire* the focus is on the Easter Rising. Some of Huston's paternal ancestors are of Irish origins and she has more than once confessed her fondness for Ireland and its traditions. Unlike the representation of history in the above-mentioned examples, in this novel Huston skilfully mixes true-to-history elements (dates, events and protagonists) with fictional characters, keeping "one foot in our little histories and one in the History of the century" as she has never done in her previous writing.<sup>492</sup> The character of Neil Kerrigan is depicted with flashbacks on the most important events of his life that unveil how the image of a caring and brilliant granddad in Milo's mind is contrasted by remarkable faults and lies. Huston imagines Neil to be the cousin of Thom, who can allegedly be identified with the historical figure of Thomas MacDonagh,<sup>493</sup> who at the outbreak of the Rising, had sent Major John MacBride at Jacob's factory. The scene is depicted in the novel on the basis of actual historical documentation, but Huston adds details of her own invention. Caught by the English while he lies in ambush with his cousin, the fictional character of Neil Kerrigan sees Thom shot to death on the spot and for fear of his own life, cowardly denounces MacBride as a leader of the Rising, secretly hoping that W. B. Yeats – who would subsequently be free to propose to MacBride's wife, Maud Gonne – could reward him by helping him publish his (yet unwritten!) book. Freed from prison because he is son to a magistrate, Neil is exiled by his own family to Canada, where, in order to start over, changes his surname to Noirlac – the one Milo is going to inherit through Declan.

Linguistic dividedness and the difficulties related to learning a foreign language have already been portrayed by Huston in *The Mark of the Angel*, as well as in other novels such as *Fault Lines* (where the already mentioned Kristina/Erra grows up speaking German and believing that her real mothertongue should have been Polish, while she was actually born by Ukrainian parents). In no other novel like in *Danse noire/Black*

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<sup>490</sup> Kate Averis, "Negotiating Nomadic Identities: The Tensions of Exile in Contemporary Women's Writing in French and Spanish", 130 (Doctoral thesis, University of King's College London, 2011), URL: [https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/theses/negotiating-nomadic-identities\(a41foa9c-bdc6-47ce-907c-54f172b5171d\).html](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/theses/negotiating-nomadic-identities(a41foa9c-bdc6-47ce-907c-54f172b5171d).html). Accessed January 4th, 2017.

<sup>491</sup> Huston, *Le club des miracles relatifs*.

<sup>492</sup> Huston, *The Mark of the Angel*, 291.

<sup>493</sup> Also known as Tomás Mac Donnchadha (1878 – 1916), one of the seven leaders of the Easter Rising.

*dance*, however, does the co-existence of languages have such a prominent role, both from the point of view of the content and from a visual textual perspective: many languages co-exist on the printed page, in the French version in particular.

Neil Kerrigan 'Noirlac' is an Irish native speaker, but, exiled to Montreal, he is forced to learn French; when he marries a native francophone speaker, they decide that their family will be linguistically split, with the boys speaking mainly English like their father, and the girls mainly French like their mother. Awinita, the Cree teen prostitute that becomes pregnant of Declan, one of Neil's sons, speaks English – a second language for her – with a strong Cree accent that Huston lexicalizes in the text. Milo, who grows up until he is seven years old in 5 different foster families learning German and English and – when Neil 'rescues' him - will be forced to learn French by his aunt Marie-Thérèse. These characters epitomize the different aspects of bilingualism or false bilingualism in the diglossic Canadian context and show different representations (in terms of the actual language of writing) in the Parisian edition with respect to the New Yorker edition of the novel.

## 6.2 Self-translation Analysis

In order to clarify the features distinguishing this self-translated novel from those I have analysed previously, I am first going to consider each published version separately. In the present case, unlike what we've seen so far, the genesis of the novel had important consequences on the extent to which – in the French version – multilingualism and self-translation are given unprecedented visibility.

Although *Danse noire* was published in France in 2013, while *Black Dance* was published a year later by the New York editor Black Cat, Huston revealed in an interview that the first draft of the novel was written in English, except for some dialogues written in Quebec French. Therefore, none of the two versions published corresponds to the first draft of the novel actually written “en anglais, sauf les passages en québécois”. Subsequently, the text was filtered through more or less partial translation in order to go to press, and obtaining two separate versions that utterly subvert the primary dichotomy between ‘original’ and ‘translation’; like the works analysed in Chapter V, in fact, both *Danse noire* and *Black Dance* are self-translations. The main difference is that, this time, the narrative context (bilingual characters and diglossic country) made the process even more complex than usual:

Tous les dialogues en français dans le livre sont traduits en anglais en sous-titres. *Vous imaginez le casse-tête? J'avais la tête qui explosait! C'est le livre le plus pervers linguistiquement que j'ai jamais fait et je ne recommencerai pas! Mais il fallait faire ça une fois dans ma vie!*<sup>494</sup>

Indeed, her latest novel (*Le club des miracles relatifs*) could not compete with *Danse noire* as to linguistic entanglement.

### 6.2.1 Bilingualism in the English Edition

Despite Huston's declaration, the dialogues in English are not ‘en sous-titres’ in the English version. Indeed, comparative reading of both novels showed that, with respect to its counterpart, the English edition (published simultaneously for an American and anglophone Canadian readership) displays a really minimal presence of the French language. It is limited to four cases of varying impact on the reading experience:

1) a quotation of a couple of verses from a French song (“À qui le p'tit cœur après neuf heures?/ est-ce à moi, rien qu'à moi?/ Quand je suis parti loin de toi, chérie/ à qui le

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<sup>494</sup> Boisvert, “*Danse noire* de Nancy Huston: le rythme du cœur”.

p'tit cœur après neuf heures?” p. 100), with a free translation provided in footnotes (Who gets your heart baby, after nine?/ Is it mine, is it really all mine?/ When I'm away, do you toe the line?/ Who gets your heart, baby, after nine?);

2) a single – pretty ‘international’ - expression on a tender note Mile receives from a francophone classmate who writes “*Je t'aime beaucoup! Edith.*” (p. 106);

3) in some excerpts in the chapter devoted to Neil in 1919, when, during the early freezing months in Montreal the apprentice novelist reads *Henry V* out loud to himself:

We hear Act III, Scene 4 as Neil reads it out loud to himself in two different mock-female voices: a dialogue between Catherine, the French princess and Alice, her chambermaid. His accent in French is perfectly abominable.

“*Je m'en fais la repetition de tous les mots que vous m'avez appris des a present.*” [sic]  
“*Il est trop difficile, madame, comme je pense.*”  
“*Excusez-moi, Alice. Ecoutez: de hand, de fingres, de nails, de arma, de bilbow.*”  
“*D'elbow, madame.*” “*O Seigneur Dieu! Je m'en oublie; d'elbow. Comment appelez-vous le col?*”  
“*De neck, madame.*”  
“*De nick. Et le menton?*”  
“*De chin*”  
“*De sin. Le col, de nick; le menton, de sin.*”  
“*Oui, sauf votre honneur, en vérité, vous prononcez les mots aussi droit que les natifs d'Angleterre.*”

He snorts. Who would have thought that Shakespeare could teach him French? All he has to do is work backward: elbow is *coude*, neck is *col*, nails are *ongles*... (p. 138)

Since the text is in itself a quotation from another literary work and the translation of the French words is already present in the excerpt itself, Huston does not provide footnote translation in this case. The situation is different when, a couple of pages later, Neil meets his future wife Marie-Jeanne, who works as a waitress in a coffee-shop in Montreal. She addresses the man in her native language and Neil recurs to the first French words he has read in Shakespeare the previous night. Italics highlight the French sentences and words and translation is provided in footnotes. As shown by the underlined utterance, Huston seems to have privileged the context-driven verisimilitude of the conversation; otherwise, it would not be clear why the French-speaking Marie-Jeanne would think of a *cours de dance*, whereas the English-speaking Marie-Jeanne refers to *the tailor's* in the very same conversation:

#### ENGLISH EDITION

“*Qu'est-ce que j'vous sers?*”<sup>2</sup>  
He doesn't understand.  
“What?”  
“*Qué c'est que vous allez prendre?*”<sup>3</sup>  
He utters the first French word that comes back to him from the Shakespearian dialogue read the previous day.

#### FRENCH EDITION

-Qu'est-ce que j'vous sers?  
Il ne comprend pas.  
– What?  
-“Qué c'est que vous allez prendre?”.  
Il ressort le premier mot en français qui lui revient de la pièce de Shakespeare lue la veille. – Menton.  
La fille lève les sourcils.  
– Quoi ? Un *menton* ?

“Menton”  
“Quoi?” The girl wrinkles her nose and giggles. “*Un menton?*”<sup>4</sup>

“Coude, ventures Neil. I’m trying to learn French.”

“*Eh, bien, avec ces mots-là, ça fonctionnerait mieux dans un cours de danse que dans un restaurant. Voulez un café?*”<sup>5</sup>

He decides to exploit his weakness rather than conceal it.

“Coffee?”

“Café.”

“**Ca-fay.**”

“*Avec du lait?*”

“**Dou-lay.**”

“*Oui, m’sieu’.*”

“*Oui m’siou’.*”

She smiles at him.

“Buttons,” he says.

“Butter? *Du beurre?*”

“No...”

Gently, gesturing, smiling, he demonstrates on his own shirt that her blouse has a buttoning problem. The girl glances down then up and laughs out loud.

“Oh, dear, I got my buttons mixed up again. I don’t believe it! Thanks for telling me...”

(p. 142-143)

2- What c’n I get ya?

3- Can I take your order?

4- What?...A chin?

5- Well, with those words you’d be better at the tailor’s than in a coffee shop. Wanna coffee?

– Coude. I’m trying to learn French.

– Eh bien, avec ces mots-là, ça fonctionnerait mieux dans un cours de danse que dans un restaurant. Voulez-vous un café ?

Il decide d’exploiter sa faiblesse plutôt que de la dissimuler.

- Coffee ?

- Café.

- Cafay.

- Avec du lait ?

- Doulay.

- Oui, m’sieu.

- Oui, m’siou’.

Elle lui sourit.

- Buttons, dit-il.

- Butter ? Du beurre ?

- No...

Souriant, il lui montre sur sa propre chemise, que sa blouse a un problème de boutonnage. La jeune femme baisse les yeux, puis se relève et pouffe de rire.

-Ah là là, c’est pas vrai, ça, j’m suis encore boutonnée en jalouse ! Merci d’m l’dire...

(p. 196-197)

-Quoi?

-[...] J’essaie d’apprendre le français.

-Boutons.

Huston limits the use of French to short sentences: the last utterance by Marie-Jeanne is conveniently already in English in the dialogue, suggesting that she has enough competence to understand Neil. The translation of this particular exchange is quite symmetrical in the French version, where the dialogue differentiates only for a couple of details (*Voulez un café?* becomes *Voulez-vous un café?*, i.e., showing a grammatically correct form in Standard French where the suppression of the subject is not possible). This bilingual dialogue has interesting narrative consequences: after their marriage, Neil – terrified at the thought that his Irish origin and education will be wiped out by the traditions of his wife’s family – demands that their sons have “Irish names, English language and a lay education”, while Marie-Jeanne can “take the girls, choose their names, talk to them in French, bring them up to be nice little catholic

women from Quebec”.<sup>495</sup> However, all the subsequent conversation between Neil and Marie-Jeanne is transposed into English, except for an excerpt on p. 200 – showing Neil having a hard time managing basic conversation in French – which is unapologetically left untranslated, since once again the meaning is inferable by the context:

Close-up on their faces: Neil’s red-bearded; Marie-Jeanne’s rosy-cheeked and sparkly-eyed. ‘T’es pas vertigineuse?’ ‘On dit pas t’es pas vertigineuse, on dit t’as pas le vertige!’ ‘T’as pas la faim?’ ‘On dit pas t’as pas la faim, on dit t’as pas faim!’ ‘T’as pas fatigue?’ ‘On dit pas t’as pas fatigue, on dit t’es pas fatiguée!’ ‘Oh! I give up. Elle est trop perverse, votre langue.’ ‘Anyway, I’m neither dizzy, nor hungry, nor tired...Just immensely happy. What about you?’.

Along with another couple of words in French used on p. 160,<sup>496</sup> these are the only footnote translations in the whole English version. These short excerpts can hardly be said to be problematic for the reader, since they are quantitatively limited and their translation is either contained in the text itself, as in the case I have just mentioned (cf. the underlined sentence), or provided in footnotes.

Thus, although bilingualism is a main theme of the novel, from a textual point of view the language of narration in the English version generally takes over the languages spoken in the diegetic reality by the characters. All the dialogues that Huston says she wrote in Quebec French<sup>497</sup> in her first draft were translated into Standard English or vernacular English. This ‘linguistic homogenization’ – which might have been Huston’s own choice, or a solution imposed by the editor – facilitates the reading experience, which is one of the most criticized aspects of the French edition, especially by monolingual readers, but homogenizes the rich variety of languages suggested by the context. The ‘French’ version configures as a much more ‘global’ novel.

### 6.2.2 Linguistic Entanglements in the French Edition

Unlike *Black Dance* – where the presence of the foreign language is suggested *narratively*, but physically limited to few circumscribed excerpts – the French self-

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<sup>495</sup> Huston, *Black dance*, 181.

<sup>496</sup> Limited just to a few words explained in the footnote: “*Kim* is the sexiest name in the world. Its resonance vibrates with *crème* and *chrème* <sup>6</sup> and *whim* and *brim...*” <sup>6</sup> – cream...chrim.

<sup>497</sup> On the linguistic repertoires of the francophone population of Montreal, cf. Henri Wittmann, “Le Joul, c’est-tu un créole?” in *La linguistique* 9/2 (Vendome: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973). The *Joul* gained the literary scene during the Seventies through authors like Michel Tremblay. Nowadays the variety is referred to as Quebec French.



translated version entitled *Danse noire*,<sup>498</sup> is a truly multilingual novel tracing a dense network of relationships among languages.<sup>499</sup> Thus, even though the first draft was mainly in English, the title of both versions comes from a French inspiration, showing, once again, how for the author the boundary between her two linguistic universes is blurry and permeable.

The frequent display of foreign languages in *Danse noire* is made possible by some heterogeneous factors: first of all, by the particular structure of the narration. In fact, besides putting an emphasis on the process of writing, the fictional film-script editing technique allows the extensive insertion of dialogues in the character's true-to-life language. Secondly, by the fact that the fictional narrator declares, at a certain point, that he "has no style of his own but has hit upon the perfect compromise between Neil's ultraliterary tradition and Awinita's oral one – *writing orality*." (p. 217). The direct consequence is that the dialogues of those characters that are represented as speaking English in the original version, (Awinita, Declan, Neil, Milo) will continue speak English (with their different accents) in the French edition, thus creating a discrepancy between the language of third-person narration (French) and the language of direct speech (Standard English, regional varieties, etc.). This heterolingual writing has some important consequences on the reading experience. As Grutman points out, if a multilingual writer chooses to address only a bilingual readership, he or she will largely limit their potential readership. Such a project, therefore, has two potential outputs:

These works can be object of a double reading: 1) a bilingual reading, playing on the complicity and identity shared by the authors with their readers and their community of origin (they will read between the lines); 2) a unilingual reading where the exaggerate sense of alterity will be a source of exoticism.<sup>500</sup>

These factors, though, are not sufficient by themselves, as of course, they should be valid also for the English version, but this is not the case. Accordingly, it seems legitimate to suppose that editorial necessities were not absent from Huston's project. Although mainly inspired by the Canadian linguistic situation, the novel was not intended exclusively for a Canadian readership. On the contrary, most of Huston's readership resides first of all in metropolitan France and in the United States.

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<sup>498</sup> The French title is borrowed from that of a painting by Swiss painter Guy Oberson, current companion of the author, and is therefore in all likelihood the 'original title' while *Black Dance* is its translation.

<sup>499</sup> To be intended here as in Delabastita and Grutman as a "very open and flexible concept which acknowledges not only the 'official' taxonomy of languages but also the incredible range of subtypes and varieties existing within the various officially recognised languages, and indeed sometimes cutting across and challenging our neat linguistic typologies" in Delabastita and Grutman (eds.), *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism*, 15.

<sup>500</sup> Rainier Grutman, "La textualisation de la diglossie dans les littératures francophones" in *Des cultures en contact : visions de l'Amérique du Nord francophone* edited by Jean Morency et al. (Québec, Éditions Nota Bene, 2005), 210. Translation is mine.

Therefore, although the original dialogues were kept in the body of the text, every spoken exchange taking place in English (Standard or vernacular) was ‘translated’ into a corresponding vernacular version of French in the footnotes. While this solution might consistently slow down the reading experience of a monolingual French readership, the comprehension of the narration as a whole is by no means jeopardized. Possibly, the most peculiar feature of this editing solution is that the translations are not merely didactical, as they would have been, for instance if a vernacular English dialogue were translated into standard French. Huston has explained her choice of Quebec French for these translations in terms of narrative plausibility. The use of Quebec French - formerly classified as the sociolect of the French-speaking Montreal working class - in a novel written by a francophone Paris-based author - is perceived as a particularly startling choice. Richard Boisvert interviewed Huston on her peculiar translation:

Je me dis que si le joul est une langue, il faut que d'autres l'utilisent, pas seulement les natifs. Nous sommes nombreux à l'avoir apprise. Je viens très, très souvent au Québec, j'y ai beaucoup circulé. C'est sûr que je me suis fait relire par des indigènes. Mais dans l'ensemble, je maîtrise la langue. *J'ai traduit les dialogues de l'anglais au joul parce que c'est en joul que les personnages s'exprimeraient s'ils parlaient français.* Je dois dire que ça a énervé plus d'un Français! [...] j'éprouve beaucoup de reconnaissance de mon côté envers cette langue. Elle fait partie de ma musique intérieure. C'est un hommage que je voulais lui rendre.”<sup>501</sup>

Again, a linguistic choice dictated by a personal poetic drive – Huston’s brother Lorne lives and works in Quebec – as well as by her cultural awareness and partaking in hybrid linguistic phenomena, such as the “mono-and-a-half-lingualism”, as she baptizes it in the same interview:

En même temps, j'avais à cœur de montrer le phénomène du «mono-et-demi-linguisme». Il y a beaucoup de gens qui parlent bien une langue et mal une deuxième, et qui du coup sont mal dans leur vie dans cet autre pays. Il y a des millions de gens dans cette situation dans le monde. Malheureusement, la littérature, elle, est censée être «nationale». Elle fait comme si tout le monde comprenait, alors que c'est pas vrai.<sup>502</sup>

In an effort to overcome linguistic barriers, then, and in order not to exceed the linguistic competences of her readership, Huston provides two distinct versions of the same scene on the same page.

Throughout the book, this happens with a varying frequency. From the point of view of the quantity and length of the dialogues in Quebec French, one of the most demanding characters for the monolingual reader is that of Milo’s mother, Awinita. All the ten parts devoted to the Cree teenager are ‘filmed with a subjective camera’ and constituted mostly by dialogues between the girl and her occasional partners; the most frequent interlocutor is Declan, whom she meets in the very first chapter. For the sake

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<sup>501</sup> Boisvert, “*Danse noire* de Nancy Huston: le rythme du cœur”.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibidem*.

of example and in order to visualize also the graphic outlook of the co-presence of languages, on the following page an original page from the Actes Sud edition is reported.

As we can see in the dialogue, Awinita's strong accent is lexicalised in English, whereby non-standard spelling stresses her pronunciation biases due to the interference of her native language: Unable to pronounce the sounds /θ/ and /ð/, in commonplace words like /'sʌmθɪŋ/, /'nʌθɪŋ/, /θɪŋk/, and /ə'nʌðə/, /ðeɪ/, /ðeə/, she substitutes the first sound with /t/ ('someting', 'noting', 'tink') and the second with /d/ ('anoder', 'dey', 'dere') (cf. p. 30 and following). Awinita's speech is generally quite laconic. The English text is thus characterized by ellipses of verbal forms ("In for long?" for "Were you in for a long time?" p. 33; "Not so different" for "You're not so different" p. 94; "simple as dat" for "It's as simple as that" p. 203, etc.).

In the footnotes, the dialogues are translated in Quebec French (locally known as *Joual*) and Huston applies the same strategies of laconism (intended as extreme brevity obtained by omissions and condensations) that are typical of orality:

-What dey **nail** you **for**? – Said I stole a car. – You didn't? – Nah, I just...you know...borrowed it. – From who? – Sister of mine. –Nah... – I swear. – You take your sister's car and she **call** the cops on you? Some borderly love!

“-Y t'ont **attrappé** pour quoi? – Y disent que j'ai volé un char. – Pis c'est pas vrai? – Ben non. Je l'ai jus'... emprunté... - À qui? – Une des mes soeurs. – Nan... - Je t'l'jure. – T'as pris le char de ta soeur pis elle a appelé les boeufs? Oustifi, c'est d'l'amour fraternal, ça!”<sup>503</sup>

'To nail' somebody in this context is a slang term for 'catching someone red-handed', rendered by the equally familiar *attraper*. While in the English version Declan can suppress the subject ('Said I stole a car'), in the French oral language it is contracted: 'Y' is the lexicalised pronunciation of the third person pronoun 'ils'. The omission of the third-person singular inflection in the English version is possibly indicative of Awinita's knowledge of English as a second language, besides being a feature typical of orality. *Char* and *boeufs* are vernacular terms for car and cops, respectively; the use of vernacular nouns is limited as in this example to few scattered expression, whose meaning can ultimately be inferred from the context. Adverbs usually are the same as in Standard French, except for '*pis*', which is the abbreviation of *puis* ('then') and often substitutes the conjunction 'and'; the contractions of subjects+ verb and suppression of subjects in both the English and French dialogues register the familiar, oral language. Some traits as, for instance, the elision of the 'l' in il/ils (which become 'y' in the written form to signal a long vowel [i:], as well as the suppression of the 'ne' particle in negative verbs, are shared by both native francophones and anglophones speaking

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<sup>503</sup> Huston, *Danse noire*, 33.

French as a second language in the Montreal population.<sup>504</sup> This choice, which is hardly surprising for the dialogue contained in the text – as it is supposed to represent a plausible scene where the characters are required to use informal, low registers – is certainly more curious for the footnote translation, which is usually expected to have a didactic function. However, it has already been observed by Delabastita and Grutman that “when *language is itself one of the topics addressed in a given novel*,” – and this is certainly the case in *Danse noire* – “translations accompanying heterolingual utterances may focus less on referential meaning, and highlight more subdued cultural connotations.”<sup>505</sup> Indeed, the reason subtending this use of Quebec French was explained by the author: given their social *milieu*, Awinita and Declan would express themselves in Quebec French if they belonged to the francophone population of Montreal.

The reader of the French edition is thus simultaneously confronted with all four varieties at once and a varying mixture of translational strategies. The distance between the Standard English of the narration and the vernacular English of the dialogues in the Black Cat edition is mirrored by the distance between standard French and Quebec French in the Actes Sud edition. Readers of the French edition, though, are offered the possibility of a double reading: they can read the translated dialogues in Quebec French in the footnotes, or, depending on their competence, the dialogues in vernacular English in the body of the text; similarly, they can read the original poems by Yeats frequently quoted by Neil in Standard English, or Huston’s translation into Standard French; the same goes for occasional utterances in German, which are totally missing from the English edition and which are translated in French in the footnotes.

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<sup>504</sup> For more details cf. Hélène Blondeau et al., « La couleur locale du français L2 des anglo-montréalais » in *Acquisition et interaction en langue étrangère* 17 (2002). URL: <http://aile.revues.org/1046>. Accessed January 4th 2017.

<sup>505</sup> Delabastita and Grutman (eds.), *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism*, 18.

— Not everyone would agree with you on that.  
 — Some people tink you bad?  
 — Plenty of people. (Il rit.) Guys up at Bordeaux,  
 to start with.  
 — You been in de jug?  
 — Just got out yesterday.  
 — Yeah? In for long?  
 — Coupla weeks.  
 — What dey nail you for?  
 — Said I stole a car.  
 — You didn't?  
 — Nah. I just... you know... borrowed it.  
 — From who?  
 — Sister of mine.  
 Awinita lâche son beau rire grave.  
 — Nah...  
 — I swear.  
 — You take your sister's car and she call de cops  
 on you? Some broderly love!  
 — I got a whole slough of brothers and sisters.  
 Unfortunately Marie-Thérèse is the only one owns  
 a car, and she's also the meanest.

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— Là, là, tout le monde s'rait pas d'accord avec toé. — Ah? Y  
 a des gens qui r'croient niaiseux? — Ouep... [...] Les gars de  
 Bordeaux, pour commencer. — T'as été en dedans? — J'suis  
 sorti pas plus tard qu'hier. — Pour vrai! T'as fait combien?  
 — Une couple de s'maines. — Y t'ont attrapé pour quoi? — Y di-  
 sent que j'ai volé un char. — Pis c'pas vrai? — Ben non. Je l'ai  
 jus'... emprunté... — À qui? — Une de mes sœurs.  
 — Nan... — J're l'jure. — T'as pris le char de ta sœur pis elle a  
 appelé les bœufs? Ostifi, c'est d'amour fraternel, ça! — J'ai  
 toute une flopée de frères pis de sœurs, mais Marie-Thérèse,  
 c'est la seule qui a un char. Pas d'chance, c't aussi la plus mé-  
 chante.

*Danse noire* (Actes Sud, 2013, p. 33)

Quantitatively, Neil is the second character whose ‘foreignness’ with respect to the context is brought to the fore in the French edition. He speaks Standard English to Milo when he first rescues him from the fifth foster family and in all their subsequent dialogues, as Milo grows up, where the grandfather teaches the boy about the masterpieces of English literature.

Here is an excerpt that shows how the dialogues are inserted seamlessly in the body of the text, with no graphic distinction from the language of narration (both are in round characters, and italics are reserved to the title of books). It can also be observed that Milo has the same peculiar pronunciation habits as his mother, as they are both unable to pronounce /θ/ and /ð/. Since he has never met her, this similarity is likely due to the fact that the boy spoke English and German until he was seven years old.

Le don verbal de Neil est aiguisé par sa faim douloureuse et impatiente de la langue anglaise. [...] son voeu plus cher est celui d’ouvrir pour son petit-fils un chemin qui le conduira tout droit à la gloire littéraire.

-So did you manage to read *Hamlet* this week?

-Yes.

-And?

-There’s a lot I don’t get. Why can some folks see his fader’s ghost and oders not? How does he tink he can venge his fader’s murder by pretending he is crazy? Why’s he so nasty to Ophelia?

Alors...as tu eu le temps de lire Hamlet depuis la semaine dernière? – Oui. – Et? – Il y a plein de choses que je comprends pas. Pourquoi y en a qui voient le fantôme de son père et d’autres non? Pourquoi il pense que s’il mime la folie, ça va l’aider à venger le meurtre de son père? Pourquoi il est si dur avec Ophélie? »<sup>506</sup>

Unlike Awinita and Milo, Neil always shows a standard pronunciation. A literate and a frustrated writer, Neil’s represent the ‘overliterary’ approach to language. He is quite obsessed with the preservation of his native tongue and his greatest wish is to pass it on to his grandchild. His appearances are therefore frequently interspersed with quotes from his favourite poet, and life-long obsession, William Butler Yeats<sup>507</sup> and – apart from the scene that I have already shown in the English version – he is ‘shown’

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<sup>506</sup> Huston, *Danse noire*, 176.

<sup>507</sup> The second stanza of “The Young Man’s Song”, p. 21; a famous quotation from Yeats diary on Maud Gonne, “My dear is angry that of late...” p. 51; a couplet from “Easter 1916”, p. 127; “The Leaders Of The Crowd” quoted in its entirety on p. 128-129 and partially quoted again on p. 238; the first stanza of “The Tower” p. 331; and another stanza of the same poem on p. 337). As we might have expected considering Huston’s usual approach toward literary quotations, a Note at the end of the novel informs us that apart from the translation of two excerpts – that on p. 127 and one on p. 261 “Cygnes sauvages à Coole” quoted by Milo, “toutes les traductions de l’anglais sont de l’auteur”.

to speak English in almost each scene taking place at the farm in the Mauricie region, where he and his wife settled with their 13 children. One of the most complex and startling scenes is that of a dinner in this linguistically-split family that can be seen as an icon of the author's mind:

FRENCH EDITION

Au souper sont rassemblés Marie-Jeanne, hyper-enceinte, Neil, hyper-abattu, et une demi-douzaine d'enfants morveux et gigotant d'âges divers, depuis des bambins encore vagissants jusqu'à cette teenager brune dégingandé, dont l'attitude déjà autoritaire la désigne comme Marie-Thérèse.

Tourne ta fourchette dans l'aut'sens, Sam, dit celle-ci.

You're not my mother.

Do what she says, Sam.

She gets on my nerves.

T'entends ce qu'il dit moman ?

Allez. Reste tranquille ma chérie, c'est pas ben grave.

Pass the butter.

On dit s'te plait.

Please.

S'te plait quoi ?

The butter, goddammit.

Attention à ta langue !

J'ai pus faim, moman.

Moman, j'peux-tu quitter la table ?

Que c'est que qu't'en penses, Neil ?

Far as I'm concerned, they can leave the house. [...]

(p. 306-307)

-T'es pas ma mère. - Fais ce qu'elle dit, Sam. - A m'tape sur les nerfs.

- Passe-moi l'beurre.

- S'il te plait.

- Le beurre, ostie.

ENGLISH EDITION

Cut to the dinner table, later that evening. Present are Marie-Jeanne, hugely pregnant, Neil, hugely despondent, and half a dozen snotty squirmy little children, up to and including a thin, dark-haired six-year-old girl whose already-bossy attitude designates her as Marie-Thérèse.

'You're holding your fork the wrong way, Sam,' she says.

'You're not my mother.'

'Do what she says, Sam.'

'She gets on my nerves.'

'Did you hear what he said, Mommy?'

'Calm down, darling, it's not that important.'

'Pass the butter.'

'You didn't say please.'

'Please who?'

'The butter, goddam it.'

'Watch your tongue!'

'I'm full, Mommy.'

'Mommy, can I leave the table?'

'What do you think Neil?'

'Far as I'm concerned, they can leave the house' [...]

(p. 228-229)

– En ce qui me concerne, il  
peuvent quitter la maison.

While in the English edition the scene is unproblematically monolingual, each character in the French version speaks his or her own language, apparently with no consequences on the mutual understanding with the other family members.

Like in the rest of the novel, the ‘code-switching’ is not even signalled by any special editing, as though there was a purposeful intent to present the mixture of languages as the *norm*, rather than the *exception*. In this regard, Mark Sebba points out that “while spoken code-switching has been extensively studied and theorized since the late 1960’s, no theories have been developed specifically for written code-switching”; also, studies on written language alternation, as it can be found in *Danse noire*, which “takes the form of *embedding* a representation of speech (for example, dialogue) within a larger matrix (for example, the narrative in a novel)” are even rarer.<sup>508</sup> Thus, although our analysis here is limited to the comparison of Huston’s double version, *Danse noire* would certainly provide interesting insight in this regard. As for the internal structure of the French version then, I will limit myself to observe that the procedure of maintaining each dialogue in its original language and embed them in a French narrative is not devoid of internal inconsistencies.

At the very beginning of the novel, for instance, the American character of Paul Schwartz – native English speaker from New York – is addressing his narration to Milo *in French*, while he reports a direct speech between them dating back to two decades earlier *in English* – which is the language they are supposed to speak between them all the time. However, a comment in the first line of the English edition suggests that Paul also knows French, thus the operation carried out in the French version is implicitly justified (even though this happens only to the eyes of a comparative reader).

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FRENCH EDITION

ENGLISH EDITION

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“T’en fais pas, Milo, c’est moi qui me mettrai au clavier cette fois-ci, moi qui saisisrai le truc [...] Ce sera sans doute le dernier film coécrit par Milo **Noirlac** et Paul **Schwarz**, réalisé

“Don’t worry, Astuto, I’ll do the keyboard this time. **I’ll capture it – or seize it, as the French say.** [...] In all likelihood, this will be the last screenplay co-written by Milo Noirlac and Paul Schwarz, directed by Paul Schwarz and produced by Blackout Films [...]

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<sup>508</sup> Mark Sebba, “Multilingualism in written discourse: an approach to the analysis of multilingual texts” in *International Journal of Bilingualism* 17/1 (2012): 98.



par Paul Schwarz et produit par **Blackout**<sup>509</sup> Films [...]

On retrouve Paul Schwarz, son élégant costume kaki tout froissé et moite – n'est-ce pas ragent comme le lin se froisse vite? -, et Milo Noirlac, comme décrit ci-dessus, moins le Stetson, regravissant la colline de Saens Penha [...]

He won't be there anymore, Milo.

Yes, he will.

You'll see. Your hat's already been sold to tourists in Santa Teresa, and the kid has either been scooped up by the garbage trucks or devoured by a stray dog. He won't be there.

Yes, he will.

You're completely meshuga, Astuto. What was it, seven hours ago?

Yeah.

He won't be there.

Yes, he will.

Jesus Christ. So what'll you do if he is? Adopt him, take him back to Montreal?

No, just, find him a foster home, if I can.

What's with the good Samaritan shtick all of a sudden?

Gros plan sur le caniveau en face de l'église vert pomme. Rien n'a bougé. (p. 18-19)

CUT to Paul Schwarz, his new suit now clammy and wrinkled – isn't it infuriating how linen wrinkles? – and Milo Noirlac – as above, minus the Stetson – toiling back up the Saens Peña hill [...]

"He won't be there anymore, Milo."

"Yes, he will."

"You'll see. Your hat's already been sold to tourists in Santa Teresa, and the kid has either been scooped up by the garbage trucks or devoured by a stray dog. He won't be there."

"Yes, he will."

"You're completely meshuga, Astuto. What was it, seven hours ago?"

"Yeah."

"He won't be there."

"Yes, he will."

"Jesus Christ. So what'll you do if he is? Adopt him?"

"Find him a home."

"What's with the Good Samaritan shtick all of a sudden?"

CUT to the gutter across from the bright green church. The Stetson hasn't budged. (p. 7-8)

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– Il sera plus là, Milo. – Si, il sera là.  
– Tu verras. Ton chapeau a déjà été vendu à des touristes à Santa Teresa, et quant au même, il a été soit embarqué par les éboueurs soit dévoré par un chien errant. Il sera plus là. – Si, il sera là. – T'es

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<sup>509</sup> Huston does not resist a trilingual isotopy on proper names here: 'schwarz' is the German translation and 'noir' the French translation of 'black'.

complètement meshuga, Astuto.  
 C'était, quoi, il y a sept heures ? –  
 Ouep. – Il sera plus là. – Si, il sera là.  
 – Bon Dieu de bon Dieu. Et tu veux  
 faire quoi s'il est là ? l'adopter, le  
 ramener à Montréal ? – Non,  
 juste...lui trouver un foyer, si je  
 peux. – C'est quoi, tout d'un coup,  
 ces manières de bon Samaritain ?

As in the example of the dialogue between Neil and Marie-Jeanne, the English dialogues are not perfectly superposable: the one inserted in the French narrative shows some additions with respect to the original dialogue. The addition “take him back to Montreal”, for instance, shows that, in translating from the English version, Huston decided to add some information to ease the comprehensibility of the complex geography of the novel – which might be rendered even more complex by the mixture of languages. Additions such as this and Milo’s answer (“No, just, find him a foster home, if I can”) also confirm Huston’s strategy to use the passage through self-translation as a ‘quality check’ for the rhythm of the original text as well as to improve the general comprehensibility via a better distribution of the information.

If the linguistic mixture were not entangled enough as it is, the four varieties considered so far (i.e., Standard and Vernacular English, Standard French and Quebec French or *Joual*) are not the only languages displayed by the Actes Sud edition. Apart from the titles of the chapters in Portuguese, which are accompanied by a translation and a short explanation of the Capoeira move they refer to,<sup>510</sup> there is also a wink to the German language when the reader is told that Milo’s first foster family is of German origin. While in the English edition everything is uniformly carried to the reader in English, in the French versions the few interactions with Milo’s foster mother are in their original language, and no editing signals the linguistic switch on the text. “Soudain on l’attrappe par le bras – Was machst du denn, Milo? Was machst du denn? – et il se trouve arraché au sol, suspendu en l’air.” The footnote translation reads: “Qu’est-ce que tu fais, Milo! Qu’est-ce que t’es en train de faire là!” (p. 42) and “Milo qui caresse de son mieux, à travers les lattes de la clôture, l’adorable cocker anglais du voisin et se fait réprimander par sa mère d’accueil: Nein, nein, die Hunden sind zu schmutzig, Milo!”, again translated in footnote as “ – Non, non, Milo! Les chiens sont trop sales!” (p. 43). On that same page, Milo, closed in the storage room receives the visit of his natural mother and again the linguistic switch is not highlighted graphically:

[Elle] lui dit d’une voix basse et rieuse: What ya doin in de dark little one?

Question de ta vie, Milo: What ya doin in de dark? (p. 43)

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<sup>510</sup> The first chapter, for instance, is entitled “LADAINHA. Litanie. Chant qui ouvre la roda de capoeira, avant le début du jeu.”

A second foster family is of Dutch origin, but – luckily for the readers I might venture to add – they decided to speak only English as they moved to Canada. Here again, some excerpts of dialogue are rendered in English with the usual ‘subtitles’. Eventually, when Milo ends up in his Noirlac family – which is internally split between English and Quebec French – he becomes perfectly bilingual and, like Huston herself, does not show any preference for a language over the other. Throughout the book, he speaks alternatively French with one of his first girlfriends (Viviane) and English with another (Roxane)... while with the woman who becomes his wife (Yolaine or Yolande, as the narrator alternates the two names, as if he did not remember which one is right), he speaks English in the Black Cat edition, and French in the Actes Sud one.

It is worth noting that out of 333 pages of narration, up to 164 pages (a good half then) show footnote translations of variable length, from a minimum of a couple of words to a maximum of 17 lines. Their sequentiality and lack of numbers make them rather difficult to follow. In her review of *Danse noire*, Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour is particularly trenchant in her critique of this rare feature:

These translations *en bas de page* are extremely annoying for readers who know both English and French and who can therefore muddle through the dialects and accents without the help of subtitles. [...] these translations are even, or perhaps even especially, annoying to readers who do not have both English and French and who cannot avoid looking at the translations [...] Many readers do seem to prefer just skipping what they do not understand, but here they have no excuse since a translation is immediately provided.<sup>511</sup>

Thus, while she avows her “grudging respect” for the challenges Huston set herself in this novel, she labels Huston’s enterprise as “intellectually arbitrary” and questions its successfulness, thus comparing it with Nabokov’s trilingual novel *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* and Federman’s *The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de debarras*.

Although I might agree with Klosty Beaujour that the novel is narratively and linguistically extremely complex, it seems unfair to underestimate the degree of tolerance and resistance of non-professional readers, or to compare it with novels whose bilingualism is structured in such a different manner. According to Valeria Sperti, – who is also rather severe in her observations of Huston’s drive toward multilingualism within the same text – it is the lack of any ‘condensation effect’ proper of cinematographic subtitles that makes this solution rather fatiguing for the reader.<sup>512</sup> In fact, instead of *condensing* the message, this repetition expands – and practically *doubles* – the content of the novel. It is difficult to counterbalance these critiques when Huston herself declared that the book was ‘a delirium to write’. This comment might

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<sup>511</sup> Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, “Nancy Huston’s *Danse Noire*”, (p. 1-8) in CUNY Academic Works. Faculty Publications and Research. Paper 46, (2014): 6. URL: [http://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_pubs/46](http://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_pubs/46). Accessed January 4th, 2017.

<sup>512</sup> Cf. Sperti, “Vassilis Alexakis et Nancy Huston au miroir de l’autotraduction», 84.

be due to the fact that for each scene, the translational strategy is based on a series of contextual socio-linguistic reflections considering the character's native language, his or her social milieu and the interaction with the interlocutor, besides considering the space taken up by footnotes with respect to the body of the text.

Written twenty years after *Plainsong/Cantique des plaines*, this novel completes Huston's journey to re-appropriate her 'Canadianness'. The reconciliation with the label "Canadian writer" which she evoked in 2010 in her thank-you speech at the University of Ottawa, which assigned her an honorary PhD,<sup>513</sup> seems to be closer and closer with this penultimate novel:

During a recent trip to Portugal, I discovered the work of an extraordinary painter named Paula Rego. Now 75, Rego has been living in London for over half a century, and yet all her biographical descriptions still describe her as a "Portuguese painter." I must admit that this changed the way I think about the "Canadian writer" label, which has so often seemed reductive and inaccurate to me. "Not one line of my books was written in Canada!" I'm continually protesting. Paula Rego's son, Nick Willing, explains that his mother is incapable of working in her studio in Portugal, because... "the ghosts are already there. Here in London she can make her ghosts and they won't come and bite her in the arse. ... She can humiliate them, she can stroke them, she can comfort them. She's in control because in London there's no magic [...]" Willing goes on to say that Rego "often talks of paintings being 'powerful magic'", adding that "she can conjure this magic only in London, although its power source remains in Portugal." A wonderful sensation came over me when I read that passage. I can transpose it word for word to my own situation, and say: I can only conjure the magic in Paris, although its power source remains in Canada.

Even though these words might be biased by the fact that the situation required a thank-you speech for a Quebecian public, there is no reason to believe that they are deprived of truth. Huston's engagement in the collective volume *Brut*<sup>514</sup> describing the devastation caused by the oil-extracting companies near Fort McMurray, in the north of her native province, as well as her last novel (*Le club des miracles relatifs*) also set in the same context, seem to confirm this impression.

After the dispute ensuing from her winning the Governor's General Award for a translation into French, Huston would not resign herself to be deprived of this aspect of her identity and mixes in the novel the contexts she cherishes most and that are part of her background (like Dublin, Montreal, New York), as well as newly discovered contexts (Rio de Janeiro), trying to show how they could harmonize in a narrative, because ultimately:

La littérature nous autorise à repousser ces limites, aussi imaginaires que nécessaires, qui dessinent et définissent notre moi. En lisant, nous laissons d'autres êtres pénétrer en nous, nous leur faisons de la place sans difficulté – car nous les connaissons déjà. Le roman, c'est

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<sup>513</sup> In the same speech, Huston reconciled the two sides of her identity as a writer by saying: Je ne peux susciter la magie qu'à Paris, bien que sa source reste au Canada". URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPB4kDj3sQ8>. Accessed January 5th 2017.

<sup>514</sup> *Brut: la ruée vers l'or noir*. Collective volume by Nancy Huston, Melina Laboucan-Massimo, David Dufresne, Naomi Klein and Rudy Wiebe. (Paris: Lux Éditeur, 2015).

ce qui célèbre cette reconnaissance des autres en soi, et de soi dans les autres. C'est le genre humain par excellence.<sup>515</sup>

An analysis exploring this text from a more stringent sociolinguistic perspective could compare Huston's position with respect to English and French to that of other contemporary Canadian authors. This aesthetics of harmonic co-presence of the two varieties within the same novel and within the same page is allegedly possible by virtue of Huston's distance from the Canadian territory (which nevertheless she often visits, given that part of her family lives there). The fact that she basically remains an outsider seems to play a role in her artistic transformation of the linguistic matter: one that theorizes co-presence and equal dignity to languages. Other Canadian authors might live their bilingualism and the diglossia surrounding them with less ease, as in other francophone countries and, in general, in postcolonial diglossic situations where one language is usually superposed to the other, instead of being juxtaposed like in Huston's artistic creation.<sup>516</sup>

The most relevant feature of this text is that, for the first time, *the act of self-translation* is shown on the page and becomes an integral part of the narrative. Klosty Beaujour, in fact, observes: "what Huston has done in *Danse noire* may seem to be to write a novel and to translate it on the fly at the same time". In writing this observation, the scholar had not seen the English version, and could not know that the latter was actually the original text, and that she was in fact reading a self-translation, or better still a *palimpsest* where a multitude of practices cohabit: original writing, doxal translation, translational rewriting, bilingual writing, and even translation of poetry. In this novel, Huston gives voice to her multilingualism both narratively (through polyphony and through the biographies of her characters) and practically, epitomizing the poetics that has marked her works since her first self-translation in an unprecedented way.

The palimpsestual structure of *Danse noire* seems to epitomize Barthes's hypothesis in *The Pleasure of the Text*: "Thus, the Biblical myth is reversed, the confusion of tongues is no longer a punishment, the subject gains access to bliss by the cohabitation of languages *working side by side*: the text of pleasure is a sanctioned Babel."<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> Huston, *Nord perdu*, 107.

<sup>516</sup> Cf. Grutman, "La textualisation de la diglossie dans les littératures francophones".

<sup>517</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, translated by Richard Miller. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 3-4. Originally, *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

## VII. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

### 7.1 Self-translation as a Ceaseless Linguistic and Cultural Negotiation

In analysing and comparing the translational solutions applied by Julien Green, Vladimir Nabokov and Samuel Beckett, Michaël Oustinoff brilliantly concluded that a reflection on self-translation must depart from the primitive dichotomy between “le domaine de l’écriture” in the one hand “et celui de la traduction” on the other.<sup>518</sup> Considering a sample of self-translated text as an “oeuvre à immanences plurielle”, a ‘multi-immanent oeuvre’, – by calling for instance each text ‘a version’ – “allows to get out of certain glaring theoretical dead ends”, but should not lead us to believe that each and every self-translated corpus shall be apprehended in the same manner. Indeed, Oustinoff provokely asks whether it is legitimate to consider Beckett’s ‘a bilingual oeuvre’, since he was never interested into publishing a bilingual edition of his self-translations. Similarly, are we really entitled to compare as ‘equivalent versions’ Nabokov’s *Kamera Obskura* and *Laughter in the Dark*, given that the author made it clear in the latter that it should be read not only as a deeply reshaped version, but also as the *definitive* version of the former? An elaboration of an epistemological definition of self-translation requires, therefore, from author to author, and even from text to text, a “critique consciente des enjeux du bilinguisme d’écriture *et de la traduction*” [a mindful critique of the stakes of both bilingualism in writing and of translation].<sup>519</sup>

The four works analysed in the present thesis – *L’empreinte de l’ange/The Mark of the Angel* (Chapter IV), *Instruments of Darkness/Instruments des ténèbres, Limbes/Limbo Un homage à Samuel Beckett* (Chapter V) and *Black Danse/Danse noire* (Chapter VI) – bear witness of the variety of translational and metanarrative strategies that the practice of self-translation allows the author to exploit in order to produce two – sometimes mirroring, sometimes deforming – versions of the same novel. The order in which they were analysed – which is clearly not a chronological sequence – should convey the idea that within the literary production of a single individual, self-translation choices are multiple and need to adapt to each specific context.

The analyses started with the awareness that the translation of a single novel can swing – from area to area, and from epoch to epoch, as well as from translator to translator and from text to text – between source-oriented to target-oriented solutions in the

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<sup>518</sup> Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d’écriture et autotraduction*, 277. Translation is mine.

<sup>519</sup> *Ivi*, 279. Translation is mine.

passage from one language to another. Similarly, *self*-translation – which is managed and carried out by the very same individual – can assume a variety of aspects according to the genre, the narrative context it is applied to, and the readership it addresses. An analysis of self-translation, therefore, needs to formulate for each specific pair of texts, its definitions or the supposed ‘original’, of the supposed ‘translation’. The analysis of Huston’s corpus, moreover, showed that the strategies implemented to create a twin text, in fact, may vary also according to heterogeneous factors related to the author’s own perception (of her bilingualism and standpoint in both heterolingual literary communities), and self-representation (found in essays, interviews, paratextual elements) in the languages and cultures she expresses herself in, and that may – in their turn – evolve over a lifetime.

A wider, holistic overlook on Nancy Huston’s *oeuvre*, shed light on the meaningful aspect that may account for the choice of self-translation and for the strategies implemented. The learning of a second language at an adult age, and the consequent false bilingualism, were symbolically ascribable to the writer’s childhood trauma: the departure of the mother. As a result of the elaboration of this trauma, English and French were thus hierarchized by Huston when she started writing for a public, both in her intimate perception and in writing. The ‘healthy distance’ provided by the French language “from all [her] other roles in life, included those of writer and mother”,<sup>520</sup> however, was gradually but surely overcome with the passing of time. While the experience of motherhood, on the one hand, and a certain literary fame in France, on the other, urged her to question her status of a bilingual exile, it was with the recovery of her motherlanguage – from the writing of *Plainsong* onward – that the writer fully embraced her hybrid identity and draw literary inspiration from it. If *Instruments of Darkness/Instruments des ténèbres* and *Limbes/Limbo* bear witness to her will to experiment the interaction of two languages and cultures, the rich and varied polyphony and multilingualism of *Danse noire* – written (or better, self-translated) in full maturity – eventually celebrates the experiential richness that comes as a byproduct of literary bilingualism and of the reiterated act of translation.

This evolution was made possible by the process that allows a continual back and forth between languages, a continuative redefinition of linguistic and cultural borders. This is once again proof that cultures and languages do not meet as abstract entities: *they meet within the individual*, who negotiates and selects those elements that are functional – in the case of a writer – to an authentic literary creation. Self-translation therefore amounts to a double negotiation. First, a text generated to creative writing (either monolingual or bilingual); then, a process involving re-reading, interpretation, word-for-word translation, idiomatic adjustments, substitutions, translative rewriting: a mix of nuanced procedures that amount to a creation of a second version, or a twin

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<sup>520</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 27.

version that from time to time needs to be defined by contrast and comparison with a counterpart...a self-translation.

As we have seen in Chapter III, Huston usually carries out the self-translation before the first version is handed over to the editor for publication. Each time, the declared target of the process is the same: two *identical* versions “insofar as possible”:

Pour moi c'est important qu'il ne manque pas une page ou un paragraphe et que l'éditeur américain approuve ce que l'éditeur français approuve et inversement. Je tiens à ce que *les deux versions soient identiques dans la mesure du possible*.<sup>521</sup>

This allows her to intervene on her manuscript and to rework it, ‘improving’ the text on as many levels as she sees fit, thanks to the filter of the second language which sheds light on unclear passages or expressions: while reading and interpreting a text for transfer into a second language, in fact, incoherent syntax, unpleasant repetition or badly chosen vocabulary are ineluctably revealed. Unlike translators, self-translators are allowed to correct these items. We can allegedly infer that a good figure of translation – one that strikes the author as being particularly brilliant or evocative – might also prompt a rewriting of the text where such translation originated from, in an effort to find words, collocations, or rhythmic patterns that are as equal in form and meaning as possible. The textual analysis of Chapters IV, V and VI, though, demonstrated that practically outcomes vary significantly.

In the first self-translation analysed here, with French *L’empreinte de l’ange* translated into the English *The Mark of the angel*, the general overarching tendency was to recur to doxal translational strategies. There is in fact only a limited number of inventive solutions where the author/translator shows a marked privilege for a euphonic-driven translation over a meaning-driven translation – particularly recalling Alessandro Serpieri and Keir Elam’s “signifier-first theory”<sup>522</sup> and a large number of translators who avowed being driven by this principle in their search for solutions.

The categories used to compare and contrast the two texts show how, in certain cases, although being the same person as the author – the self-translator does not make use of this privilege, limiting herself to approach the first text as a ‘normal’ translator would and to find appropriate translational solutions to the issues she encounters in the passage from the first language-culture to the second language-culture. For instance, when an idiomatic expression in the first version does not have an immediate correspondance in an idiomatic expression in the target language, Huston generalizes the excerpt and compensates the loss by adding an idiomatic expression in another point of the text. The use of culture-bound terms and expressions, however, seems to be

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<sup>521</sup> Mi-Kyung, « Épreuves de l'étranger », 8. Emphases mine.

<sup>522</sup> Alessandro Serpieri and Elam Keir. “Preface: towards a Poetics of Translation”, in *Textus XV I*, (2002): 7.



limited in numbers. This leads us to formulate an hypothesis: it is possible that the project of self-translating the first version once it will be completed, unconsciously conditions the author in the use of a too locally embedded lexicon or register?; or does this uniforming tendency actualize in the moment of passage through self-translation, when, unable to find appropriate correspondences for the second text, the translator is forced to ‘simplify’ (by means of generalizations, condensations, substitutions, etc.) also the first version? Douglas Hofstadter pointed out that the “constraints” that are at work in the translator’s mind need not necessarily be “hard-and-fast and black-and-white”; they can on the contrary be:

[...] as vague and hard to pin down as “romantic in tone” or “sprinkled with subtle allusions to Greek mythology” – but it is nonetheless constantly exerting pressure and making itself felt. Often the constraints constituting the medium selected are not decided upon explicitly or consciously; *they simply lurk in the back of the translator’s mind, unformulated in verbalized terms. Even so, they are no less real for their tacitness.*<sup>523</sup>

For Huston, such constraint could be the pre-established need to self-translate, and the fear to realize that she “could never have written that into the other language!”.<sup>524</sup> As already shown by Oustinoff for other central self-translators, the first text language may, in fact, shape the second text through the linguistic effect of interference and “the other language may contribute to engender a particular style. The imprint left by the other language may be stronger if it was the first language of writing”.<sup>525</sup> Given that Huston usually destroys her manuscripts, the hypothesis is difficult to prove with textual evidences, such as erasures.<sup>526</sup> However, textual evidences of the influence of the self-translating practice on creative writing, and of the mutual influence of the twinned published text, can be extrapolated from the comparative reading of the texts that resulted from a first bilingual writing.

The second couples of works analysed in Chapter V, in fact, situate the self-translation on a different, more vivid level of textual and linguistic interchange. The genesis of the first works, (*Instruments of Darkness/Instruments des ténèbres* was written alternatively in English and in French) and the bilingual genesis and editing of the second (*Limbes/Limbo*) presumably allowed for a greater degree of dialogue between the two versions. Traces of this “dialogue” are epitomized by the often superposable syntactical structures (cf. 5.2.1). Superposable word order, short sentences, a

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<sup>523</sup> Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Le Ton Beau de Marot: In Praise of the Music of Language* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 192.

<sup>524</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 30.

<sup>525</sup> Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d’écriture et auto-traduction*, 45. Translation is mine.

<sup>526</sup> Huston has confessed to Irène Fénoglio that she throws away all of her drafts: “Je jette tout ... C’est sale, oui, c’est ça mon idée. L’idée que l’on puisse mettre le nez [...] dans un truc que je suis en train d’écrire est pour moi insupportable. Je vous confie maintenant, sans la moindre réticence, un bout de manuscrit parce que je l’ai garde exceptionnellement. Mais c’est fini, c’est publié, ce n’est plus prive, c’est public.” in “Déracinement du savoir”, 33.

preference for asyndeton, the maintaining of epanalexis, are all features and stylemes that are first of all allowed by the intrinsic qualities of English and French (e.g., the fact that they stem from common ancestors: Indo-European and then Romance languages such as eleventh-century Norman French and fifteenth-century Latin). Secondly, (but not in order of importance), these features are the outcome of the author's translational poetics, which is one deliberately aimed – *a priori*, as well as at textual comparison – at preserving the “corpo sonoro” [auditory body] of the text, to say it with Italian author and translator Franca Cavagnoli, who recently used this concept to define her Italian translation of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.<sup>527</sup> Among other forms, isomorphisms are a clear evidence of such attention to the musicality of each language. While examples of them are already present in *Plainsong* and *The Mark of the Angel/L'empreinte de l'ange*, they punctuate the prose of *Instruments of Darkness* and *Instruments des ténèbres* insistently (cf. 5.2.2), thus proving to be a typical trait of the auditory body of Huston's texts. This is hardly surprising in an author who affirms to read her texts aloud in order to translate them. Ultimately, Huston praxis of translation, with such a blatant insistence on the rhythm and prosody as carriers of meaning, seems to fit particularly well within Henry Meschonnic's theory of the evolution of translation in the Twenty-First century as he summarized it in *Quaderns*:

[La traduction] passe peu à peu de la langue au discours, au texte comme unité. Elle commence à découvrir *l'oralité de la littérature*, pas seulement au théâtre. Elle découvre qu'une traduction d'un texte littéraire doit fonctionner comme un texte littéraire, par sa prosodie, son rythme, sa signification, comme une des formes de l'individuation, comme une forme-sujet. [...] L'équivalence recherchée ne se pose plus de langue à langue en essayant de faire oublier les différences linguistiques, culturelles, historiques ; elle est posée de texte à texte, en travaillant au contraire à montrer l'altérité linguistique, culturelle et historique comme une spécificité et une historicité. C'est le passage, qui est encore loin d'être compris par tous, de l'annexion au décentrement, de la réduction à l'identité vers la reconnaissance de l'altérité.<sup>528</sup>

Huston's stance in translation theory – alongside her stances on literature – fits in Meschonnic's definition also because it posits the typically postmodern focus on the evaluation of alterity (linguistic and philosophical). This is visible also by intratextual metalinguistic comments prompted by the practice of self-translation when the context allows it: the character of the writer in *Instruments of Darkness* is a perfect example of this feature. The English-speaking Nadia, in fact, stands out with respect to her counterpart in the French edition, because her monologues in English are studded with French expressions. Besides being Huston's *autobiographeme*,<sup>529</sup> Nadia could represent the emblem of translation as Paul Ricœur defines it: “Traduire, c'est à la fois habiter dans la langue de l'étranger et donner hospitalité à cette langue au cœur de sa

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<sup>527</sup> Franca Cavagnoli, “Tradurre Joyce”. URL <http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/tradurre-joyce>. Accessed January 4th 2017.

<sup>528</sup> Meschonnic, “Traduire au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle”, 59.

<sup>529</sup> Cf. Sperti, “Autotraduzione et figures du dédoublement dans la production de Nancy Huston”.

propre langue.” [Translating is both living in the language of the foreign and giving hospitality to this language at the heart of one’s own language],<sup>530</sup> because what she does is writing a novel in a second language (French) and hosting this second language in her monologues as a way to enrich her mental processes and to better understand the world. At the same time, from an author-oriented point of view, she represents the equivalence – for the self-translator – between *writing* and *translating* as acts and as outcomes:

Tout est traduction désormais. Mes livres sont des traductions, par exemple : des tentatives maladroites, bâclées, pour transcrire ce que m’a révélé mon daimôn. L’original n’existe pas. L’original est comme le paradis: perdu par définition (Huston 1996, p. 106)

Along our analysis of Huston’s self-translations, it turned out that this process can sometimes be just shy of *rewriting*. The bilingual edition of *Limbo/Limbes*, indeed, is so ripe with target-text “decentering” translational strategies that it verges boldly toward translational rewriting. Yet, it cannot be considered a rewriting *tout court*, as each version would turn out almost incomplete if we were not enabled to consult its counterpart (cf. the examples shown in 5.4.1 and 5.4.2). This strategy is modelled on the content of the text: the Beckettian *pastiche* allows for the recovery, mixing and matching of all the idiomatic expressions and culture-bound references that were left underrepresented in the former writing and result in a pyrotechnical display of virtuosity of (re)creative writing and translation.

If we read this text stereoscopically along with the rest of Huston’s production, we could fairly state that it is with *Limbes* that the author/self-translator has for the first time given prominence and visibility to her bilingualism and to the process of translation, by allowing the reader (either monolingual or bilingual) to consult both versions at the same reading. Until this publication, the work as translator had remained invisible for the reader, except for few declarations in sparse interviews and for the polemics aroused by the Governor General’s Award for *Cantique des plaines* in 1993.

The bilingual readership, moreover, is able to appreciate the inventive literary equivalences that Huston traces on the parallel pages and the exquisitely cultural aspect of self-translation. Unlike the strategies used in producing *The Mark of the Angel* out of *L’empreinte de l’ange*, which are almost always superposable to those of allograph translation, in *Limbes/Limbo* Huston deployed target-oriented translation of culture-bound translational units. Each text is interwoven with echoes of the literary voices that have preceded the narrative voice, but the two texts are nevertheless closely interrelated. Although this is true for other self-translated texts too – here this bond is graphically visible bearing evidence of how self-translation can be configured as “an

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<sup>530</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “La marque du passé,” in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 1 (1998): 15.

effective channel of intercultural dialogue, one which can open a space for the enunciation of a diversity of voices, positions and sensibilities”.<sup>531</sup>

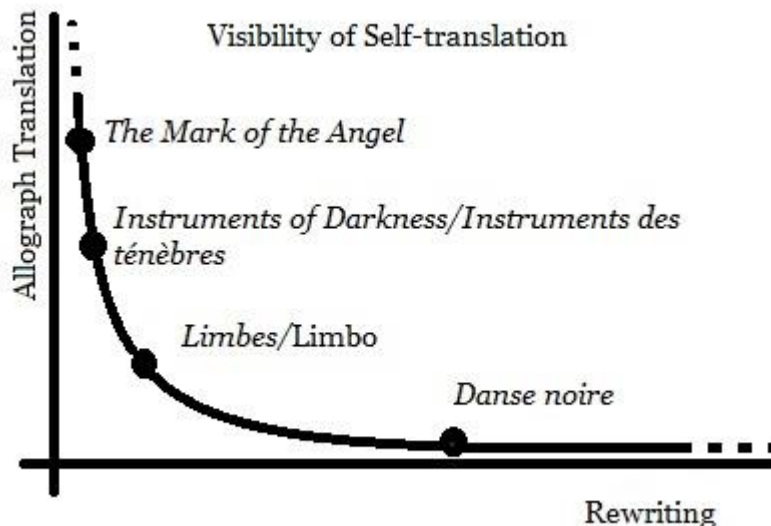
The third part of the analysis, focusing on the passage from *Black Dance* to *Danse noire*, shows a remarkable and unprecedented degree of variation between the two self-translated versions. While the English text shows a limited number of interjections in the French language, its twin French version, on the contrary, reports dialogues between different characters in their original language, thus summing up to a richly multilingual novel. Such *quantitatively extensive* use of heterolingual excerpts reiterates Huston’s strenuous defence of her *étrangéité* within the French literary panorama and ultimately confirms her recovered interest in her native country, Canada, which is incidentally characterized by widespread phenomena of diglossia. Eventually, compared with the other texts taken into consideration in the present thesis, *Danse Noire* marks a progressive increase of sperimentality of self-translation in creating her twin versions: translation finally becomes a true protagonist of the literary scene.

According to Valeria Sperti, translation (as a theme) was already present in *Trois fois Septembre* as “encryptée dans le roman comme un thème narratif [...] C’est une mise en abyme textuelle de l’acte d’écriture et de traduction, représentés comme contemporains et inséparables” [encrypted in the novel as a narrative theme. It is a textual *mise en abyme* of the act of writing and translating, presented as contemporary and inseparable]. If *Trois fois septembre* is the novel that prefigures self-translation, *Danse noire* is the offspring of twenty years of mutual enrichment of the two languages of writing and the epitome of reconciliation. Structurally, for the first time self-translation is visible *on the same page*, so to say, within the text.

If the different strategies and outcomes of self-translation analysed in the present thesis needed to be visualized graphically in comparison with one another, then their representation would probably be rendered by an asymptotic curve on a Cartesian graphic, where the x axis representing the practice of *rewriting* and the y axis representing *allograph or doxal translation* would delimit the space proper of self-translation: the asymptote tends to both – but never actually unites or crosses neither of the axis. *Danse noire* would accordingly be placed toward the x-axis *Rewriting*, close enough but never actually encountering it, while *The Mark of the Angel* would be located close to the practice of allograph translation, and the other works analysed would be found somewhere in the middle.

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<sup>531</sup> Aurelia Klimkiewicz, “Self-translation as broken narrativity: Towards an understanding of the Self’s multilingual dialogue” in *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture* edited by Anthony Cordingley (London: Continuum, 2013), 190.



Such a graphic representation would be possible if the categories we are dealing with were discrete entities: this is not the case. Any distinction between these categories is blurred because how do we define *a priori*, on the text, the difference between a creative transposition and utter rewriting? There is no possible word count to discriminate mathematically between the two. Up to the umpteenth non equivalence, is there a border, a gap between the two?

Like language itself and like culture, the relation between two texts is seamless. The category of self-translation thus covers a wide variety of possibilities and its definition ultimately needs to be ceaselessly negotiated for every author and for every text.

Such definition would not end in itself. It would be especially important in the light of a project to choose either twin text (or both) for a translation into a third language. If it would be in fact legitimate to presume that a translation into Italian of *The Mark of the Angel* would not differ significantly from a translation from *L'empreinte de l'ange*, while the transition from *Black Dance* or from *Danse noire* to Italian or to any third language, for that matter, would on the contrary lead to largely different outputs. The translation into a third language of self-translated works would offer an enriching and – at least to my knowledge – completely underresearched field of enquiry.

## 7.2 Decrypting the Bond Between Linguistic Identity And Literary Identity

Reflection on the linguistic aspects in the analyses has been ushered by parallel considerations on the aspects related to the ‘self’ part of self-translation (particularly in Chapter III). The reflection on identity – i.e, on how a notion of ‘self’ is constructed in life – takes on different aspects throughout Huston’s literary production, and can be considered one of the main underlying themes of this contemporary author.

The first ‘self’ taken into consideration in the following observation is that of the author: Nancy Huston. Perhaps not the person in the flesh, but at least the representation she has given of herself in her multigenre writings.<sup>532</sup> It is quite ironic that as a former student of the scholar who had declared “the death of the author”, Nancy Huston has poured so much of herself into her *oeuvre*. There are plenty of autobiographical references and suggestions in the narrative content of novels and essays – and the net of relations bonding them is traceable only through a close comparison and a holistic overview.<sup>533</sup>

The references already highlighted in the previous chapters<sup>534</sup> were relevant in a more inclusive research carried out in Huston’s novels that was not included in the detailed thematic and linguistic analyses. What seems worth noticing here, however, is that the four children protagonists of the four parts of *Fault Lines/Lignes de faille* are described by Huston in more than an interview as corresponding to as many diverse aspects of her own personality at the age of six: a meaningful age for her life and literary career as we saw in Chapter 2.1. In *Trois fois septembre*,<sup>535</sup> the two protagonists, mother and daughter are French women, living in America and translating into French the letters and messages left by the daughter’s best friend, an American girl. Linn, the female protagonist of *La virevolte/Slow Emergencies*, abandons her husband and her daughters to pursue her career as a ballet dancer – thus recalling the choices of

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<sup>532</sup> In all of Huston’s works we have retraced the thematization of her linguistic exile, her identity as a writer, the *mise en abyme* of the very events, factors and sensibilities that constitute the identity of Huston-the-writer, to such an extent that she can be read as one of the characters of her *œuvre*. A disguised character, supervising everything from the shadows and occasionally letting the reader get a clearer glimpse of her. In her autofiction *Bad Girl*, Huston once again blurs the boundary between theory and practice, between history and fiction, and, as she has done constantly, between languages: « *Toi, c’est toi, Dorrit. Celle qui écrit. Toi à tous les âges, et même avant d’avoir un âge, avant d’écrire avant d’être un soi. Celle qui écrit [...] Un personnage.* ».

<sup>533</sup> Cf. also David J. Bond, “Nancy Huston: identité et dédoublement dans le texte” in *Studies in Canadian Literature* 6/2 (2001).

<sup>534</sup> The fact, for instance that *Plainsong/Cantique des plaines* is set in Alberta, her natal region; *Instruments of Darkness/Instruments des ténèbres* is set part in New York, part in the Berry, a region where she lived for part of the year with her Parisian family.

<sup>535</sup> Translated into - but never published - in English.

Huston's own mother. Rena Greenblatt, the protagonist of *Infrared/Infrarouge*,<sup>536</sup> is a francophone half American/half Canadian woman of Jewish origins (Huston has always felt a deep interest and empathy for this population), who is not familiar with her own original cultural group and is in exile from her own family.

This multitude of displaced, dislocated or exiled characters speaking a foreign language in a foreign country epitomize the different aspects of Huston's own situation. It is true that, at a deep observation, every literary author ultimately writes about what he or she knows best, and hence directly or indirectly about himself or herself: but this seems even more evident for Huston, because she does so on multiple layers. Indeed, her autobiographical enquiry develops not only narratively, but also linguistically, and a strong relation exists between these two declinations, which are preferably considered as apart in scholarly research. In the present research – aligning to the calls for transdisciplinarity by self-translation scholars – an (hopefully) equal attention was devoted to both aspects, as they were esteemed mutually enriching.

The subjective space of the author is balanced and rebalanced from a book to the other, but never simply taken for granted. This fragmented identity is made explicit in manifold ways. For instance, in one of the letters to French writer Leïla Sebbar, the author writes about her own name, pronounced differently according to her interlocutors:

Au moins sais-tu prononcer ton nom en français, alors que le mien... certains amis (dont toi) disent 'Nancy' comme la ville et font rimer 'Huston' avec 'bâton', d'autres prononcent tous les n et vont même jusqu'à aspirer vaillamment les h ; moi-même j'hésite à dire mon nom avec des sonorités trop anglaises, surtout lorsque je me présente à des inconnus, de peur d'avoir à le répéter quatre ou cinq fois. *Il n'est pas facile d'être sûre de son identité quand on ne parvient même pas à la décliner sans atermoiements !*<sup>537</sup>

Similarly, in *Journal de la création*, Huston describes her approach to literary creation with a lexicon that is highly reminiscent of Freudian undertones, in that it describes *a self subdivided into competing parts* like the *es* and the *super-ego*: “D’abord je suis la petite fille fugueuse, courant, essoufflée, euphorique, follement heureuse après son rêve; et, tout de suite après, je deviens le parent puissant, négateur et répressif”.<sup>538</sup>

However, the most recurring figure for representing this split is the image of the *two selves*. In *Losing North* she wrote: “Every expatriate has the conviction – deeply rooted in her subconscious and regularly rejected as preposterous by her intellect – that a part

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<sup>536</sup> The structure of this novel (Arles: Actes Sud, 2010, and New York: Grove Press, 2012) is also complex and fixed: divided into 8 parts (titled as the days of the week from Tuesday to Tuesday) each subdivided into subchapters all bearing a title in Italian.

<sup>537</sup> Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, 135. Emphasis mine.

<sup>538</sup> Huston, *Journal de la création*.

of herself, or, rather, *another self*, has never stopped living *back there*.”<sup>539</sup> Two selves, then, differing not much in their physical aspect or for highly varying interests in life, but for one basic, intimate distinction that entails a series of consequences: one speaking French, the other speaking English. If there are two languages, there are two selves. Huston has imagined her (potential) monolingual Anglophone self on multiple occasions. In *Bad Girl. Classes de littérature*, her ‘fictional autobiography’,<sup>540</sup> Huston writes:

D’où vient le thème juif dans votre travail? Te demanderont, plus tard, lecteurs et journalistes. Tant de personnages juifs, blagues juives, tragiques destinées juives, c’est bizarre dans les romans d’une cowgirl *shikse*, vous n’avez rien d’une juive! Pourquoi cette identification pérenne au peuple persécuté? [...] tu t’identifies au juifs de la diaspora, partageant avec eux, entres autres, l’absence d’une appartenance nationale claire et évidente.<sup>541</sup>

What is interesting in this passage is the label that Huston attaches to herself: “A cowgirl *shikse*”. After twenty years of success on the French intellectual and literary scene, this fictional ‘intra-uterine’ autobiography echoes – once again – the reflections collected in *Nord perdu/Losing North* and in *Lettres Parisiennes*, where the discourse on identity and the fragmentation of the self unravels. But the ghost of her Canadian jovial and libertine counterpart has accompanied her all along: in *Désirs et réalités* (1996), she describes at length her ‘other self’, the woman that she would have turned into if she had not decided to go to Paris at twenty:

C’est quelqu’un d’assez épatant – par là je veux dire que je l’aime bien – une Calgarienne de souche irlandaise et fière de l’être, une vraie Ouesterneuse avec un rire fort et franc, presque viril, une grande femme halée, plus costaud et plus cocasse que moi, elle pèse mettons soixante-trois kilos, elle a une allure généreuse, des gestes larges [...] elle laisse grisonner ses cheveux et elle s’en moque, se maquille peu, , par contre elle aime à se mettre du rouge à lèvres carmin et à porter de lourdes boucles d’oreille mexicaines en argent et en turquoise, ce n’est pas une intellectuelle [...]

Most significantly, – let’s restate it once again – the split between the two selves is marked by the fact that ‘they’ *speak two different languages*. Scholar Olga Anokhina has recently highlighted how: “Chez l’humain, le linguistique, le langagier est intimement lié à l’affectif” [In human beings what regards language is intimately

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<sup>539</sup> Huston, *Losing North*, 91. She imagines how life over there would have transformed her into a different individual : in *Nord perdu*, 112-113.

<sup>540</sup> The back cover informs the reader that “Knowing the pitfalls and illusions of the discourse on the Self, Nancy Huston familiarly addresses the foetus she was –that she renames Dorrit -, to tell her - in an original intra-uterine autobiographical narrative - the novel of her life”. Student of Barthes, Lacan and with her interest for Freudian analyses, Huston protects herself from ‘illusions of the discourse on the Self. Unsurprisingly, the book ends with an epigraph by her supervisor Roland Barthes, “Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman” [All of this must be written by the character of a novel], drawn by Barthes’s own autobiography (Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes. Paris: Seuil, 1975).

<sup>541</sup> Nancy Huston, *Bad Girl. Classes de littérature* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2014), 31.



connected to the emotional sphere].<sup>542</sup> Indeed, authors who have experienced bilingualism and multilingualism tend to describe their feelings toward the two or more language-cultures using terms that belong to the semantic field of human relationships and/or refer to the corporality of the human body. Elsa Triolet uses the metaphor of ‘bigamy’ to describe her bilingualism; Vladimir Nabokov invokes ideas of ‘adultery’ and ‘reincarnation’; Julien Green of ‘renaissance’; Cuban writer Eduardo Manet uses the expression “glisser dans la peau du français” [to slip into the skin of the French language];<sup>543</sup> Régine Robin speaks instead of the: “impossibilité du bilingue de *faire corps* avec sa langue maternelle” [the impossibility of the bilingual individual to be one with (literally ‘make body with’) one’s mother language]. A study on a wider corpus of bilingual authors would certainly reveal a more specific ‘anatomy’ of bilingualism and reveal how the fact of speaking and writing in different languages can be considered an experience of the body, as well as of the mind.

As for the case in point, the split between two selves is felt to be painful and ever-present, and it recurs as food for thought throughout her essayistic production, insinuating itself in her novels too by taking on different shapes: first of all, as a theme for narration, through the depiction of divided, exiled characters as the selection of novels analysed hopefully highlighted. As regards the ‘anatomy’ of bilingualism, I should also like to point out that the self-translators’ metaphors mentioned above resonate with the predicaments of those cognitivists who have recently claimed that all human cognition is embodied. In particular, while Embodied Cognition theorists have shown that embodiment is present in native language processing,<sup>544</sup> whether or not embodiment is present while learning and speaking a second language is currently a topic of debate.<sup>545</sup> Neurolinguists are developing models to test this hypothesis, aimed at revealing symmetries and asymmetries in the cognitive processes of native language and learned language:<sup>546</sup> an interaction between this expanding area of research and self-translation studies might hopefully provide fruitful insights for both.

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<sup>542</sup> Olga Anokhina (ed.) “Avant-propos” in *Multilinguisme et créativité littéraire. Au coeur du texte* 20. (Paris: l’Harmattan, 2012), 5.

<sup>543</sup> Quoted in Martine Paulin, « Langue maternelle et langue d’écriture », *Hommes et migrations*, 1288 (2010).

<sup>544</sup> Cf. for instance Benjamin Bergen et al., “Body part representations in verbal semantics” in *Memory and Cognition* 38/7 (2010): 969–981. DOI:10.3758/MC.38.7.969. Accessed January 4th, 2017.

<sup>545</sup> Cf the recent volume by Roberto R. Heredia, Anna B. Cieślicka, *Bilingual Figurative Language Processing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>546</sup> According to the *Revised Hierarchical Model*, for instance, translating a word from second language to native language occurs faster than the contrary. (See Judith Kroll and Erika Stewart, “Category interference in translation and picture naming: Evidence for asymmetric connection between bilingual memory representations” in *Journal of Memory and Language*. 33/2 (1994): 149–174. DOI:10.1006/jmla.1994.1008. Accessed January 4th, 2017). While according to the *Extended Bilingual Interactive Activation Model*, both languages are activated in the brain when recognizing a word in either one. (Cf. Tom Dijkstra and Walter Van Heuven, “The architecture of the bilingual word

Secondly but not less significantly, it is transformed into metanarrative reflection in the form of polyphonic structures that allow an equal space to different voices. In *The Goldberg Variations/Les variations Goldberg*, *Prodige/Prodigy* and *La virevolte/Slow Emergencies*, as well as and in *Une adoration/An adoration*, *Lignes de faille/Fault Lines*, *Danse noire/Black Dance* and *Le club des miracles relatifs*, the use of a polyphonic structure allows different characters to tell their story from their own point of view, each with their own voice. And thirdly - perhaps even more meaningfully for the present study - Huston allows herself the same polyphonic privilege in real life. Since there is no chance of fully embodying one or the other of her selves, it is the literary *corpus* that – *through self-translation* – physically redoubles, either from French to English or from English to French, thus epitomizing the impossibility for Huston of letting go of her *other part* and her wish that the English self and the French self both stand an equal chance of fulfilment, at least on paper, if not in the flesh.

According to Klimkiewicz, “as a writing strategy, self-translation demonstrates the difficulty of locating and articulating the self, since two languages collide one with another and refuse to submit to each other, and consequently lead to a divided consciousness”.<sup>547</sup> For Klimkiewicz, self-translation is a *symptom*, while for Sperti – who ponders on the reasons why Huston’s tutelary deities are Beckett and Gary, two culturally hybrid authors and multilingual self-translators – it is rather a *cure*:

Beckett’s lesson is evident from *Limbes/Limbo*’s graphic outlook. The two versions, published side by side, contribute in defining self-translation as a mending literary practice - soothing in its parallel composition but dynamic in its differences - and the dialogue between is a definitive answer to the supporters of the original, of the authentic.<sup>548</sup>

These antithetical definitions characterizing the discourse on self-translation, confirm, if need be, the hybrid nature of the practice, not only in general, but also for the specific case in point. For the author, the process is “fastidieux et harassant” [tedious and exhausting], but the term chosen to describe the feeling invading her when the work is done, is *guérie*, i.e. ‘healed’:

[...] parce que quand c’est fini, quand c’est vraiment terminé, quand, après tout ce dur labeur, le livre prend enfin forme et réussit à exister dans l’autre langue, eh bien, là je me sens mieux, là je me sens guérie, parce que c’est le même livre, il raconte les mêmes histoires, suscite les mêmes émotions, fait entendre la même musique.<sup>549</sup>

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recognition system: From identification to decision”. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*. 5/3 (2002): 175–197. DOI:10.1017/S1366728902003012. Accessed January 4th, 2017.)

<sup>547</sup> Klimkiewicz, “Self-translation as Broken Narrativity: Towards an Understanding of the Self’s Multilingual Dialogue”, 191-192.

<sup>548</sup> Sperti, “Autotraduction et figures du dédoublement dans la production de Nancy Huston”, 72. Translation is mine.

<sup>549</sup> Nancy Huston, “Traduttore non è traditore” in *Pour une littérature-monde* edited by Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud, Eva Almassy (Paris, Gallimard, 2007), 159.

The linguistic and cultural transfer, however, does not heal the split completely, because every time it reinforces the sensation of an « identité faible », a ‘feeble identity’ as the author still defines it in 2015.<sup>550</sup> As Cordingley explains,

[...] the self-translator’s stereolinguistic optics puts any one of her or his languages/cultures in relief with respect to the other. Consequently, self-translators share with many other writers of the margins the tendency to subvert the possibility that their writing affirms a singular national culture or literature. Indeed, the subject of the self-translated text is very often hybridity itself.<sup>551</sup>

The fact that for Huston the self is something that is *painfully constructed*, rather than simply inherited as such is the result of the continual to-ing and fro-ing between cultures and languages, of the sensation of being « mi-langue » (*Lettres parisiennes*, p. 77) rather than « bi-langue ».

Such feeble sense of identity, such openness to relativity of one’s position in the world is presented as an asset for both the individual and the scholar. The individual wants to maintain and protect the features that mark her as a foreigner with respect to all society she attends to...such as, for instance, her English accent in French, which

[...] translates the *friction* between me and the society surrounding me, and that friction is more than precious to me, it is necessary. Even though I finally have a double nationality, Canadian and French, [...] I have no wish to pretend that I was born here or to claim its heritage as my own. In other words, I do not aspire to be really naturalised. My interest lies in culture, not in nature.<sup>552</sup>

Foreignness can also be a lifestyle, conditioning the place the writer has chosen for living and writing. Huston has lived for a long time in the *Marais* district, the ancient Jewish district that she describes in the pages of *The Mark of the Angel*. One of her fictional characters – Rena Greenblatt – instead, lives in *Belleville*, another densely multicultural district of Paris: we cannot help noticing the remarkable similarity between Huston’s words in *Nord perdu* and the words she ascribes to Renain *Infrared*:

Qu’il s’agisse d’un Haïtien à Montréal, d’une Allemande à Paris ou d’un Chinois à Chicago, c’est tout un roman, quand on y pense. « Ah... me dis-je, cette

I have a marked preference for people who are split – bi’s and ambi’s of all sorts. That’s why I live in the neighbourhood of Belleville, where bilingualism is

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<sup>550</sup> Nancy Huston, *Carnet de l’incarnation. Textes choisis 2002-2015* (Ottawa: L’émeac et Arles: Actes Sud, 2016), 16.

<sup>551</sup> Anthony Cordingley, “Self-translation, going global”, 3.

<sup>552</sup> “Mais mon accent, au fond, j’y tiens. Il traduit la friction entre moi-même et la société qui m’entoure, et cette friction m’est plus que précieuse, indispensable. Bien que j’ai désormais la double nationalité, canadienne et française, bien que j’ai donné naissance à une fille qui, elle, sera française jusqu’au bout des ongles et parlera sans accent, je n’ai aucune envie de faire semblant d’être née dans ce pays, de revendiquer comme mien son héritage. Je n’aspire pas, en d’autres termes, à être vraiment naturalisée. Ce qui m’importe et m’intéresse, c’est le culturel et non le naturel.» Huston and Sebban. *Lettres parisiennes*, 13-14. Translation is mine.

personne est cassée en deux; elle a donc une histoire. » Car celui qui connaît deux langues connaît forcément deux cultures aussi, donc le passage difficile de l'une à l'autre et la douloureuse relativisation de l'une par l'autre [...] (p. 37)

the rule and not the exception, where you know that behind every face in the street is a brain teeming with sentences, quotes, expressions, songs and proverb in French and another language, whether Chinese or Arabic, Turkish or Kurdish, German, English or Cambodian. I have no patience for people who think they know who they are just because they were born somewhere.<sup>553</sup>

For the *femme de lettres*, the relativity of one's place of birth and culture is the key to the invention of fictional world, as she theorizes in *Losing North* and at length in *The tale-tellers. A short study on humankind*, as we will see in detail in the next paragraph. Combined with her love for words – always there, forever filling the absence of the mother – the conscience of the relativity of her condition has always been a nourishment for literary creativity.

Thus, the words Huston used to describe Anaïs Nin in 2010 could very well suit the French and Canadian author herself: “polypatride et polyglotte”, i.e., ‘multi-homelanded and multilingual’, she was able to “relativize the beliefs on identity that the average person commonly boasts of. This woman will never be anything specific; neither Cuban, nor American, nor French, and this *anything* (which could drag her toward nihilistic indifference, or make her cling to dogma) always made her, on the contrary, more tolerant and curious of others”.<sup>554</sup>

Tolerance and curiosity about other human beings are the essential qualities for a novelist, who ultimately confirms her need to “alimenter et explorer indéfiniment la dynamique dialogique de la bi-vision, mais aussi à dépasser le cadre plutôt restreint de la simple binarité en faveur de l'expansion et de la prolifération illimité de l'imagination et de la relation.”<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> Nancy Huston, *Infrared* (New York: Grove Press, 2011), Kindle edition.

<sup>554</sup> Nancy Huston, “Anaïs Nin: et la fille devient...femmes!” in *Carnet de l'incarnation. Textes choisis 2002-2015* (Ottawa: Lémeac et Arles: Actes Sud, 2016), 39. Translation is mine.

<sup>555</sup> Mary Gallagher, “Nancy Huston ou la relation proliférante”, 35.

### 7.3 “Traduttore non è traditore”: The Poetics of Self-translation and of the Transnational Novel

Having seen the effects of self-translation on the texts as well as on the author, in the last part of these conclusive remarks I will briefly focus on the wider framework of self-translation in *world literature*.

The current theorizations of *world literature*, – a label with a fine, Goethian nuance – shows that reflections on translation are cardinal in contemporary societies and cultures.<sup>556</sup> Although the literary system may be thought of as a planetary whole, in fact, single texts are still written in a range of different languages and the main process through which they can ‘travel’ from a country to another, and from a culture to another, is inevitably *translation*, broadly intended as a process of linguistic and cultural negotiation carried out on many levels, from editorial to textual, regarding their selection, the translation strategies, etc). This process has proved essential, not exclusively for the circulation of texts through and to different areas of the system, but also for the creation of new models and a new literature. Unlike ‘doxal’ translation, self-translation bypasses at least one step of this selection:

By writing a single text for two separate linguistic communities, self-translators *inscribe their works as world literature*. As both the author and the translator, they facilitate the circulation of a literary text across linguistic and cultural lines, thereby appealing to a mode of reading that probes the meaning and effects of such an exchange. It is in this sense that we can posit *self-translation as the paradigmatic example of world literature*, as self-translated texts are immanently and necessarily connected to two literary communities.<sup>557</sup>

Studying the experience of single authors who, like Nancy Huston, act as first-person mediators and translate their own works, enables us to consider the chances of linguistic and cultural enrichment that come with the process of translation in the circulation of literary works. Indeed, thanks to translation, the dialogue between different languages and cultures turns into an encounter with Otherness.<sup>558</sup> Translation being a negotiation between different *world-views*, translators and authors alike learn to accept and deal with – in accordance with the very nature of any negotiation – the losses and sacrifices that come with it, along with the opportunity of mutual hospitality, accommodation and understanding. The dialogue among cultures is historically conflictual and may represent – in our present time as it did in the past

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<sup>556</sup> Cf., for instance, Paul Jay. *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2010, as well as Ticontre. *Teoria testo traduzione* 2 (2014) “Letteratura mondo e dintorni” in and 3 (2015) “La traduzione come genesi e palingenesi della letteratura”. URL: [www.ticontre.org](http://www.ticontre.org)

<sup>557</sup> Kippur, *Writing it Twice*, 11.

<sup>558</sup> Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud, Eva Almassy (eds.), *Pour une littérature-monde en français*. (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

– a painful challenge for the parties involved, in that it requires individuals to have a *critical awareness* of how language and cultural aspects shape their life and their relationship to others. In the case of self-translation, such redefinitions of one’s own cultural and linguistic identity develop into textual evidence, thus enabling readers and scholars to challenge received notions of how our self works. This happens more easily with *novels*, on account of the intrinsic qualities of this genre, at least in the forms it has developed over the last centuries in the Western world.

Huston take a position with respect to the function of literature and of narration in *The Tale-tellers. A Short Study of Humankind*,<sup>559</sup> where she maintains that «There is no record of a human tribe ever having been content to live in “reality”, to register it and comment on it without telling stories about it».<sup>560</sup> Human beings differ from animals in that they perceive their existence as a Narrative with a beginning, a series of adventures, and an ending. As our existence evolves through time and we keep track of it, we need to fill it with Meaning. That is the reason why humans are unable to live «without religion, taboo, ritual, genealogy, fairy-tales, magic, stories – i.e., without recourse to the imagination, without confabulation».<sup>561</sup> Narration is intrinsic to human nature to such an extent that we construe all of our lives around it: our given names, family names, date and place of birth, religion, racial and ethnic makeup: all denominations that allow our interaction with our conspecifics are built upon arbitrary fabulations. If everyone adheres to them with abiding faith, it is because they are necessary for the construction of their identity, without which daily life would be unbearable. The simple fact that humankind has more than one language, that every human group has different words to cut up the universe, bears witness of the arbitrary – and, in this sense, ineludibly *fictional* – nature of language: the term ‘fictional’ in this case has completely positive connotations for Huston. Since there is no ‘true’ or ‘natural’ correspondence between names and things, fictions are «*human, i.e., constructed realities*».<sup>562</sup>

The author also points out that we need to differentiate between good and bad fictions. ‘Bad fictions’, in Huston’s definition, are those that want to pass off as ‘the Truth’: believing that one’s language, one’s country, one’s God serve ‘a natural function’ (as opposed to cultural and hence constructed) usually leads to radicalist and violent-prone attitudes. Whereas *good* fictions are those that display – boast about, we may even say – their fictional nature, showing themselves as ‘stories’, each depicting *one possible portion* of reality among many others: novels are the good fiction *per excellence*. Unlike other literary genres such as drama, or poetry, in fact, the novel is a

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<sup>559</sup> Nancy Huston, *The Tale-Tellers. A Short Study of Humankind* (Toronto, McArthur & Co., 2008).

<sup>560</sup> *Ivi*, 139.

<sup>561</sup> *Ivi*, 28.

<sup>562</sup> *Ivi*, 27.

form of narration that combines two characteristics: it talks about other human experiences and is mostly *experienced individually*. Thus, “the characteristic of the novel – the way in which it explores the tension between individual and society, between freedom and determinism, and encourages us to identify with people unlike ourselves – make it capable of playing a role in ethics”,<sup>563</sup> precisely by opposing the ‘bad fictions’ which are irremediably archetypal: “Just *because* human reality is shot through and through with simplistic, involuntary fictions, it is important to invent complex, voluntary ones.”<sup>564</sup> Novels fulfil this need.

While the novel has always been ‘global’ in the sense of universal, the phenomenon of globalization, or better, the ensemble of correlated events that are comprehended under this umbrella term, i.e.:

[...] transculturation, the various forms (from cultural to economic) and periods (from the time of Columbus to the present) of imperialism and colonialism, the violent and uneven impact of socio-cultural and economic systems on one another as they come into contact, the eclipse of traditional ways of life, the temporal (modernization) and spatial (nationalism-internationalismtransnationalism) demands of European modernity, the global spread of capitalism and Western liberalism.<sup>565</sup>

have lead literary scholars to question themselves and consequently to redefine the paradigms through which contemporary literature is interpreted.<sup>566</sup>

While this field of enquiry is vast and lively, and cannot be adequately taken into consideration here, just a couple of observations will be made, meant to highlight those features of Huston’s that place her in the discourse of a global literature.

Among the characteristics of the global or world novel, Caren Irr includes “multistranded narration, broad geographical reach, cosmopolitan ethics, multilingual sensitivity, and a renewed commitment to realism”.<sup>567</sup> All the novels analysed in the present thesis display and treasure these categories, thus depicting Huston as a typically global novelist. In agreement with those who claim that the focus on

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<sup>563</sup> Huston, *The Tale-tellers*, 162.

<sup>564</sup> Huston, “Why literary lies are better than other lies”. Communication at the Internationales Literaturfestival Berlin (2008). URL: <http://www.literaturfestival.com/intern/reden/nancy-huston-engl>. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>565</sup> Susie O’Brien and Imre Szeman, “Introduction: The Globalization of Fiction/ the Fiction of Globalization” in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100/3 (2001): 604.

<sup>566</sup> Cf. for instance, Mariano Siskind, “The Globalization of the Novel and The Novelization of the Global: A Critique of World Literature”, in *World Literature: A Reader* edited by Theo D’Haen, César Domínguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomson (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>567</sup> Caren Irr, “Toward the World Novel: Genre Shifts in Twenty-First Century Expatriate Fiction” in *American Literary History* 23/3 (2011): 660-661.

‘globalization’ has replaced any discourse on ‘postmodernity’,<sup>568</sup> Stefano Calabrese maintains that the, unlike postmodernist novels, the global novel is not sheltered from the incursions of History.<sup>569</sup> Huston’s works, with her family sagas (*Fault Lines* and *Black Dance* in particular, but also *Plainsong* and *Prodigy* are spanned into three generations of the same family), and her focus on real historical events, inscribes itself into the global-novel trend, to which she adds a peculiar trait of her own: the multiculturalism and multilingualism of characters with very distant origins who find themselves involved in the same plot. Besides the characters already analysed in Chapters IV and V, those depicted in *Danse noire/Black Dance* constitute another prominent example: an Irishman (Neil), a Quebec Canadian (Marie-Jeanne), a Cree girl (Awinita), a New-York Jew (Paul Schwartz), and a Brazilian child (Eugenio, Milo’s adopted child). Huston once again questions the features that are traditionally regarded as necessary for a family to exist – all the while showing how our being in the world is conditioned – also, and to a lesser or greater extent, – by genetic inheritances, and not only constructed culturally in abstraction from our bonds.<sup>570</sup>

Encapsulating her own transnationality within her novels is a choice Huston shares with a whole community of transnational writers, who according to Rachel Trousdale,

[...] constitute a cohesive community, with common goals and values [...] the transnational synthesis in postcolonial or exilic novels remind us that the critical fields through which we approach them are our own constructions: these fields provide a means of delineating areas of critical expertise, but they are not the full contexts of the novels. Contemporary fiction abounds with texts influenced by fifty years of postmodern self-scrutiny and a rising awareness of globalization: Nicole Krauss’s *The History of Love* (2005) and Geraldine Brooks’s *People of the Book* (2008) exemplify an increasing trend toward transnational community building in popular literature. Global mobility and postmodern experimentation have created a new genre: the book that relocates and redefines the meaning of home.<sup>571</sup>

Huston’s autobiographical discourse on identity is thus transferred into her fictional writing, where it becomes a poetic agenda:

The polyvocal nature of transnational discourse emphasizes that *identity is a process, not a stable product, subject to reaffirmation and reconstruction*, during which an individual’s attributes and affiliations can be reinterpreted as the grounds of similarity or to difference from the people she encounters. The goal of transnational fiction is to teach readers to see

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<sup>568</sup> Cf. Lawrence Grossberg, “Speculations and Articulations of Globalization” *Polygraph* II (2002): II-48.

<sup>569</sup> Cf. Stefano Calabrese, *www.letteratura.global. Il romanzo dopo il postmoderno* (Torino: Einaudi, 2005).

<sup>570</sup> A point of view she discusses diffusely in her essay *The Tale-teller*, first written in French and published as *L’espèce fabulatrice* (Arles, Actes Sud, 2008).

<sup>571</sup> Rachel Trousdale, *Nabokov, Rushdie and the Transnational Imagination. Novels of Exile and Alternate Worlds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 193.



awareness of that process, rather than simple ethnic or national affiliations, as a key part of their own identity.<sup>572</sup>

In addition to being ‘foreigners’, Huston’s protagonists are – more often than not – artists or intellectuals. Musicians and singers are very well represented: from Liliane Kulainn, the harpsichord player of *The Goldberg variations*, to Raphael the flutist, to the three piano players in *Prodige/ Prodigy: A Novella* (Lara, her mother Sofia and her daughter Maya).<sup>573</sup> Kristina/Erra, one of the protagonists of *Lignes de faille/ Fault Lines* is a professional singer; Lin (*La virevolte/Slow Emergencies*)<sup>574</sup> is a ballet dancer who abandons a husband and her two daughters in order to pursue her artistic career; Miranda (*Plainsong/Cantique des plaines*) is a painter; Nadia, a novelist; Cosmo (*Une adoration/An Adoration*)<sup>575</sup> is a famous comedian and Rena (*Infrared/Infrarouge*) is a photographer. Besides the Sadie of *Fault lines*, we find a whole set of university professors in *Dolce agonia*. There are also unsuccessful intellectuals: Paddon and Neil are remarkably similar in their life-long efforts to become writers in the face of their time and energy-consuming families. These characters have something in common: they portray how it is difficult to conciliate art with the more down-to-earth necessities of daily life and family affections, in a way that does not fail to evoke Huston’s considerations in *Journal de la creation* (Seuil, 1990). Huston’s artists have either difficult or broken relationships, which triggers the idea that art is an all-or-nothing vocation. Milo makes no exception: his painful childhood experiences have provided him with the skill to imagine and construct fictions for the cinema... but this costs him the capacity to form any long-lasting relationship: his marriage breaks up and his adopted child will ultimately be (directly or indirectly – we are left to wonder) the cause of the death of his lover. This reiterated reflection on the nature of artistry could allegedly be construed as another feature of the self-awareness characterizing postmodern and global writers alike.

Having shortly commented upon the content of the novel, and as we are dealing with self-translated texts, an equally brief consideration on the forms is called for. A “literature of globalization” is forcibly thought *outside* the framework of national literatures. Only fairly recently, though, the role of translation as a powerful medium connecting literatures all over the world and shaping world literature has become a focus of academic studies.<sup>576</sup> Even more recent and yet underresearched is the role of

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<sup>572</sup> *Ivi*, 194.

<sup>573</sup> Nancy Huston, *Prodige* (Arles : Actes Sud, 1999) and *Prodigy: A Novella* (Toronto: McArthur, 2000).

<sup>574</sup> Nancy Huston, *La Virevolte* (Arles : Actes Sud, 1994) and *Slow Emergencie* (New York: Random House, 1996).

<sup>575</sup> Nancy Huston, *Une adoration* (Arles : Actes Sud, 2003) and *An Adoration* (Toronto: McArthur, 2003).

<sup>576</sup> Cf., for instance, Kathleen Shields, "Challenges and Possibilities for World Literature, Global Literature, and Translation." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 15/7, (2013). URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2381>. Accessed January 4th, 2017. For geographically related case

self-translation,<sup>577</sup> even though it seems to be accepted by now that “qu'ils perpetuent ou non leur plurilinguisme au niveau de l'écriture, les auteurs polyglottes prouvent au contraire que ni les frontières linguistiques, ni les frontières nationales ne rendent compte des divisions internes au champ littéraire”.<sup>578</sup>

While there is no ambition of the present author to venture into making hypothesis on the subject, I can at least formulate one last consideration on Huston's idea of translation. In 2007, Nancy Huston contributed to the volume *Pour une littérature-monde en français* edited by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud<sup>1</sup>, with a short text entitled *Traduttore non è traditore*, clearly deconstructing the infamous motto *traduttore, traditore* and offering the perspective of a self-translator on the function of literature. The volume aimed at conveying the notion that a literature in a certain language – French in this case – is not necessarily superposable to a national literature limited by geographic boundaries. In her text, Huston aligns herself with this ideal, reproposing the belief expressed by the poet Marina Tsvetaeva, that no writing language, no literary language is a mother tongue (“Aucune langue n'est maternelle. Écrire des poèmes c'est écrire d'après. [...] On devient poète pour être tout”). One becomes a poet not to be ‘a French poet’ or ‘a Russian poet’, but to be all of this, and more. Similarly, for Huston, one becomes a writer, because this allows identifying with any other human being. The labels – of a linguistic, national, regional kind, are attached to an author in the aftermath, by publishers, the academia, or the reading public. A true writer, in Huston's opinion, should not write in honour of such or such country, or such and such language, and least of all to become rich and famous. Most of the time, a writer does not know what to make of boundaries. Vast, diverse and unforeseeable, literature “joue des rôles différents et répond à des besoins différents, tant chez les écrivains que chez les lecteurs”. There are universal novels or extremely local novels; there are good novels, and those are miracles ‘of different sizes’. Ultimately,

[On] écrit pour agrandir le monde, pour en repousser les frontières. [On] écrit pour que le monde soit doublé, aéré, irrigué, interrogé, illuminé, par un autre monde, et qu'il devienne habitable.

*Ce faisant, l'écrivain traduit.*

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studies see Chaudhuri, S. “Translation and World Literature” in *Literature Compass* 9 (2012): 593-598 on the Indian area, and Wang Ning, “World Literature and the Dynamic Function of Translation” in *Modern Language Quarterly* 71/ 1 (2010): 1-14 about the Chinese area.

<sup>577</sup> Cf. Edoardo Zuccato, “Translating Oneself on the World Stage. Global Literature and Minority Languages in Italy, Scotland and Ireland”, in *Textus* 3 (2013): 9-22. DOI: 10.7370/75655. Accessed January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>578</sup> Rainier Grutman, « La logique du plurilinguisme littéraire ou, une langue en vaut-elle une autre? » in *Literarische Mehrsprachigkeit/Multilinguisme littéraire* edited by Georg Kremnitz and Robert Tanzmeister (Wien: Belvedere Druck, 1995):63.

Ce n'est jamais chose facile.

If any label is 'absolutely necessary', then Huston would range herself among the 'divided writers', writing each time "dans la langue que veulent bien parler mes personnages, j'écris les histoires qu'ils veulent bien me raconter, je les traduis de mon mieux en mots, scènes, dialogues et intrigues." The writer is thus engaged in a double translation: first, the literary translation, from the mind to the draft. Secondly, a linguistic translation, transposing all that has already been shaped into one language into another – extradiegetic – language, offering a double certificate of birth to the literary work. Quoting the experiences of the writers she considers her mentors, Gary and Beckett, and of a friend, André Brink, Huston defends her practice of self-translation and states her right to claim both versions as 'original translations' given the equivalence stated above, in spite of all labels and those who care about attaching them:

Traduire, c'est ça qu'il faut: *traduttore non è traditore*, c'est même la seule façon de ne pas trahir, il n'y a que ça de vrai. Traduire, éternellement traduire.<sup>579</sup> [Translation, that's what we need. Translating is not betraying; it may well even be the only way not to betray, the only true thing].

In a certain manner, it seems that the *genesis of her writing* on the one hand, and the *purpose of literature* on the other hand, are superposable for Huston: multiplying the self – which, as we have seen so far, is already fragmented in reason of her life experience marked by instabilities. The reader is thus allowed to identify in as many selves as their can, in order to perceive otherness, to be able to recognize it, face it, appreciate it and subsequently relativize his / her own values and constitutive substances of the self. In other words, learn empathy and dialogue, learn to identify to someone other than him/herself. As a self-translator, the writer decides to assume a transnational – in this sense global – attitude toward literature, which is ultimately also an ethical calling.

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<sup>579</sup> Huston, Nancy. "Traduttore non è traditore", cit., p. 158.

## WORKS BY NANCY HUSTON

### Novels

- HUSTON, Nancy.** *Bad Girl. Classes de littérature.* Arles: Actes Sud, 2014.
- *Black Dance.* Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2014.
  - *Cantique des plaines.* Arles et Montréal, Actes Sud et Leméac, 1993.
  - *Danse noire.* Arles: Actes Sud, 2013.
  - *Dolce agonia.* Arles : Actes Sud, 2001.
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## APPENDIX I.

### SYNOPTIC TABLE OF NANCY HUSTON'S SELF-TRANSLATIONS

FRENCH VERSION	ENGLISH VERSION	
<b>1981:</b> <i>Les Variations Goldberg</i> (Seuil ; rééd. Actes Sud)	<i>The Goldberg Variations</i> (Montreal: Nuage, 1996)	NOVEL
<b>1985:</b> <i>Histoire d'Omayya</i> (Seuil ; rééd. Actes Sud)	<i>The Story of Omayya</i> (London: Women's Press, 1987)	NOVEL
<b>1989:</b> <i>Trois fois septembre</i> (Seuil ; rééd. Actes Sud)	<i>Thrice september – self-translated but unpublished</i>	NOVEL
<b>1993:</b> <i>Cantique des plaines</i> (Actes Sud)	<i>Plainsong</i> (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1993)	NOVEL
<b>1994:</b> <i>La Virevolte</i> (Actes Sud ; rééd. J'ai lu)	<i>Slow Emergencies</i> (New York: Random House, 1996)	NOVEL
<b>1996:</b> <i>Instruments des ténèbres</i> (Actes Sud ; rééd. poche J'ai lu) / <i>Instruments of Darkness</i> (Toronto: McArthur, 1997)		NOVEL
<b>1998:</b> <i>L'Empreinte de l'ange</i> (Actes Sud)	<i>The Mark of the Angel</i> (New York: Random House, 1998)	NOVEL
<b>1999:</b> <i>Nord perdu, suivi de Douze France</i> (Actes Sud)	<i>Losing North: Musings on Land, Tongue and Self</i> (Toronto: McArthur, 2002)	ESSAY
<b>1999:</b> <i>Prodige</i> (Actes Sud)	<i>Prodigy: A Novella</i> (Toronto: McArthur, 2000)	NOVEL
<b>2000:</b> <i>Limbes / Limbo - Un hommage à Samuel Beckett</i> (Léméac, Actes Sud)		PASTICHE  BILINGUAL EDITION
<b>2001:</b> <i>Dolce agonia</i> (Actes Sud)	<i>Dolce Agonia. A novel</i> (New York: Random House, 2001)	NOVEL

<b>2003:</b> <i>Une adoration</i> (Actes Sud)	<i>An Adoration</i> (Toronto: McArthur, 2003)	NOVEL
<b>2006:</b> <i>Lignes de faille</i> (Actes Sud ; rééd. poche J'ai lu)	<i>Fault Lines</i> (Toronto: McArthur, 2007)	NOVEL
<b>2008:</b> <i>L'Espèce fabulatrice</i> , Actes Sud	<i>The Tale-Tellers: A Short Study of Humankind</i> (Toronto: McArthur, 2008)	ESSAY
<b>2010:</b> <i>Infrarouge</i> (Actes Sud)	<i>Infrared</i> (London: Atlantic, 2012)	NOVEL
<b>2013:</b> <i>Danse noire</i> (Actes Sud)	<i>Black Dance</i> (New York: Black Cat, 2014)	NOVEL
<b>2016:</b> <i>Le club des miracles relatifs</i> (Actes Sud)	yet unpublished	NOVEL