Theories and Methodologies

Beyond Untranslatability

CHANA KRONFELD

Cultures of commentary like Judaism and Islam may serve as productive countermodels for theorizing translation beyond the impasses in current debates about translatability and untranslatability in Eurocentric translation studies, which attempt to deal with their historically marginalized others. Thinking with the literatures I study and translate, I offer here Yehuda Amichai's word-recycler figure for poet, translator, and even the Spirit of God as counterpoint to the obsession with originality in (misapprehensions of) romanticism in the West:

וְהַמְתַרְגְּמִים יוֹשְׁבִים וּמְמַחְזְרִים הַכֹּל
לְמִחְזוּר אַחֵר שֶׁאֵין לוֹ קֵץ וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים
מְרַחֶפֶת לְמַעְלָה בִּתְנוּעוֹת כַּנְפֵי מְאַוְרֵר עֲנָק
וּמַכֶּה אֶת הָאֲוִיר וְהַמִּלִּים מֻכּוֹת שׁוּב וָשׁוּב כְּמוֹ קֶצֶף.

(עמיחי 156)

> The translators sit and recycle it all to another
> recycling plan that has no end, and the spirit of God
> hovers above with the whirring wing-blades of a giant fan
> whipping the air, the words whipped over and over like
> foam. (Amichai 147)

Viewed through cultures of commentary, like the ones Amichai is invoking here, translation emerges as a salient, necessary intertextual practice that embraces mediation, secondariness and process, and does not mournfully yearn for some unattainable originality.

Even in the Westernized formations of modern Hebrew and Yiddish literature, the classical Jewish tradition of interpretive translations from biblical Hebrew, as well as exegetical intertextuality and the (often irreverent, iconoclastic) citational mode in general, remains a formal and indeed an ethical matrix: writing is always radical

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rewriting, an agentive, communal speech act of rereading and rewriting for a (historically multilingual) cultural collectivity in which translation fulfills a crucial part.[1] Adriana X. Jacobs has provided a compelling argument that "writing poetry in Hebrew is itself a multilingual translational practice." Moreover, for the modern poets she discusses, "translation also serves as a crucial and antihegemonic mode of cultural, linguistic, and transhistoric exchange, thereby constituting a politics that is inseparable from its poetics" (Jacobs 15). The same is true for the Hebrew and Yiddish poets I work with. The intertwined politics and poetics of translation are most salient in the omnipresence of radical rewritings of the sacred in modernist and avant-garde Jewish literature—and the intertextual/translational recasting of canonical texts in modern poetry tout court.

Much is to be gained from conceiving of translation as part of an overarching theory of intertextual agency, alongside other intertextual practices like allusion, parody, and interpretation, all of which are forms of bilateral or multilateral circulation by and for textual communities. In this vein, I suggest that thinking about translation as collaborative labor may help offset the hierarchical aspects of the distinctions between author and translator, source and target;[2] and it may also strip away the vestiges of the old patriarchal metaphors of fidelity and betrayal that still adhere to discussions of translation, especially in evaluating alternative renditions of the same work.[3]

The modernist Yiddish and Hebrew poets I insist on reading together, against the pressures of nationalist monolingualism in Israel and the United States, emerge out of an age-old tradition of translational textual commentary produced by and for multilingual Jewish communities. Though other exegetical cultures of commentary are beyond my field of expertise, my understanding is that the same is true of them as well, especially those in Muslim lands, which of course have their own distinct intertextual and translational traditions, not only between Persian and Arabic but also within the various diglossic layers of Arabic (see, most recently, Fani; Larkin; Ahmed).[4] Historically, Muslim and Jewish exegetical practices have been in translational dialogue, a dialogue in which neither of the languages or cultures has been viewed as foreign. Classical Arabic poetry incorporates the figures of the doe and stag as metaphors for lovers, a metaphoric system that is central to the biblical Song of Songs (Kronfeld, "Land"). And medieval Hebrew poetry in Al-Andalus integrated Arabic metrics and genres with biblical intertextuality, while major works of Jewish philosophy were first written in Arabic, then translated into Hebrew, like Maimonedes's treatise *A Guide for the Perplexed* (see the discussion in DeKoven Ezrahi), and translation was crucial for early modern Jewish religious thinkers (Idelson-Shein).[5] I assert this common basis because European colonialism and Zionist Hebraism have done their best to make us forget these shared traditions, and because, when taken together, Jewish and Muslim cultures of commentary may consolidate into a formidable textual and intertextual model that motivates a radical retheorizing of translation, as well as of other forms of rewriting.

I do not want to suggest, however, that these are the only cultures that refuse the notion of untranslatability and its attendant view of the source text as a static invariant. A similar understanding of translation as dynamic "transcreation" can be found, for example, in Brazilian culture, where textual adaptation has long been conceived and later theorized as the "cannibalization" and redigestion of earlier works. This idea has been famously put forth by Oswald de Andrade in his 1928 "Manifesto antropófago" ("Cannibalist Manifesto"), and later developed by the famed poet, critic, and translator Haroldo de Campos into a fuller theory of translation as "blood transfusion" and "transcreation."[6] In fact, as Yael Segalovitz's important research has revealed, De Campos was keenly aware of the affinities between the Brazilian and Jewish traditions of intertextuality, and he set out on the formidable mission of studying Hebrew and translating the biblical books of Genesis and Ecclesiastes into Portuguese in the form of concrete poetry, paradigmatic of third-wave Brazilian modernism. Similarly, Segalovitz shows, Clarice

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Lispector has turned mistranslation of biblical texts into an important feature of her poetics, boldly asserting that "my error is my mirror" (qtd. in Segalovitz).

Translation has always been the first step in a never-ending process of exegetical rewriting of the Hebrew Bible, circulating between the Hebrew source language and Aramaic, Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Persian, and other Jewish languages as the target. Invoking Itamar Even-Zohar's terminology, Abigail Gilman describes translation as a "vital zone within the Jewish literary polysystem since before the common era, a practice relevant to women and men, to the intellectual elite and the uneducated alike" (Gilman 251; see also Even-Zohar). Translation is indeed a prototypical Jewish intertextual practice, alongside radical allusion, pastiche, parody, and specifically Jewish rhetorical strategies and genres that undergird the history of Hebrew and Yiddish literature. These strategies include the genre of the anachronistic midrash (Hebrew) or *Medresh* (Yiddish), a nonliteral, radically rewritten rendition of a biblical story or gloss on a biblical verse that speaks to and from the postbiblical exilic context of its composition, and the poetic figure of *Shibbutz,* the *Mussivstil* or mosaic-like insertion of biblical quotations into a poem in surprising, at times irreverent combinations and contexts, developed in dialogue with classical Arabic and Persian rhetoric but perfected parodically in Yiddish poetry and plays. While the practice of *Shibbutz* goes back to the ancient piyyut, the liturgical poem in Palestine and Babylon, it continues into the modern period, as for example in Sholem Aleykhem's טביה דער מילכיקער (*Tevye the Dairyman*). Tevye's obsessive pseudo-non-sequitur translations of Hebrew and Aramaic verses from the Bible and Talmud into Yiddish form a sustained social critique, a central feature of his monologues that is of course barely audible in the work's widely popular American translation-adaptation, *Fiddler on the Roof* (initially done for Jerry Bock, Sheldon Harnick, and Joseph Stein's 1964 Broadway production). Translation as interpretation thus continues into the modern period and is felt to be not only possible but also necessary for the continued life of the text (and not really, pace Walter Benjamin, its afterlife).[7]

This may pull out the rug from under debates about translatability and untranslatability spearheaded in France by Barbara Cassin and in the United States by Emily Apter. Apter has famously argued for both translatability and untranslatability, but in recent years she has focused on untranslatability, in a valiant attempt to develop a critical framework that undoes the damage of erasing linguistic and cultural specificities in the all too prevalent literary-critical "generic . . . lexicons that presume universal translatability or global applicability" ("Untranslatables" 581; see also *Against World Literature* and "Interference"). Apter's—and Cassin's—objectives are admirable, calling into question the universal transparency of concepts developed within specific historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts. However, some of their projects, such as *The Dictionary of Untranslatables* (2014), which Cassin and Apter edited with Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood, may have had some unintentional consequences: ironically, they may have ended up reinforcing the Eurocentric perspective they criticize, as they focus on the translated philosophical term in each entry as a closed end product (Cassin et al.). More broadly, the very dichotomy translatability/untranslatability presupposes that translation is about the success or failure of what Lawrence Venuti has termed "the reproduction of a source-text invariant" (*Contra Instrumentalism* 8), and hence an instrumentalist rather than a hermeneutically open text that is constantly in the process of being rewritten ("Translation"). As Aria Fani has observed in a powerful recent article, "The notion of untranslatability itself . . . uncritically accepts the core logic of romantic nationalism . . . obsessed with languages appearing as bounded and fixed" (112). He continues:

> The monolingual ethos of romantic nationalism—the idea of one country, one language—has assigned to translation the task of reifying and policing linguistic boundaries ever more aggressively. In that vein, untranslatability will best serve as a historiographical fixture that can help us draw the contours

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> of a translation culture rooted in the age of nationalism and print capitalism as the field of translation studies grapples with the most productive ways to move beyond it. (117)

Sometimes going beyond it requires going elsewhere, both in time and in space. Theorized from the examples of cultures of commentary, translation studies would be compelled to set aside the existential anxieties about secondariness and lack of originality and to reveal that even in the European context these are relatively recent developments, vestiges of a (misconstrued, reductive interpretation of) romanticism and its fixation on the bourgeois individual original author (Coldiron, "Translation").

For Hebrew and Yiddish literature, as for Jewish textual culture in general, the opposition between translatability and untranslatability is all but culturally moot. In my field, it is widely believed that translations of European classics into Yiddish were accompanied by the label "Fartaytsht un farbesert" ("Translated/interpreted and improved") on the title page. Scholars have been hard-pressed to come up with even a single example of such title pages.[8] This hasn't stopped people from repeating it as a fact. Here, for example, is Peter Manseau, the curator of American religious history for the Smithsonian Museum and a winner of the National Jewish Book Award, in a *New Yorker* interview: "It was not uncommon to see on the title page of Yiddish translations of Shakespeare or Dickens the words '*fartaytsht un farbesert*,' as if some anonymous Yiddish scribbler got his hands on *King Lear* and thought, I'll just punch this up a bit" (qtd. in Norich 13). This funny but ill-informed suggestion that Yiddish translators of Shakespeare were "some anonymous . . . scribbler[s]" glosses over the massive literary translation projects undertaken by some of the major Yiddish writers and dramaturgs from the end of the nineteenth century through the interwar period. Let me only mention the great poet Yehoash (1872–1927), who produced brilliant translations not only of the Hebrew Bible but also of hundreds of works of world literature, including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, which he translated in 1910; the 1929 translation of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* by the Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904–91); the 1921 translation of Julius Caesar by the poet I. J. Schwartz (1885–1971); the masterful translation of Molière's *L'avare* for Zigmund Turkov's Yiddish Art Theater by the Sorbonne-educated scholar Arn Eynhorn (1884–1942); the translations of Charles Dickens—perhaps the English-language writer most frequently translated into Yiddish—by the fiction writer L. Shapiro (1878–1948); and the anthology of Russian poetry translated into Yiddish compiled by the poet Leyb Naydus (1890–1918). Manseau's flippant tone presupposes that Yiddish is obviously culturally inferior to English and that no Yiddish work is comparable to the masterpieces of the English canon.

But the *chutzpedik* view of Yiddish translation that the apocryphal story of "fartaytsht un farbesert" articulates is, I would argue, with Anita Norich, quite meaningful. It is entirely consistent with a culture that entrusts translation with improving our understanding of the source text, without feeling the need to provide one definitive and authoritative rendition. In this respect, this Yiddish folk theory of translation as interpreting and improving the source text articulates boldly, irreverently the egalitarian dialogical view of translation that Westernization has made even Jewish literary historiography forget. What has been forgotten is that the proliferation of different versions of the sacred biblical source text constitutes the very basis of textual study in rabbinic discourse. In the Talmud, as Daniel Boyarin clarified in a recent conversation I had with him, a debate over the meaning or exegetical translation of the Hebrew text that results in one definitive take is considered fatally flawed argumentation, and is technically labeled an impasse, קושיא (*kushya*). Only once the multiple versions or Aramaic translations/interpretations of the Hebrew are restored does Talmudic logic deem it a solution, תירוץ (*teyrutz*). While the exegetical process is supposed to follow the recipe of שניים מקרא ואחד תרגום (*shnayim mikra ve-echad targum*), two parts biblical Hebrew, one part translation/exegesis (into a Jewish language), in effect the translation-cum-exegesis takes over, as is evident on any page of מקראות גדולות (*Mikra'ot Gedolot*),

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literally "The Great Readers," often called in English "The Rabbinic Bible," which has been the basic text for Torah study for centuries.

In the classic 1525 Venice second edition of *The Great Readers* (fig. 1), the so-called "Second Rabbinic Bible," the Hebrew Bible section of the text, in this case the opening lines of the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15.1–19), even in the large font featured in the middle left, is but a small part of the page. The Onkelos Targum, the translation of the poetic Hebrew passage into Aramaic, is to the immediate right of that passage, the philological notes on the Masoretic biblical text are immediately above it, and the Bible verses are surrounded by the most common later Hebrew commentaries on this passage, some of them "translated" into a different ("Rashi") script.

These discursive practices have continued to inform modern Yiddish and Hebrew poetry, at least partially inoculating them against hierarchical dichotomies of original and translation, even as Jewish cultures became increasingly Europeanized and Americanized. And despite the influence of German romantic nationalism on Zionism, and Zionism's investment in imposing a Hebrew monolingualism, de facto cultural multilingualism and a valorization of translation have remained a seldom acknowledged but nevertheless powerful norm in modern Hebrew literature.

Translation, as Ziva Ben-Porat and André Lefevere noted early on (Ben-Porat; Lefevere), cannot be theorized independently of allusion, parody, or other forms of rewriting, such as anthologizing and, yes, interpretation. Classifying translation under the umbrella of the superordinate category governing all intertextual practices would work, however, only if we were to retheorize intertextuality itself, taking it beyond ineluctably conflictual, hierarchical models of influence, à la Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence, on the one hand, and agentless, ahistorical if egalitarian models of intertextuality, à la Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, on the other (Kronfeld, *Full Severity* 117–224).

Using cultures of commentary as the model, we may end up with a theory that need not occasion anxiety or despair over the secondariness of translation and over the derivative nature of intertextuality in general. Furthermore, reinscribing agency in a theory of intertextuality may highlight the open-ended, multilateral nature of the circulation involved in translation, as in other rhetorical practices, from allusion to metaphor: both source and target text—and their attendant cultures—are opened up to rereading through rewriting (an approach elaborated in the special issue of *Forum for Modern Language Studies* on the relationships between texts across cultures [Bassnett]). And that circulation needn't go from center to periphery, as Pascale Casanova or Franco Moretti would have it, but can move—as Jewish literary tradition often does—forward, backward, and sideways, perhaps even all at the same time (Weiman Kelman; Levy and Schachter).

This is precisely the nexus between translation and intertextuality that Venuti describes as mutual interpretation but also as a bilateral interrogation:

> A translation . . . recontextualizes both the foreign text that it translates and the translating-language text that it quotes or imitates, submitting them to a transformation that changes their significance. As a result the intertextual relations that a translation establishes are not only interpretive, but potentially interrogative: they inscribe meanings and values that invite a critical understanding of the quoted or imitated texts, even the cultural traditions and social institutions in which those texts are positioned, while simultaneously inviting the reader to understand the foreign text on the basis of texts, traditions, and institutions specific to the translating culture.
> ("Translation" 165)

Let me add, however, that the translating-rewriting text need not be felt as foreign, even when the translational languages belong to different language families, like (Semitic) Hebrew and Arabic, (Germanic) Yiddish or (Romance) Ladino. Similarly, the multilingualism of diasporic literary communities that have not submitted to the coercions of monolingualism like LatinX and Asian literatures in the United States, and the bilingualism or multilingualism of many contemporary Canadian and European literary communities, may require us to rethink the dyad

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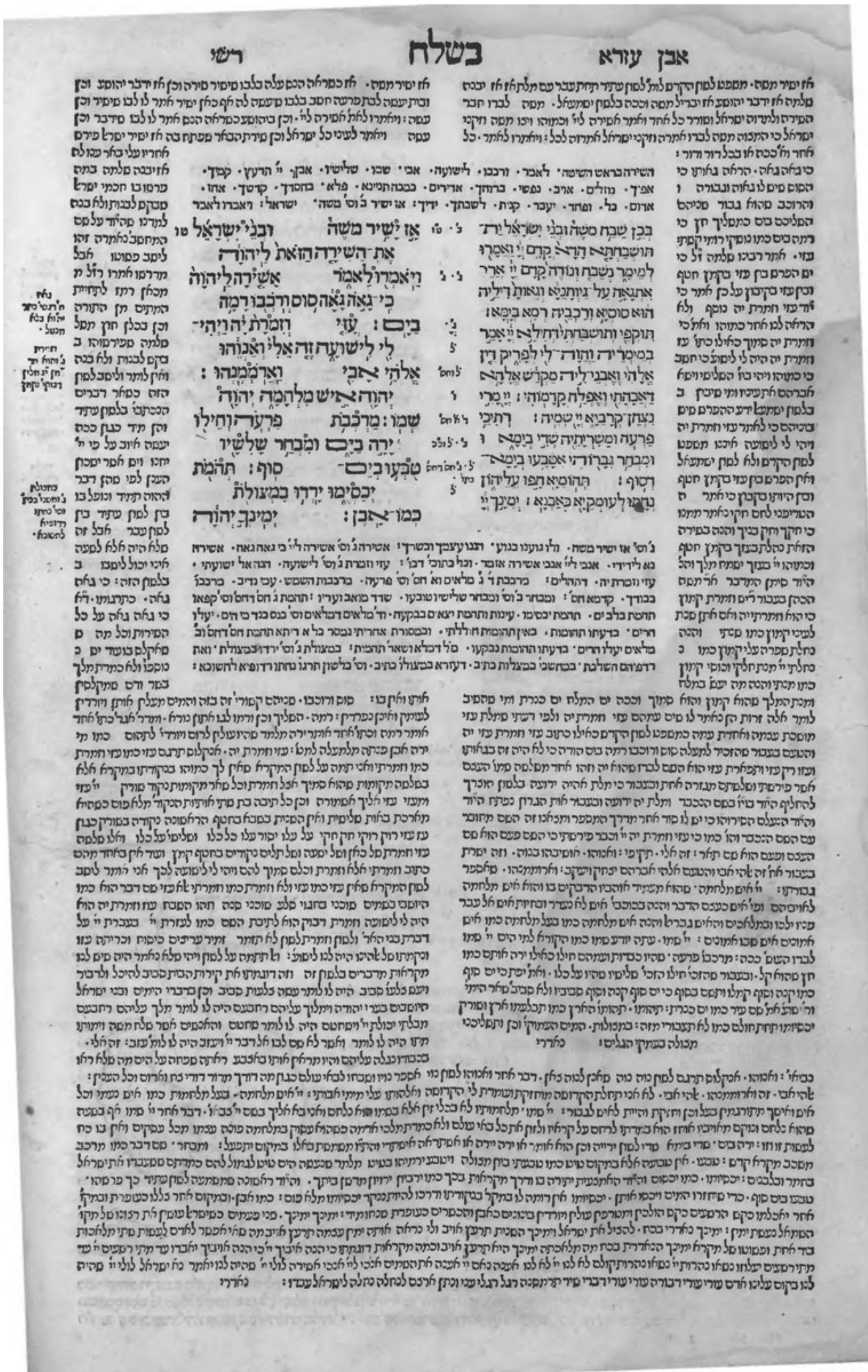

אבן עזרא בשלח רשי

אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל
את השירה הזאת ליהוה
ויאמרו לאמר אשירה ליהוה
כי גאה גאה סוס ורכבו רמה
בים: עזי וזמרת יה ויהי
לי לישועה זה אלי ואנוהו
אלהי אבי וארממנהו:
יהוה איש מלחמה יהוה
שמו: מרכבת פרעה וחילו
ירה בים ומבחר שלשיו
טבעו בים סוף: תהמת
יכסימו ירדו במצולת
כמו אבן: ימינך יהוה

Fig. 1. The Second Rabbinic Bible (Mikra'ot Gedolot), vol. 1, Exodus 15.1–6.

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foreign/domestic and even perhaps the distinction between foreignizing and domesticating translations. This is, indeed, where translation and multilingualism intersect (Luzon, *Translational Encounters* and "Shakespeare"). Much may therefore be gained from reimagining translation as bi- or multilateral collaborative or cooperative labor that is in principle never completed. In this context, I want to highlight the work of the Arabic-Hebrew translators' forum Maktoob, which since 2016 has been translating contemporary Arabic literature into Hebrew in a collective manner in binational and bilingual teams. As the members of Maktoob write in their online mission statement, the literary translation work is explicitly intended to combat the segregation of Jews and Palestinians and dismantle the colonial power structure dividing the two languages by "assigning two translators to work together on each text, one of whom is always a Palestinian" ("About Us" 2022).[9]

Rethinking translation as collaboration allows me to add my voice to those who have militated in recent years against the invisibility of the translators, who are often underpaid and overworked women, but also to hold up collaborative dialogic labor as an alternative to the patriarchal metaphors of fidelity and betrayal in translation (see Johnson; Chamberlain; Seidman 37–39, 43; Coldiron, "Visibility"; Castro and Ergun).

I was fortunate enough to have had that experience literally, as a dialogue between writer and translator: with Benjamin Harshav in collaborative translations of his poetry from Yiddish into Hebrew, and with Yehuda Amichai and Dahlia Ravikovitch, with whom Chana Bloch and I worked closely on our English translations of their Hebrew poetry. Indeed, the most cherished part for me was collaborating with co-translators, going back to my working with Naomi Seidman on translating into English the bilingual (Hebrew and Yiddish) short stories of Dvora Baron. Ultimately, the collaborative labor that is theoretically the most significant is between the source and target languages, the source and target cultures.

But translation as collaborative labor is dialogical rather than dialectical, and I mean this in the special sense developed with great nuance by Mikhail Bakhtin. In his book on Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Bakhtin writes, "Every thought senses itself from the very beginning to be a rejoinder in an unfinalized dialogue" (18), living "a tense life on the border of someone else's thought, someone else's consciousness" (32). Bakhtin's dialogism has all too often been understood as sentimental pluralism, on the model of the "I'm OK, You're OK" of American self-help books. For Bakhtin—but also for the theory and practice of translation I am discussing here—the dialogical means the ability to read and render the language of the other without pretending that it is your own, without blurring the differences between source and target text and culture, or the tensions that such differences produce. Thus, in the account I am providing here, a multiplicity of different, even incommensurate versions produced in the history of translation—as in the history of textual interpretation—is not only inevitable but vital.[10]

We always theorize from the literatures we work with, whether we acknowledge it or not, although it is only majoritarian cultures that get to claim their practices and the theories derived from them as universal, and their specific cultural contexts as context-free. Marking the unmarked may just be the countermove we need.

Let me conclude where I started, with lines from Yehuda Amichai's "Conferences, Conferences: Malignant Words, Benign Speech," a poem that parodies the abuse of language in academic conferences and celebrates the work of translators and simultaneous interpreters at such conferences, but does so through a radical engagement with biblical intertextuality and its interpretive history:

וְהַמְתַרְגְּמִים יוֹשְׁבִים וּמְמַחְזְרִים הַכֹּל
לְמִחְזוּר אַחֵר שֶׁאֵין לוֹ קֵץ וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים
מְרַחֶפֶת לְמַעְלָה בִּתְנוּעוֹת כַּנְפֵי מְאַוְרֵר עֲנָק
וּמַכֶּה אֶת הָאֲוִיר וְהַמִּלִּים מַכּוֹת שׁוּב וָשׁוּב כְּמוֹ קֶצֶף.
(עמיחי 156)

The translators sit and recycle it all to another
recycling plan that has no end, and the spirit of God
hovers above with the whirring wing-blades of a
giant fan

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whipping the air, the words whipped over and
over like foam. (Amichai 147)

Amichai counters here hierarchical views of translation, views that he debunks extensively in the rest of this poem, as elsewhere in his oeuvre, where the poet himself is figured as a translator (Kronfeld, *Full Severity* 175–224). However, rather than a deification of the translator, what we have here is a cutting down to human size of the Holy Spirit. Amichai's reference to the biblical creation story and its reception history forms a radical bilateral allusion that uses the biblical text to valorize the work of the translators but also uses the verbal work of the translators to illuminate God's creation speech act in new ways. Amichai reminds us that God in chapter 1 of Genesis does not actually create the world ex nihilo, as fundamentalist readings would have it, but rather recycles primordial air and water that are already there in a state of chaos, תוהו ובוהו (*tohu va-vohu*). In a series of metonymic shifts, the Spirit of God, רוח אלוהים (*ru'ach elohim*, always literalized and embodied in the Hebrew also as "the wind of God") that "hovers above," מרחפת למעלה (*merachefet le-ma'ala*) does not create a world but rather recycles language up in the heavens, as the translators do here on earth. Even for רוח אלוהים (*rua'ch elohim*) there is no privileged access to a pre-intertextual point of origin, to some verbal first cause, so to speak. Here Amichai rejects outright the view of the Holy Spirit as the Logos that was there "in the beginning" (John 1.1). Along with it, he also rejects various Christian appropriations of the Septuagint legend, which in the centuries following Philo began to describe the miracle of the perfect identical translations as the work of the Logos penetrating "from above" the individual cells and bodies of each of the seventy-two Jewish sages charged with translating the Bible into Greek thus effecting a unified, monological Greek rendition of the Hebrew Bible. In Amichai's poem, however, the Spirit of God continues to hover up above and doesn't descend to produce a single authorized text for which the translators are mere vehicles or mediums.[11] Here the translators and the Holy Spirit turned wind are entrusted with the laborious effort of endlessly recycling words that are beaten and whipped like eggs for baking a cake. Amichai wryly valorizes the creativity of ordinary labor—of creativity *as* ordinary labor—by the nameless translators and the biblical God alike, rather than the special gifts of human or divine inspiration. The metaphor of textual recycling makes us see the Spirit of God first as a giant ceiling fan (with the heavens as the ceiling), and then as a cosmic mixer (with the universe as the kitchen where all the recycled words are whirred and whipped up). This cosmic recycling of words encompasses all textuality, as in Kristeva's and Barthes' most orthodox poststructuralist formulations. In Amichai's philosophy of language too, as in Kristeva's and Barthes's, there is no sense in any search for origins, since intertextuality is a cycle that has no beginning and no end. But in stark contrast with the poststructuralist position, the cyclical and recycled nature of all discourse that translation epitomizes does not entail for Amichai impersonality and erasure of agency, nor does it occasion an epistemological crisis. Quite the contrary, the agency of the word recyclers themselves—precisely because it is limited and threatened—serves as both point of departure and syntactic topic for the whole stanza: "the translators sit and recycle it all. . . ."

Notes

Earlier versions of this article were presented as the keynote address at the Translators' [In]visibilities Conference at the University of Calgary (February 2022) and as the keynote lecture at the Yiddish and Translation Conference in Paris (August–September 2021), as well as in the Trans;Form Symposium at Stanford University (November 2018). I thank Larry Venuti, Aria Fani, Maya Kronfeld, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, and Yael Segalovitz for a stimulating dialogue, and Oren Yirmiya and E. Arnon for their help with the research.

1. And see Sandra Bermann's ACLA address for an important discussion of translation as collaboration and dialogue, where translators work in the "and zone" rather than being confined to the adversarial binary opposition of source and target domains (441–42).

2. On translation as community in Jean-Luc Nancy's sense of "the-being-in-common" of texts across time in a Japanese context, see Abel.

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3. In his essay in this special issue of *PMLA*, Venuti describes this as a universal tendency to debase retranslation, a tendency that forms a reader's fixation on their first beloved translation and expresses an instrumentalist relation of the target to the source text. While I agree with this cogent analysis, I suggest in this article that this tendency may not be universal.

4. Fani addresses the temptations and inadequacies of the concept of untranslatability for Persian literary culture; Larkin writes on reading classical intertextuality in modern Arabic poetry beyond models of influence; and Ahmed considers palimpsests of commentary and translation in South Asian Muslim textual traditions.

5. On the importance of Arabic-Hebrew translation for the formation of medieval Hebrew poetry in Al-Andalus, see, most recently, Gilman. On the Hebrew-Arabic dialogue in medieval Jewish poetry and philosophy as counterexamples to present-day reductions of the sacred to a Jewish-Muslim opposition, see DeKoven Ezrahi's important new book, *Figuring Jerusalem: Politics and Poetics in the Sacred Center*. And Idelson-Shein has recently explored the role of translation in what she describes as the early modern Rabbinic (scientific) revolution.

6. Cisneros traces the evolution of Haroldo de Campos's concept of translation.

7. But of course *iberlebn* in Yiddish means to survive, to suffer *and* survive; it does not refer to the afterlife, something Benjamin, in his close dialogue with Gershom Scholem, would have been aware of.

8. Norich 12–13, 130n13. She cites an email communication with the historian Michael Stanislawski on 9 May 2006, in which he asserted that in fact there is no evidence such title pages ever existed.

9. I thank Oren Yirmiya for this important example.

10. The power relations between source and target cultures are, of course, of crucial importance here. Masel cogently addresses this in the context of Yiddish translations of canonical Hebrew poetry and shows that what takes the form of a claim of untranslatability is often a displacement of political conflict over asymmetries of power and control.

11. The rest of the poem makes this critical rewriting of Christian myths of monologic translation even more palpable. See Seidman 47–63 for a fascinating discussion of the various appropriations of the Septuagint legend, and Norich 3–12 on the negative impact of the Septuagint as a model of perfect monolithic translation.

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