

Remembering, Witnessing and Translation: Female Experiences of the Nazi Camps

INTRODUCTION

Translating the written memory of an individual into another language and culture entails a twofold act of perpetuation; first, the lived experiences of that individual are recorded in an additional repository and are then carried beyond the immediate borders of the original telling. Yet, in order that this perpetuation might be realized through translation, the particular threads of memory which constitute the original narrative – whether in the form of autobiography, memoir, diary or testimony – are necessarily reworked by the hands of another, by a translator who, in most instances, has no direct connection with the remembered events or emotions¹. The warp and weft of the initial act of memory may subsequently emerge intact, preserved by translation to bear enduring and accurate witness to the life of the individual; alternatively, it may not withstand the process, becoming distorted in its appearance, texture or purpose once reconstructed in another setting.

This article sets out to identify and critically examine the role of the translator in the transmission of individual memory within the specific context of survivor accounts of the Holocaust. In this respect, any exploration of how the translator re-mediate life in the camps must be fully mindful of the unique representational, epistemological and ethical complexities that can beset attempts to tell and retell those stories of suffering and survival. Many Holocaust narratives are marked by a tension between the (communicative, commemorative, and often cathartic) need to commit lived experience to writing and the aridity of words whose capacity to tell withers before the sheer horror of the events they venture to describe. The complexities of representation may be compounded further by the contingencies of memory, which can fade but also sharpen with the passing of time². In turn, the translator of the Holocaust narrative is potentially brought into an encounter with a text

that is, deliberately or otherwise, halting, uneven; a text that may attempt to lay bare some or all of the concentrationary universe, and in so doing, charge itself with a particular moral burden to remember, to understand, or indeed to resist any such understanding. How the translator responds to such complexities will be considered in reference to the concept of the secondary witness³, defined by Geoffrey Hartmann as someone who “provides a witness for the witness, [and] actively receives words that reflect the darkness of the event” (1998, 48). It is precisely the nature and extent of the translator’s act of receiving that will be considered in the case study below, always heedful of what Colin Davis terms the “insidious dangers inherent in secondary witnessing” (2011, 20) which threaten to belie the experiences, pain and otherness of the Holocaust survivor. For the manner in which the translator serves as secondary witness will ultimately determine whether the target language reader has a window onto past events that is as broad or narrow, as transparent or opaque, as whole or fragmented, as the one originally offered by the survivor.

The present case study centers on two remarkable French testimonies of life in and liberation from the Nazi labor camps for women. Agnès Humbert’s *Notre guerre: Journal de Résistance 1940-1945* was published in the immediate aftermath of World War II in 1946; it begins with the art historian’s diary entries which record her early involvement in the French Resistance movement and then proceeds to a retrospective account of her arrest and internment in the Parisian prisons of Cherche-Midi, La Santé, and Fresnes, her subsequent deportation to the German forced labor camps of Krefeld-Anrath, Hövelhof and Schwelm, and her eventual liberation from the town of Wanfried. Micheline Maurel, a literary scholar, was also arrested for Resistance activities, and her testimony, *Un camp très ordinaire*, appeared in 1957. In her work, Maurel documents her experiences of daily life and hardship in the Neubrandenburg labor camp, a satellite of the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women, as well as her difficult return home following liberation. These accounts will be

brought into relief with their English translations – respectively, *Résistance: Memoirs of Occupied France* translated by Barbara Mellor (2008) and *Ravensbrück* by Margaret S. Summers (1958)⁴ – as a means of establishing how these translators have served as witnesses to the survivors, while also recognizing that the translator is not the sole agent responsible for the way in which these individual memories have been transmitted.

The decision to explore these two particular female survivor accounts has been made in light Margaret-Anne Hutton’s observation that “French women deported to Nazi concentration and death camps [...] have, as yet, received little to no critical attention” (2005, 2), in Holocaust studies or elsewhere. With the exception perhaps of Charlotte Delbo, analytical focus has tended to fall on male memories and narratives of life in the camps; this case study can thus be read as an attempt to bring two marginalized, eclipsed voices of female survivors further to the fore. In more general terms, the article can also be seen as a contribution towards a burgeoning body of work by scholars who situate themselves at the intersection between Translation Studies and Holocaust Studies in order to better understand how the linguistic and cultural dynamics of translation have shaped the transmission and reception of Holocaust writing. Susan Suleiman observes in 1996 that “While students of Holocaust literature are keenly aware of problems of language and representation, they have paid surprisingly little attention to a problem one might call representing – or remembering, or memorializing – the Holocaust in translation” (1996, 640). Almost a decade later, and that much needed critical attention is beginning to emerge in revelatory studies, underpinned by comparative textual and cultural analyses across a range of language pairs and genres.

Of particular note is the work of Jean Boase-Beier who approaches the poetry of Paul Celan from the dual and ethically engaged position of researcher and translator; she argues (2014) that reading a Holocaust poem for translation entails a more penetrating, exacting encounter with the silences, ambiguities, and tensions of the original and maintains (2011)

that these potent features must be retained in the translation where they might be perceived and interpreted by the new reader. Conversely, Peter Davies adopts a decisively descriptive approach to the translations of Borowski (2008), Wiesel (2011) and Höß (2014) to frame textual and paratextual decisions in terms of the status and function of Holocaust testimony in the target culture, and in reference to target language reader expectations. A recent special edition of *Translation and Literature* (2014) on 'Holocaust Testimony and Translation', edited by Davies, further signals the upsurge in interest in questions of how, why and to what effect Holocaust writing travels in translation. In addition to Boase-Beier's (2014) work mentioned above, specific cases in point are Sue Vice's (2014) examination of how reading false Holocaust testimonies in translation can lay bare their constructedness, as well as Angela Kershaw's (2014) exploration of how translation can restrict and release the complex network of intertextual references in French Holocaust fiction. Also of interest is Kershaw's (2013) detailed examination on how translated Holocaust fiction is marketed and received within Britain's literary landscape. More broadly, Bella Brodski (2007) understands translation as a trope for the textual reconstruction and transmission of memory, dedicating a chapter of *Can These Bones Live* to the connections between memorializing, mourning, and translation in the writing of Jorge Semprùn.

These studies unarguably serve to provide a more detailed and nuanced picture of the various ways in which translation functions as a mode of reinscribing and imparting Holocaust memory. In turn, this article endeavors to illustrate the strategies on which the mediation and reception of the two translated French testimonies are premised, supplementing thus the existing body of work in an empirical sense and proposing the figure of the secondary witness as a framework for better understanding the responsibility of the translator of first hand Holocaust accounts.

SECONDARY WITNESSING IN TRANSLATION

The notion of secondary witnessing can be traced back to the establishment of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies for which over 4,400 eye-witness accounts were recorded on videotape. One of the co-founders of the project, psychoanalyst Dori Laub, has reflected critically on his role as an interviewer, or “the immediate receiver of these testimonies” (1991, 76). He frames his position in relation to the survivor as “a companion on the eerie journey of the testimony. As an interviewer, I am present as someone who actually participates in the reliving and reexperiencing of the event” (ibid.). Such companionship and participation is a decisive factor in the very elicitation of the testimony; the interviewer bears witness to the witness and, in so doing, becomes an auxiliary to the telling of the story, a secondary witness. Accordingly, an ethical onus is placed on the secondary witness; as Thomas Trezise puts it:

The general lesson Laub draws from his intervention is that the listener actively contributes, for better or for worse, to the construction of testimonial narrative, that the receiving is analogous to the giving of testimony insofar as it involves a process of selection and omission, attention and inattention, highlighting and overshadowing, for which the listener remains responsible. (2013, 19)

The translator of the Holocaust testimony can likewise be placed in this position of receiving and responsibility. Although the dialogic immediacy that characterizes the relationship between the survivor-witness and interviewer-secondary witness on tape is, in many cases, no longer tenable in the context of translation⁵, it is nevertheless the case that the translator is a present and operative force in the bringing forth of the testimony in another language, as well as in its journey to another time and place. It is the translator who first participates in shaping the contours of the account, and only then can its content be repackaged and transmitted to a subsequent, broader audience in the target culture.

The role of any secondary witness is a demanding and a complex one which entreats the listener to hear affectively and exactly: “The listener has to feel the victim’s victories,

defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony” (Laub 1992, 58). At the same time, the secondary witness is called to be mindful of this attempt to feel and know the survivor, so as to preclude any collapse of the distinction between the two subject positions (ibid.). Hartmann expresses the dilemma of the secondary (or what he terms ‘intellectual’) witness as follows: “Every identification approaches over-identification and leads to a personifying and then appropriation of the identity of others. The distance between the self and other is violated and the possibility of intellectual witness aborted” (1998, 4). In order to avert such a failure, secondary witnessing must be predicated instead on the core value of empathy, an empathy which pertains in all contexts of the act. In the case of the historian as secondary witness, Dominick LaCapra insists on an ethically desirable form of empathy that “involves not full identification but what might be termed empathic unsettlement in the face of traumatic limit events” (2001, 102). Likewise, memory studies scholars Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer contend that the secondary witness “must allow the testimony to move, haunt and endanger her; she must allow it to inhabit her, without appropriating or owning it” (2010, 402). As I have argued elsewhere (Deane-Cox 2013), this empathic mode of bearing witness to the witness must also extend to the context of translation. However, the risk of crossing the threshold from empathy into over-identification is stronger here still given the appropriative thrust of translation and the subjective filter of the translator who may “feed [their] own beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and so on into [their] processing of texts, so that any translation will, to some extent, reflect the translator’s own mental and cultural outlook” (Hatim and Mason 1990, 11). If the translator of the Holocaust testimony is to serve as a secondary witness, as “the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time” (Laub 1992, 57), here in a new linguistic, cultural and temporal setting, then he or she must strive to engage empathically with that telling and to respect the distance that separates him or herself from the survivor. Otherwise,

the testimony is at danger of being overwritten by the assumptions and the excesses (hearing too much) or insufficiencies (hearing too little or inaccurately) of the translator, at which point the testimony will cease to function as such.

However, participation in the communicative exchange is not restricted to the witness and the secondary witness alone, for the account that emerges from this encounter can also be heard by additional audiences and used to different ends. Although Laub does not address this point explicitly in his work, Trezise sees there a “suggest[ion] that the reception of the Holocaust survivor testimony requires not only attending to the voices of witnesses while remaining aware of one’s own, but also attending, with equal self-awareness, to the voices of other listeners” (2013, 9). And within the paradigm of the translator as secondary witness, those other listeners are the translation readers as well as other interested parties such as literary agents, publishers and editors, their presence and needs positioning the translator, once again, in that familiar continuum bounded by source and target concerns. Or, as Francis Jones writes, “the call to the primary other (the source-writer or source-culture) must be tempered by a constant awareness of ‘the other other’” (2004, 723). Referring here to his experiences of translating literary texts against the backdrop of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, Jones clearly foregrounds the dual obligation of the translator whose loyalty towards the source text writer is in ever-present negotiation with the differentiated social, ethical, ideological, aesthetic, economic etc. goals of these ‘other others’.

In this respect, the loyalty of the translator as secondary witness can never be wholly and exclusively be ascribed to the Holocaust survivor; there are no unique circumstances which might allow the translator of any published target text to stand outside the communicative context in which he or she operates. Such a position is doubtless implausible. But the impossibility of absolute loyalty does not exclude the very real possibility of privileging the original survivor’s account, of listening attentively despite, or even in the face

of, the demands of other parties. For the translator is never an impartial mediator, situated squarely between source and target values; to think otherwise, according to Maria Tymoczko, leads to “the evisceration of the agency of the translator as a committed, engaged and responsible figure” (2007, 7). Indeed, the translator as secondary witness who purposely decides that their first and foremost obligation is to the survivor becomes the very embodiment of a translator as an ethically motivated agent.

At the same time, this agency functions to dispel the similarly restrictive idea that translators are irrevocably beholden to the norms and expectations of the target culture. Of course, there may be implications for translation decisions that fall outside of established conventions and values; non-publication, censorship and poor sales are amongst the most obvious. But there is also a danger in overemphasizing the influence exerted by the target culture norms in the translation process. Siobhan Brownlie (2007, 155-7) has argued that adopting a broad normative approach has its blind spots since the specific motivations behind the decision to translate can vary from one text to the next, translation strategies may fluctuate within a given text, and there is often no neat concurrence between distinct norms and distinct time periods given the potential of norms to co-exist, reappear or be challenged at any moment. In other words, the engaged translator will necessarily take the wider cultural context into consideration, but will proceed in accordance with their own agenda, be that in line with or in opposition to supposed prevailing norms.

In her work *Disappearing Traces: Holocaust Testimonials, Ethics and Aesthetics*, Dorota Glowacka (2012) also gestures towards translation as an ethically charged act of bearing witness, where translation is understood to function on various levels in Holocaust testimonial writing: the original witness translates the self from past to present and often across multilingual contexts, while subsequent interlingual translations are framed in Levinasian terms as “a response to the summons from another language, the language of

another” (ibid., 94). Glowacka also proceeds from the premise that the events of the Holocaust exist in the realm of the unspeakable, so that any act of witnessing will be suffused with communicative loss. Nevertheless, Walter Benjamin’s concept of ‘pure language’ is proposed as restorative mode of telling; specifically, Glowacka suggests that the call of the other can be answered across Babelian disunities of language by means of translation that initiates “linguistic complementation” (Benjamin 2000, 21), namely the blending and synthesis of source and target languages that culminates in pure language. For Glowacka, a translation that responds ethically to the other is one that draws on multiple linguistic repertoires in order to transmit and ensure the survival of the testimony; only then can it transcend the limitations of the monolingual utterance.

However, while this view of translation certainly calls attention to the responsibility of the interlingual translator in the witnessing process, numerous tensions arise if pure language is pressed into the service of concrete textual communication. First, the concept of pure language is an abstract one whose end goal is the elevation of language itself to an always distant point where language “no longer means or expresses anything but is [...] that which is meant in all languages” (Benjamin 2000, 22). It is a matter of form alone, and its realization through translation “ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship of languages to one another” (ibid., 17). Conversely, the translation of content is considered by Benjamin to be a redundant task: “any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information – hence, something inessential” (ibid., 15). On the one hand, this conceptualization fits with discourses of unspeakability and trauma – the very act of telling, the manner in which it is told, is more important than what is told. But on the other, it is difficult to reconcile this stance with the demands of secondary witnessing: how will the referential function of a testimony endure if the task of the translator is to invariably defer meanings? And how will the relationship

between the original and secondary witness be sustained if precedence is given to the relationship between languages? James E. Young cautions against an exclusive emphasis on poetics in Holocaust narratives: “By seeming to emphasize the ways we know the Holocaust to the apparent exclusion of the realities themselves, critics threaten to make the mere form of study their content as well” (1988, 3). This warning is particularly pertinent in the context of pure language which would seem to offer all but a restricted, abstruse mode of secondary witnessing; a mode that neglects the facts (as understood by the survivors) of existence and suffering, and one that certainly eschews over-identification, but does so by promoting the linguistic over and above the human.

When we move from the abstract to the concrete to consider Benjamin’s proposal of literal translation strategies as a means of approaching pure language, obstacles to secondary witnessing are still discernible. According to Glowacka, Benjamin’s literalness will instigate a process whereby “native words are transformed from an inscription of belonging into the mark of strangeness” (2012, 99), and the translated testimony reader is forcefully confronted with and called to respond to the (multi)linguistic and experiential alterity of the other. The claim that translation, as a signal of difference, “can potentially stand guard against linguistic ethnonationalism, remaining vigilant against the sedimentation of words into tools of oppression, exclusion and discrimination” (ibid.) strongly echoes Lawrence Venuti’s claim that foreignization “can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism” (1995, 20). But, although foreignizing translation can be revelatory and responsive to the needs of the other, it can also conceal under the weight of its impenetrability: as Tymoczko questions, “how do we distinguish resistant translations from translations that are unreadable?” (2000, 37). The danger here is that the reader finds nothing on which to hinge their reading and response, thereby rendering translation if not ineffectual as a mode of address, then at least diminished in what Glowacka regards as its “potential to

create communities of speakers” (2012, 101). So, while Glowacka is right to insist on the ethical responsibility of the translator to preserve and transmit survivor testimonies, neither pure language nor its textualization as literal translation are perhaps the most enduring bridges across the divide between the other and the other other.

Instead, the translator who serves as an ethically committed secondary witness is one who listens astutely and empathically to the survivor’s story, giving primacy to its preservation and not to any lofty ideas of pure language or the assumed demands of a target culture, all the while aware that some concessions must be made in the name of accessibility. Admittedly, though, discussions of the secondary witness have predominantly remained notional and detached from empirical practice. The following case studies will therefore direct attention towards more applied considerations of secondary witnessing in order to explore the implications of actual textual translation decisions, while also attempting to discern the extent to which pressure has been exerted by external factors.

Given the ethical dimension of secondary witnessing, the comparisons between source and target testimonies will be openly evaluative. In this sense, my analytical stance is informed by Phil Goodwin who has challenged the displacement of ethical questions in translation by technical labels such as ‘free’ or ‘literal’, ‘foreignizing’ or ‘domesticating’; one of his aims is “to remind us that translation always takes place within a human context” (2010, 23) and, consequently, that it is “almost wilfully absurd to view the translation question in these circumstances as a purely technical one” (ibid., 24). By consciously moving beyond the realm of objective description, the question of translation as secondary witnessing can thus be fully foregrounded as an ethical one. The stakes are high; the translator has a clear responsibility towards the Holocaust survivor, and, whether they have a conscious awareness of this obligation or not, the ways in which the translator (dis)continues the original act of witnessing merit a critical and a vigilant approach.

Humbert and Maurel: translated experiences

How have the translators of Humbert and Maurel engaged with the survivors' stories and how have their translation decisions impacted on the process of secondary witnessing? Before turning to the analysis itself, it is worth briefly underscoring a basic premise of this study, namely that, although written accounts of the Holocaust may have been borne of an onerous struggle with language, such accounts should not be placed under the sign of the ineffable. This is not to deny the extremity of the events, but rather to acknowledge the efforts that witnesses have made to put their lived experiences into words. Accordingly, both content and form are fundamental to the transmission of survivor memory; neither can be omitted from the analytical approach. First, while there may be some slippage between lived experiences and their verbal representations, this should not undermine the potential of words to tell or to record. As Pascaline Lefort argues, "the existence of testimonies shows that the camp survivors [...] have successfully dealt with the unspeakable, moved beyond its limitations" (2012, 585, my translation), while Zoë Waxman likewise affirms that "Language may not be adequate to convey the horrors of the Holocaust, but this does not mean that nothing can be said" (2006, 175). In short, saying something is understood as the counterpoint to ineffability. Secondly, the form of that saying is also central to renouncing silence. Although Young's (1988, 3) previously discussed warning against an exclusive focus on form is to be heeded, it would be equally restrictive to dismiss the revelatory function of poetics in Holocaust accounts, since, as Margaret-Anne Hutton contends, "such literary and rhetorical traits can be seen to function as aids to communication" (2005, 69). So, if the form and content of words have been simultaneously charged with the task of communication by the original witness, then the secondary witness is compelled to uphold and preserve those referential and

aesthetic dimensions. The examples below will thus consider how and to what effect the translators have responded to the communicative efforts of Humbert and Maurel.

On irony

One of the most striking narrative features of the testimonies of both Maurel and Humbert is the way in which they draw on irony, verging on dark humour, in order to record their physical experiences and to signal their resistant stances in the face of such suffering.

Referring to its use in Holocaust testimonies, Hutton has noted that “irony, as a non-literal mode, requires the reader to decode the unspoken message. When and if these conditions are met, a powerful bond based on what remains unsaid is created, and communication is intensified” (2005, 84). But for the reader of the translated testimony, this potential bond already hinges on an act of decoding, or hearing the unsaid, as carried out by the translator. Critically, if the translator does not pay sufficient heed to irony, then the voice of the survivor and the adverse conditions of which they speak risk being submerged in translation, which would mark a collapse of secondary witnessing.

Maurel’s account is, from time to time, accentuated by litotic observations that are caustically delivered in a single sentence. Indeed, a good number of these have been heard and re-inscribed in the English versions by her translator, Summers. Accordingly, where Maurel downplays her brutal treatment at the hands of the guards by remarking that “Il est apparu très vite que j’avais une tête à claques” (1957, 49), this sardonic tone is preserved in the translation as “It soon became apparent that my head invited blows” (1959, 39). And where Maurel declares that “C’est à cause de [Frau Schuppe] en grande partie que les Françaises mouraient si bien” (1957, 87), the mordant inflection is paralleled in English, where the reader learns that “It was mainly because of her that the French were dying in such satisfactory numbers” (1959, 71). By preserving Maurel’s irony, Summers offers the

translation readers an insight into both the daily threat of punishment and death in the camps, as well as the survivor's defiance in the face of such hardship.

But certain restrictions seem to have been placed on the transfer of irony that is self-deprecating or particularly sensitive. In the first instance, Maurel, reflecting on her physical and emotional dishevelment, comments that “Nous devions être si ridicules à voir [We must have been such a ridiculous sight]⁶” (1957, 81-2); in contrast, the translation lessens the derision in its more neutral estimation that “we must have presented an incongruous sight” (1959, 66). Secondly, Maurel is scathing in her critique of the unthinking way in which people responded to her return to France. The question most frequently posed to the survivor was whether she had been raped, leading her to react as follows: “Finalement, je regrettais d’avoir évité cela. J’avais manqué par ma faute une partie de l’aventure, et cela décevait le public. Heureusement que je pouvais au moins raconter le viol des autres [I came to regret having avoided that. Through fault of my own, I had missed out on a part of the adventure, and that disappointed the public. Fortunately, I could at least tell them about the rape of others]” (1957, 185). Although Summers retains the ironic sense of regret expressed by Maurel, a few telling attenuations of the full force of the irony occur in the translation. The survivor's wry self-blame is first limited by the shift from the original active construction of ‘having avoided’ rape to a much more passive state in which she “regretted having *been spared* this” (1959, 154, my emphasis). Secondly, a tentative adverb is added to the passage: “*Seemingly*, by my own fault, I had missed one part of the adventure” (ibid., my emphasis) which detracts once again from the sardonic notion that she is guilty by deliberate omission. In addition, the discordantly positive ‘Fortunately’ of the original is replaced by a concessive adverb in the statement that “However, I could at least tell them of the rape of others” (ibid.), which has the potential to be read in a more straightforward manner.

Perhaps these changes were motivated by a sense of probity on the part of the translator, but this lessening of Maurel's irony effectively dampens a form of communication that the survivor relied on as both a means of communicating and of coping. Indeed, the cumulative effect of this strategy can be read in the *Kirkus Review* which describes the translation in the following terms: "More as a reminder, than as recrimination, this sensitive and softspoken memoir patterns the days spent over a period of two years in the concentration camp of Neubrandenburg" (n.d.). But the original is scathing, bold, outspoken. The review thus points to the potential of translation to fundamentally alter the tone of a given testimony.

The piercing use of irony comes even further to the fore in Humbert's writing, extending over entire passages. By way of illustration, Humbert describes the harmful and humiliating effects of working with acid in the rayon factory as follows:

J'ai passé l'âge des costumes genre Folies-Bergère. L'acide brûle naturellement non pas seulement notre peau, mais il brûle aussi le tissu de notre uniforme. Chaque goutte fait un trou... plusieurs petits trous réunis en font un grand. [...] Je fais voir à la gardienne que j'ai maintenant le sein gauche à l'air... elle a refusé de me faire donner une autre chemise, refusé une aiguillée de fil, refusé une épingle, il faudra que je travaille le sein à l'air ! [I'm past the age of wearing Folies-Bergère style costumes. Of course, the acid doesn't just burn our skin, it burns the fabric of our uniform too. Each drop makes a hole... several small holes join up and make a large one. [...] I let the female guard see that my left breast is hanging out now... she has refused to let me have another shirt, refused a needle and thread, refused a pin, I'll just have to work with my breast hanging out!] (1946, 217)

Although the translation starts off by capturing Humbert's glib tone in the statement that "I really do believe I am too old for this Folies-Bergère lark" (2008, 161), the remainder of the episode is conveyed in a more dispassionate manner which conceals the original flippancy:

The acid burns holes not only in our skin, but also, naturally, in our uniforms. Every drop makes a hole, and the little holes join up to make big holes. [...] I have shown the wardress how my left breast is now on view. She has refused to let me have a new shirt, a needle and thread, or a pin, declaring that I'll just have to work as I am. (2008, 161)

The comparative reduction in irony stems first from the shift in register from the irreverent allusion to “le sein à l’air”, her breast hanging out, to the more factual statement that “my left breast is now on view”. Mellor’s translation also neglects to repeat the phrase at the end of the passage and to retain the exclamation mark, thereby eliding the dry humour and self-ridicule of the original interjection. Another significant alteration comes at the same point in the translation with the introduction of reported speech as signalled by the verb “declaring”. So, whereas the free indirect speech of the original echoes Humbert’s attempt to make light of her deplorable work conditions, the translation effectively takes the words from the survivor’s mouth and reattributes them to the female guard. This is a move that strips Humbert’s words of the power to resist her inhumane treatment at the hands of the one who now speaks in her place.

Also suppressed in this passage is Humbert’s use of aposiopesis whereby the unfinished sentences silently, but deliberately, communicate the frustrating impossibility of her situation. The translation reader is thus no longer called on to sense the futility that lies in these discontinuities, which in turn detracts from Humbert’s ironic treatment of the scene. In point of fact, the use of irony is diminished elsewhere in the translation through the reduction in or omission of exclamation points and ellipsis; such is the case, for example, in Humbert’s account of an underwear inspection (1946, 180; 2008, 130) and the shared drinking bowl (1946, 184-5; 2008, 134).

The examples above reveal that, in some instances at least, the irony of both Maurel and Humbert has been palpably conveyed to the translation reader. At the same time, however, where the tone of that irony is neutralized, misappropriated, or its typographic markers discarded, the reader will be left with less immediate and identifiable clues on which to base their interpretation. If the irony should cease to function as such, then the critical and

unyielding voice of the survivor is also submerged by and in translation, marking thus a collapse of secondary witnessing.

On narrative time

Lawrence Langer draws a fundamental distinction between the linear movement of ‘chronological time’ and the more oblique dynamics of ‘durational time’ in Holocaust testimonies; the latter “relentlessly stalks the memory of the witness, imprinting there moments immune to the ebb and flow of chronological time” (1995, 22). This durational past does make its haunting presence felt in the accounts of Maurel and Humbert, albeit in different ways, with both survivors slipping between and across temporal perspectives in their shifting use of tense. The translator as secondary witness is then called on to listen attentively to the subtleties and significances of how the past is retold in the present of the survivor.

The passage in which Maurel recounts her arrival and processing at Ravensbrück is a revelatory example of how tense and aspect can serve to unsettle the narrative and point towards the abiding anguish of the survivor. It opens with alternating moves between narration in an imperfect tense that intimates the horrifyingly unending nature of the ordeal for the survivor and the use of the infinitive, an impersonal and timeless form that reverberates with the inhumanity and ubiquity of the guards’ orders. This sequence is followed by a sudden shift to the present tense, heavy with the weight of inescapable immediacy and dread, while the subsequent use of the perfect tense situates the survivor in the close aftermath of the event to convey a transitory moment of reprieve:

Les choses **se passaient** vite derrière les portes. **Déposer** les valises, **se déshabiller** en vitesse; on vous **arrachait** les vêtements à mesure. **Se coucher** sur une table, où une femme vous **maintenait** pendant qu’une autre **explorait** du doigt tous vos orifices naturels. **S’asseoir** sur un tabouret pour être tondue. Une main **fouage** dans mes cheveux. Je **n’ai pas été** tondue cette fois [Things **were happening** quickly

behind the doors. **Put down** the suitcases, quickly **get undressed**; your clothes **were being snatched** away as you went along. **Lie** on a table where a woman **was holding** you down while another **was exploring** all your natural orifices with a finger. **Sit** on a stool to be shorn. A hand **rummages** through my hair. **I have not been** shorn this time.]’ (Maurel 1957: 18, my emphasis)

The translated narrative undergoes an aspectual reframing that obscures the inescapable, interminable and durational thrust of the time to which these temporal manoeuvres attest in the original. Maurel’s arrival at the camp has been wholly recast by the translator in a simple past that disassembles the difficult relationship between the survivor and the lived experience:

Things **happened** fast behind those doors: **a moment to** set the bags down, to undress quickly, hastened on by hands that **reached** out to tear the clothing off; **a moment to** lie on a table, where one woman **held** us down while another **passed** an exploring finger into all our natural orifices; **a moment to** sit on a stool to have our hair cut off. A hand **rumped** my hair, but on this occasion **I was not** shorn (1959, 13, my emphasis).

The elision of the present tense marks, above all, a breach of attentiveness on the part of the translator as it fails to herald what Oren Stier has termed “the palpable presence of the past [...] [that] disrupts the space-time of the survivor” (2003, 87). But the use of the imperfect tense has also been passed over in the translation, leaving little indication that Maurel found herself suspended in the dreadful moments she described, while the replacement of the infinitive imperatives with the temporal phrase “a moment to” further masks the threatening persistence of the guards’ orders. Although objective details about Maurel’s arrival at the camp remain, the translation reader can no longer discern the more subjective painful blurring of temporal boundaries enacted by the survivor, and the appropriation of the narrative flow into one of chronological time therefore blunts the act of secondary witnessing.

The use of the present tense in Holocaust writing is widely held to be a narrative marker of trauma. As Anne Whitehead explains, “This method of narration emphasizes the traumatic nature of the memories described, which are not so much remembered as re-

experienced or relived” (2004, 35). However, an altogether different dynamic emerges from the writing of Humbert; her account begins with the diary entries made in the months prior to her arrest, and her ensuing experiences of imprisonment and deportation are also recounted in this immediate narrative style of the diarist. In his afterword to Mellor’s translation, Julien Blanc writes that Humbert “was consistent in using the present tense throughout” (2008: 275), but this statement is only partly true. On the one hand, the use of the present tense is undeniably frequent, signalling less the steely grip of durational time on the survivor, and more her own lucid control over chronological time. On the other hand, though, Humbert’s work does bear the traces of tense switching, from this dominant use of the present tense that speaks of resistance and strength to a sparing, but nevertheless compelling, use of the past tense that speaks too, in its own way, of defiance and escape.

The following example is telling in its understated shift from the immediacy of the present to the completedness of the perfect tense, transitioning through free indirect speech back to the present in an episode that details the survivor’s increased suffering due to acid burns and her descent into the confines of the cellar where prisoners supposedly had the opportunity to convalesce. Humbert writes:

Mes mains me **font** autant souffrir que les yeux ; j’**ai connu**, car j’étais seule à la cave, la signification de cette locution, « se taper la tête contre le mur » ; oui, j’**ai tapé** ma tête contre le mur, et puis je **me suis reprise**. [...] Pour mes mains, il **faudrait** des pansements humides, oui, mais il n’y **avait** pas d’eau... Alors, **essayons** autre chose. J’**urine** sur mes malheureuses mains, les chiffons qui me **servent** de pansements **sont** imprégnés de pipi... [My hands **are making** me suffer as much as my eyes; because I was alone in the cellar I’**ve known** the meaning of this saying, ‘to bang your head against the wall’; yes, I’**ve banged** my head against the wall, and then I’**ve pulled** myself together again. [...] For my hands, some damp bandages **would be needed**, yes, but there **was** no water... So, **let’s try** something else. I **urinate** on my pitiful hands, the rags that **serve** me as bandages **are** soaked in pee...] (1946, 252, my emphasis)

Here, the slippage into the use of the past perfect tense might be read as an attempt on the part of the survivor to contain her most unnerving memory of the event, marking it off as one

concluded, isolated incident before she finds the determination once more to take charge of her situation. If durational time is indeed pursuing Humbert, she turns its trap on itself to restrict and defy its reach, distancing herself temporally and emotionally from this horrific moment. The return to the present tense indicates thus a return to resistance, a return that is further paralleled in Humbert's flippant lexical choice and the dry humor of her ellipsis.

These fleeting, yet important, variations in narrative time are indiscernible in the translation, where the episode is retold consistently in the present tense:

My hands **are** as agonizing as my eyes; finding myself alone in the cellar, I **understand** the true significance of the phrase 'banging your head against a brick wall'. Yes, I **bang** my head against the wall. Then I **pull** myself together. [...] What I **need** for my hands is damp dressings, but there **is** no water. So **let's** try something else. I **urinate** on my wretched hands, soaking the rags that serve as dressings. (2008, 190, my emphasis).

The translator does not appear to have heard the undertones of defiance in Humbert's singular step into the past; or, this move may have been ignored in a misled endeavour to unify the temporal aspect of the narrative. The result stands as a warning against the potential dangers of inattention and appropriation in secondary witnessing; the lack of aspectual contrast mitigates the force of Humbert's renewed refusal to give up, while the omission of the ellipsis and self-deprecating tone once again hides the survivor's tenacity in the face of suffering.

On language

For many prisoners, experience of the Nazi camps was also marked by a confrontation with and assimilation of the language of their German oppressors, but also the Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, to name but the predominant tongues, of their fellow prisoners. The result of this linguistic conflation was the emergence of a 'Lagersprache', a vernacular particular to the camps that was necessary for communication between the prisoners themselves, as well as between the guards and the prisoners. In her testimony, Humbert remarks that, rather than

speak fluent German, “Je ne parle que ce charabia international, cet espéranto étrange que vingt million de déportés ont dû apprendre [I speak only this international gobbledygook, this strange esperanto that twenty million deportees have had to learn]” (1946, 296). Her narrative is interspersed with individual German words that resounded throughout her internment and served to shape her experience. Mellor retains, in large part, the echo of these discordant and often terrifying lexical items; by way of illustration, the English language reader is introduced to the concept of the “kommando” (2008, 115), to the “little coshes, known here as ‘*gummi Knüppel*’” (ibid., 128, original emphasis), to the “*Spinnerei*, or rayon mill” (ibid., 147, original emphasis) and to the markings, “G=*Gefangene*: convict” (ibid., 148) on the prisoners’ work uniforms. Nevertheless, there are a few occasions on which the lexical specificity of the camps is subsumed into standard modes of expression by Mellor. First, Humbert’s observation that the food in the Ziegenhain prison is “acceptable, mais *knap* [sic]” (1946, 286, original emphasis), is simply remediated as “tolerable but scarce” (2008, 219), without any attempt to retain the German term. Consequently, the translation silences the linguistic hybridity and alterity of Humbert’s ‘strange esperanto’, while simultaneously obscuring the misspelling (German: *knapp*) which attests to the survivor’s adequate but imperfect use of a German idiom, undoubtedly acquired as a result of constant food privations.

In addition, the prisoners would often create new turns of phrase, or rework existing ones, to convey the extreme conditions of their existence. Such is the case when Humbert and her fellow inmates adapt an idiom to capture the caustic effects of working in the rayon factory: “Selon notre expression « mes yeux coulaient dans ma bouche » [According to our expression, ‘my eyes were running in my mouth’]” (1946, 245). The translation omits reference to the singularity of the expression and also undoes its distinctiveness, reverting instead to the recognizable idiom of “eyes streaming” (2008, 184). The reader is at once

disallowed access to the extent of the suffering and the process of linguistic inventiveness that characterized life in the camps.

Language too plays a prominent role in the testimony of Maurel which bears the traces of the German, Polish and Russian with which she came into contact. Summers' translation, in turn, demonstrates a keen sensitivity to these markers of otherness, preserving a vast array of German orders (Raus!; Schnell!; Aufstehen!), insults (Schweinehund; Schmutzstück), and the nomenclature that designates the reality of the camps (Revier; Verfügbar; Strafstehe; Kretze). Snatches of Russian and Polish are also to be heard in the translation, while verses of French poetry and song are retained in their original form and then followed by their interpretation in English. The preservation strategy is an effective one, serving to provide a distant reverberation of the Babelian disquiet that prevailed in the camps. It is only on the rare occasion that the non-translation is discontinued, that the real force of appropriation comes to the fore. Notably, this occurs when the German command "Achtung!" (1957, 50, original emphasis) is articulated in the translation as "Atten-shun!" (1959, 40). Instead of a German imperative, an order now rings out that suggests the diction of a stereotypical British sergeant major in an act of appropriation that closes the reader off from a distinguishing verbal feature of the camps.

Of further linguistic significance is the process whereby Maurel and her companions 'Frenchify' some of the camp vocabulary: "Nous avons transformé *Kopftuch* en « coiffe-tout », *Schüssel* en « jusselle », *Nachtschicht* en « narchiste », *Schmutzstück* en « schmoustique ». Et les brutes en uniforme qui nous surveillaient, les *Aufseherinnen* était pour nous les « officerines » [We transformed *Kopftuch/headscarf* into 'coiffe-tout', *Schüssel/bowl* into 'jusselle', *Nachtschicht/nightshift* into 'narchiste', *Schmutzstück/piece of dirt* into 'schmoustique'. And the brutes in uniform who guarded us, the *Aufseherinnen/female overseers* were for us the 'officerines']" (1957, 15, original emphasis).

This assimilation of German words into a French pronunciation resonates with Reiter's reflection that "The highest priority for concentration camp prisoners was to lessen the alien character of their experience. They were helped in this if they could name new things with their existing vocabulary and thus include them in the horizon of the familiar" (2000, 99).

However, the significance of this use of language as survival has been overlooked by Summers who, in her translator's preface, begins by explaining the etymology and pronunciation of "coiffe-tout", "schmoustique" and "officerine", but then goes on to undermine the prevalence and dismiss the importance of the remaining terms, claiming: "Certain other words, like *Schüssel*, a bowl or basin, pronounced *jusselle* by the French, *Nachtschicht*, nightshift, which became *narchiste*, occur only once or twice in the French text and have been omitted in this translation for simplicity's sake, though they might have added local colour" (1958, 10). This approach to the survivor's own appropriation of the German words attests to a further act of appropriation on the part of the translator, one that fails to heed the importance of the re-naming process. For these words lend more than a touch of 'local colour' to the depiction of life in the camps; they represent a strategy of survival and of resistance. Evidently, Summers has made the decision to privilege simplicity over complexity in order to facilitate a more fluid reading experience in English. In so doing, though, Summers also closes the reader off from the entangled linguistic landscape of the camps and from Maurel's coping mechanism amidst the unfamiliar. At this point, the translation strategy stands as a barrier to secondary witnessing.

On accuracy

Survivor testimonies are generally not held to be reliable sources of fact given the reconstructive fallibility of memory and the alleged representational failings of words. As Aleida Assman has noted, "The survivors as witness do not, as a rule, add to our knowledge

of factual history; their testimonies have, in fact, often proved inaccurate” (2006, 263). But this does not preclude the possibility that, at any moment in the telling, survivors can fully and precisely convey the kind of empirical, objective information valued by historians⁷. Although it may reasonably be presumed that this latter type of information is more readily discernible and less problematic for the translator as secondary witness, the following example from Summers’ translation of Maurel’s testimony would suggest otherwise.

At the beginning of her account, Maurel records that:

Le convoi dont je faisais partie [...] a été immatriculé à Ravensbrück sous les numéros 22.000. J’étais le numéro 22.410. Au bout d’un mois de quarantaine, le convoi des 22.000 a été envoyé à Neubrandebourg [The convey I was part of [...] had been registered in Ravensbrück in the 22,000s. I was number 22,410. After a month in quarantine, the convoy of the 22,000s was sent to Neubrandenberg]” (1957, 13).

As prisoners entered the concentration and work camps, they were assigned a matriculation number; for Maurel’s particular French convoy, registration began at the number 22,000 and her own number was 22,410. However, it becomes clear that Summers has misinterpreted this numerical information as in the English version we read that the convoy was “registered **and given numbers**. I was number 22,410. At the end of a month of quarantine, **the 22,000-odd** were sent to Neubrandenburg” (1959, 8, my emphasis). Here, the number which assigns *identity* to the group, i.e. the ‘convoy of the 22,000s’, has been misattributed by Summers to the *size* of the group. Nor is this erroneous tally an isolated occurrence, for the translator then reworks Maurel’s observations in Chapter Four in line with her own reckonings.

Consequently, where Maurel documents that “En automne 1943 le camp de Neubrandebourg contenait environ 2.000 femmes [In the autumn of 1943 the Neubrandenberg camp contained around 2,000 women]” (1957, 38), that “le convoi des 22.000 était pourtant bien mélangé [the convoy of the 20,000s was nevertheless well mixed]” in terms of political and religious beliefs (ibid., 41) and that “nous étions 2.000 sur le terrain [there were 2,000 of us on the parade ground]” (ibid., 46), Summers purports that “the camp at Neubrandenburg contained

approximately 22,000 women” (1959, 30), the French “numbered 2,000” (ibid., 32) and the camp was “22,000 strong on the parade ground” (ibid., 37). Whether the reversal of the numbers stems from a misplaced attempt on the part of the translator to ‘correct’ an inferred inaccuracy can itself only be surmised. But it does seem as though Summers was not fully aware of the dehumanizing Nazi practice of replacing prisoner names with numbers.

Nor does Summers appear to have an understanding of the camp classification system of colored markings. Following liberation, Maurel has her friend remake “mon numéro et mon triangle rouge [my number and my red triangle]” (1957: 171) in order to avoid being mistaken for a German; these items are stripped of their specificity and their personal resonance for Maurel in the translation as “a triangle and some numerals” (1959: 143). The implications of such an inattentive treatment of the serial numbers and statistics are such that, not only does Summers obscure the imposed identity of the convoy, but the capacity of the labor camp is also inflated well beyond its actual dimensions. In line with Maurel, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos* places the number of female prisoners in Neubrandenberg at “almost 2,000 at the end of February 1944” (Strebel 2009, 1215); the translation thus runs the risk of misinforming its readership, and of giving ammunition to the Holocaust deniers who “are quick to seize upon errors and inaccuracies in witness accounts” (Hutton 2005, 33).

Regrettably, the errors and inaccuracies in this case are all those of the translator; worse, they have made their way into both reviews and scholarship, as a result of which the misinformation becomes more broadly disseminated. In 1959, the *Catholic Herald* printed a review of *Ravensbrück* in which it is noted that at Neubrandenberg “some 22,000 women, including 2,000 French, were engaged in munition works” (1959, 3). The *Kirkus Review* similarly goes on to record that “Neubrandenburg numbered some 22,000 women” (n.d.) on the basis of the translation, while the entry for Maurel in *The Jewish Holocaust: An*

Annotated Guide to Books in English also states that “Over 22,000 women were sent to Neubrandenburg during the war” (1995, 192). Of even more significance is Rochelle G. Saidel’s (2004) work, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*. Drawing explicitly on the English translation of Maurel’s account, Saidel challenges the statistics of another scholar as follows: “Morrison cites Maurel that there were two thousand women in the camp in late 1943, but she wrote there were twenty-two thousand women”, and she then refers the reader to *An Ordinary Camp* (the title under which the US edition was published) “regarding this discrepancy” (ibid., 250n. 12). Of course the unfortunate irony here is that the real discrepancy is to be found in the translation, not the original. In reference to Holocaust scholarship, Kuhlweck notes that “large quantities of primary source material have been translated into English, and many conclusions have been drawn from texts read only in translation” (2007, 62). The above is a clear example of how translation can substantially (in both senses of the word) alter this interpretation of the camps that is presented to the translation receiver.

And yet, in the face of such distortion, it is also important to bear in mind that translation has the potential to retransmit the accuracy and precision with which life in the camps has been reported in the original testimony. Such is the case in Mellor’s translation of Humbert’s account; although the survivor focuses less on the quantitative dimensions of the various camps to which she is sent, there is sustained evidence of a high degree of concordance between the details presented by the primary and secondary witnesses. Take for example the exactitude with which the classification system at Krefeld has been explained in the translation: “The Russian girls have a label sewn on their clothes, a little rectangle of blue material with the word ‘*Ost*’ in white” while the Polish women wear a “yellow lozenge with a dark-blue ‘P’” (2008, 132, original emphasis). Similarly, the complex mechanical process Humbert was forced to learn in the rayon factory has been recorded with careful adherence to

the original telling, to reveal the torturous work of the spinner who, amongst other tasks, “grasps the filament in her left hand and, holding it between her index and middle fingers, takes it on to the glass wheel, follows it through and pulls it towards the funnel slightly” (2008, 153). There does appear to be one isolated instance in which Mellor has misheard the dynamics of life in the camps. The bartering (and theft) of commodities was widespread amongst prisoners, and Humbert recounts that “Mon amie Martha [...] me promet, **contre** deux tartines, de me ravoir ma défroque [My friend Martha [...] promises, in return for two slices of bread, to get my old rag back for me]” (1956, 204, my emphasis). However, it would seem that Mellor has heard ‘entre’ as opposed to ‘contre’, and thus reworks the situation into one where Martha “promises me **between** two slices of bread that she will get my old rag back” (2008, 150). Although evidence of the theft remains in the translation, one of the common and vital practices that shaped the (often and necessarily unscrupulous) relationship between prisoners has been obscured on the basis of a prepositional slip. Nevertheless, Mellor’s translation rigorously attends to the cruel physical realities of the labor camps as experienced by Humbert, thereby attesting to the re-presentational contingencies of interlingual secondary witnessing.

MEMORY MEDIATION IN CONTEXT

It goes without saying that the translator is not the only figure involved in the transmission of the survivor’s account; when a translation appears, its packaging and intended audience are all shaped, to some degree, by context of production. By this token, the readership (the ‘other others’) that the translator as secondary witness reaches and their response to the testimony will be in large part be determined by the publisher, and not least by the ways in which the account is reframed by paratextual material. Although it is difficult to reconstruct a comprehensive account of all the editorial and contextual factors that have influenced the

translations of Summers and Mellor, and therefore their reception, it is nevertheless possible to retrace some of the wider socio-cultural and economic backdrop against which they appeared and offer some suggestions as to how the process of secondary witnessing is affected under such circumstances.

Despite the parallels between the original testimonies of Humbert and Maurel in terms of referential content and style, the moment of publication and the paratextual presentation of the English translations differ widely. Whereas the translation of Maurel's account is separated from its source text by just one year (i.e. 1957 to 1958), Humbert's work does not appear in English until some sixty years after its publication in France (i.e. 1946 to 2008). This discrepancy may in part be explained by the dynamics of both the source and target cultures, and in particular by changes in the prevailing attitudes towards survivor accounts.

To begin with Humbert's *Notre guerre*, its appearance in France in 1946 came at a moment when the literary field was becoming (over-)saturated with testimonial writing from recently returned deportees. According to Damien Mannarion, the accounts which appear between 1944 and 1951 are not simply motivated by a desire to tell: "in this period when [the survivors] say 'remember', they are really addressing their contemporaries and not future generations, [...] they want to denounce those responsible and see them condemned" (1998, 20, my translation). Given both the volume of published accounts and the contextual immediacy of their goals (acknowledgment of and justice for their sufferings), Humbert's source text may well have been rendered invisible to British publishers or translators alike. Neither was there an expansive audience for any such translation in the target audience at that time. This is not to suggest that British readers were closed to accounts from the Nazi camps; on the contrary, the problem, as identified by David Cesarani, was one of a market flooded by very raw, disturbing writing, as a consequence of which readership began to dwindle: "Reading these memoirs and testimonies it is easy to understand why, by the end of the

1940s, the public turned away” (2012, 20). And so source and target conditions contrived to obscure Humbert’s work. But in France, a recovery of her writing was instigated by the publishing house Tallandier in 2004 when they issued a re-edition of *Notre guerre*, thereby introducing the survivor to a new, broader audience. The text’s journey was succinctly described by Daniel Rondeau, a journalist for *L’Express*, as follows: “out of sight for years, often quoted by historians, here is *Notre guerre* once again” (2004, n.p.). However, there seems to be no direct link between the appearance of the new French edition and the introduction of Humbert to English readers in translation, for this second recovery came about only when Mellor happened across the original 1946 edition on French ebay (Mellor, 2008, np.) and initiated the translation process herself.

Likewise, the English version of Maurel’s *Un camp très ordinaire* appeared as a direct result of the translator. In this case, though, the link was of a more personal nature since Summers and Maurel shared a mutual acquaintance. According to a reviewer in *The Vassar Chronicle*:

Mrs. Margaret Summers of the French Department has just completed a translation of AN ORDINARY CAMP by Micheline Maurel. [...] Mrs. Summers became interested in this factual account of the author’s life in a German concentration camp through Mlle. Louisiene [Lucienne] Idoine, formerly of the Vassar French Department. Mlle. Idoine met Mlle. Maurel, the author of the original version at the German concentration camp of Ravenbruck [sic]. [...] Mrs. Summers decided to undertake the translation of Mlle. Maurel’s book, for she wanted people to know about these German camps. (1958, 3)

The relatively quick appearance of the target text can thus be explained through the biographical circumstances of the translator, as well as her desire to raise awareness of Nazi atrocities. For even though the translation was published more than a ten years after the liberation of the camps, Anglo-American audiences would still not have been familiar then with the full scale and horror of the events we now know as the Holocaust⁸. As Andy Pearce has argued, “We cannot speak of ‘Holocaust consciousness’ in the opening postwar decade or

so not simply because the substantive concept of ‘the Holocaust’ did not yet exist, but because [...] there remained considerable ignorance, ambiguity and variance” (2014, 12-3). Indeed, this rather patchy understanding is likely to have extended to Summers’ herself and may go some way to explaining some of her more problematic translation decisions, especially the treatment of the *Lagersprache* and matriculation numbers as discussed above.

Events in the source culture may also have had a bearing on the appearance of Summers’ translation, for the prominence of *Un camp très ordinaire* was greatly enhanced by the involvement of François Mauriac who helped to secure its publication in 1957⁹. Interest in survivor testimonies was on the wane in France at this time, and Mauriac felt a duty to remember “an abomination that the world has determined to forget” (1957, 9, my translation). His presence as a preface writer inevitably lent weight and authority to the source text, and so, while Summers may have shared Mauriac’s ideological agenda, the additional symbolic and potential economic capital generated by his name would also have been appealing to Anglo-American publishers. Both Mellor and Summers then played integral roles in bringing the testimonies of Humbert and Maurel respectively to an English-speaking readership. But target culture publishers also made an undeniable contribution to this process of transmission, and a close examination of editorial paratext can reveal some of their underlying motivations and agendas.

What is instantly remarkable about Bloomsbury’s publication of Humbert’s account is the use of a modified title. Rather than adopt a literal translation of the original, i.e. ‘Our War: Diary of Resistance 1940-1945’, the publisher has instead opted for *Résistance: Memoirs of Occupied France*. On the one hand, this alteration can perhaps be explained by the reticence, first, to retain a possessive marker that would jar in a new cultural setting, and secondly, to present the work as a diary when only parts of the work can be claimed as such. But on the other hand, the revised title introduces some misconstruals of its own; for the

account is not restricted in scope to Humbert's time in an occupied France, but rather, the greatest proportion of the work deals with her experiences as a deportee. Indeed, this discrepancy has been noted by historian Simon Kitson who remarks in his review of the translation that "the English title is slightly misleading. Whilst the author's spirit of resistance is present throughout, almost two-thirds of the book is set in Nazi Germany" (2008, n.p.). Furthermore, the cover graphics which show two lovers on the banks of the Seine, with a barbed-wire barricade in the foreground, also accentuates an occupied Paris that figures only in the beginning of the memoir. It may well be the case that cynical ploys of marketing lie behind this repositioning of focus; it is perhaps no coincidence that the cover image in many respects mirrors that of *Suite Française*, the highly successful novel written by Holocaust victim Irène Némirovsky and published in English translation by Chatto and Windus in 2006. Likewise, the revised subtitle, 'Memoirs of Occupied France' also suggests a thematic correlation with the latter. Rather than present the work on its own terms, the publisher may have skewed its title in line with market forces.

However, within the covers of the translation, the reader is afforded an abundance of supporting editorial and allographic paratextual material, including a preface by writer William Boyd, photographic illustrations, an afterword by French historian Julien Leblanc (who provided the introduction to the French 2004 re-edition of the work), historical documents on the Resistance movement, and a bibliography for further reading. In contrast to, or perhaps as compensation for, the title of the work, this material ensures that the interested reader has the opportunity to arrive at a more informed understanding of Humbert's experiences, her character and her writing style.

The first UK edition of Maurel's *Un camp très ordinaire* was published in 1959 by Digit Books (an imprint of Brown Watson publishers) under the title *Ravensbrück*, leaving the *Catholic Herald* reviewer unable to answer the "mystery why it should have been

misleadingly re-christened” (1959, 3). One possible reason may be that Ravensbrück was becoming more recognizable to Anglo-American readers as part of the Nazi apparatus. For example, in 1954 Lord Russell published his book *The Scourge of the Swastika* which “enjoyed immense commercial success” (Pearce 2014, 16) and contained details of Ravensbrück and sketches of the camp drawn by former inmate Violette Lecoq, meaning that knowledge of its deadly function was expanding. The book cover also makes the prominent claim that the work is “As Real as THE DIARY of ANNE FRANK...” (1959, original emphasis), thereby suggesting that the publishers were tapping into an existing market demand for Holocaust writing, especially given the bestselling success of the latter’s translation in 1952.

But other factors suggest that interest in the work was being generated not along the lines of understanding, but of sensationalism. At the top of the cover is the quote from a *Sunday Times* reviewer that this is “a coarse, savage book”. Below this appears the bold and fallacious depiction of a voluptuous, perfectly coiffed, red-lipped prisoner who bears more than a passing resemblance to Vivian Leigh, gripping a barbed-wire fence, and dressed in a well-tailored, low-cut khaki dress. For Maurel’s work has found its way on to the list of a publisher who caters for an audience that enjoys tales of derring-do such as *Jungle Pilot*, *Against the Gestapo* and *Conscript*. Interestingly, writer Ken Worpole recalls his own experiences of *Ravensbrück* in his work on popular literature in Britain, placing it on a list of nineteen WWII-related titles (mostly written by men) that “were sold in millions and read in even larger numbers” (1983, 50). The popularity of these books appears to have been enormous, with Worpole claiming that “they were the staple reading diet of myself and my school peers, and the sales figures also suggest that they were the staple reading diet of the adult male British reading public, and, possibly, of a significant portion of the female reading public” (ibid., 50-1). But Worpole also sounds a strong note of concern about the way in

which the Digit Books edition has been visually presented to its readers, defining it “as part of the pornography of sadism” (ibid., 64). There can be no doubt the cover sets out to titillate, not educate; it sells a sexualized image of the survivor, rather than depict the arduous, unrelenting conditions of her captivity. Worse still is the US edition issued by Belmont in 1958 whose cover page depicts a distressed, yet appealing, blond behind whom stands a menacing SS figure, whip in hand. The original title has also been eschewed in favor of *The Slave*, while the cover carries an extract from Maurel’s text (but wrongly attributed to Mauriac) that asks “Were you raped? Were you beaten? Were you tortured?”, and in so doing, overtly fetishizes the testimony.

Unquestionably, these two publishers are extreme in their misappropriation; other editions released in the US by Simon and Schuster (1958) under the title *An Ordinary Camp* and in the UK by Anthony Blond (1959) as *Ravensbrück* are more muted in their cover design, opting instead for a plain barbed-wire motif. Nevertheless, both Digit Books and Belmont serve as an example of how publishers are positioned as initial gatekeepers to the survivor’s story, attracting a particular type of reader seeking action or cheap thrills. If Mauriac was troubled about forgetting in the source culture in the 1950s, there are parallel concerns to be raised in the target culture about the dubious ways in which the Holocaust was being remembered then.

The last issue to be addressed in reference to the framing of the target texts is that of the translatorial paratext¹⁰. In *Résistance*, Mellor has provided a ‘Translator’s Acknowledgements’ section in which she thanks those who helped in the process and alludes to her reasons for undertaking the translation of the original: “Surely it deserved to be more widely known? Surely it should be made available in an English translation?” (2008, vi). There are also extensive ‘Translator’s Notes’ (ibid., 325-57) at the back of the work which provide detailed explanations of references in the text to people, places and events. As

discussed above, Summers also establishes her presence around the text by means of the “Translator’s Note” which focuses on the use of *Lagersprache* and Maurel’s Frenchification of certain words (1959, 10-1). So, although the translatorial paratext is a clear signal to the reader that they are reading a text in translation, neither translator provides any sustained or penetrating reflection on the challenges and possibilities they may have confronted during their engagement with the source text.

I would like to argue that the paratext offers a space in which the translator can make explicit their role as secondary witness, in contrast to the text itself where “the task of the listener is to be unobtrusively present” (Laub 1992: 71) . Accordingly, the position of the translator as secondary witness can be mapped once more on to that of the interviewer for the Fortunoff project. Hartmann observes that throughout the recording process, “the interviewers are almost completely out of sight [and] seem not to intrude into the testimony, even as they continue to direct it” (in Young 1988, 166). In the same way as the interviewers are visible on the margins of the screen, so too can the translator be visible on the margins of the text, whether in a preface, in footnotes or any other form of translatorial paratext. This peripheral material can thus function as a record of how the translator has interacted with the original witness, how they have elicited and facilitated the transmission of a testimony from one setting to another, what obstacles they might have encountered, and how they regard their own ethical responsibility. Trezise has noted that, in the video testimonies, “the audible and occasionally visible presence of the interviewer(s) lends to the dialogical relation of witnessing a concreteness far removed from what may seem, in written testimony, to be only a disembodied interaction of pronouns” (2013, 34). The translator as secondary witness can thus add a concrete dimension to the transmission process by acknowledging their own role as listener to and perpetuator of the original act of witness. In so doing, the community of

receivers will be more informed, more alert to any potential barriers to communication and more conscious of the survivor behind the pronouns.

CONCLUSION: REMEMBERING FORWARDS

Translation, as a mode of remembering forwards, is not an unshakable one. Despite resisting a more perfidious and total lapse of memory, the above inquiry has shown that translation equally has the potential to distort, amongst other aspects, the factual, linguistic and tonal qualities encoded in the original telling, while paratextual material can also function as a site of appropriation and transformation. The extent to which a translator listens closely to the original telling may be the result of numerous factors: over-identification with the survivor, the onset of secondary trauma that leads to a distancing or a numbing of the translator, or, more prosaically, the temporal and editorial constraints imposed by publishers. In turn, the listening realized by the translator has the capacity to shape the response of the reader to the events of the past. In other words, the manner in which the reader positions him or herself on an ethical and epistemological level in relation to the Holocaust, as well as to the specific struggles of the survivors, will hinge on the strength and integrity of the bond established between the original and secondary witness. It has also become evident that the ties of that bond hold more securely in some parts of a translation than in others; within the boundaries of a given text, translation can serve either as an empathic re-telling or as a trespass.

Granted, this article has given more space to what, following Antoine Berman (2000), could be termed a “negative analytic” of translation, the emphasis here being on the forces that deform the survivor’s account. Peter Davies has warned against such a focus on the negative in reference to Holocaust translations, claiming that “What is missing from the discussion of translation is a sense of the far-reaching achievement [of translators]... If we move beyond melancholy reflections on loss, we are able to shed a much fuller light on the

role that translation and translators have played” (2014, 166-7). However, the reasoning behind my negative approach is twofold. First, the wider empirical evidence that emerged from my comparative analyses had a discouraging tendency to point in this direction, particularly in the Summers translation; the examples discussed above are a small, but representative sample of this trend. Secondly, the study should in no way be understood as a personal attack against the translators, but rather, as a means of accentuating the very real transgressive potential of translation as a form of secondary witnessing. By flagging up the lapses in secondary witnessing in these texts and underlining the translation strategies from which they stemmed, it becomes possible to inform future Holocaust translation practice and to prevent such breaks in transmission from reoccurring elsewhere.

It may well be the case that the all-hearing, non-appropriating figure of the secondary witness is an impossible ideal, but this does not mean that it is not one worth striving for. Speaking more broadly about the readers of Holocaust narratives, Colin Davis points out that “the best we can do may be to try to attend as honourably as possible to the traces of that which remains foreign to us” (2011, 40). Similarly, Francis Jones has proposed some basic guidelines for the translator working in sensitive circumstances, namely “a principle of maximum awareness of ethical implications together with one of least harm” (2004, 725). And so the translator as secondary witness is one who undertakes to be attentive and self-reflexive, and who weighs the better part of translation decisions in favor of the survivor. Although some of these endeavors will inevitably fall short of their mark, the crucial step is in the trying. It has often been noted in recent times that the need to document Holocaust testimonies is growing as the survivors themselves diminish in number. As these accounts continue to be committed to paper or audiovisual media, or are recovered from the past, so too does the potential increase for the communicative force of translation be brought

consciously and effectively into the service of the original witness and the perpetuation of his or her memory.

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¹ A notable exception to this distance between the one who remembers and the one who translates can, of course, be found in the phenomenon of self-translation. The conflation of these two positions necessarily raises an alternative set of questions to the ones I address here.

² Contrary to the anti-narrative stance adopted by literary theorists such as Cathy Caruth (1996), scientific studies have shown that traumatic experiences are recoverable and representable, as opposed to repressed and unspeakable. As is noted by Beverley R. King in *21st Century Psychology: A Reference Handbook*, "Overwhelmingly, the research supports the trauma superiority argument – memories for stressful experiences are not easily forgotten, especially the central details of the events" (2009, 452). For further criticism of Caruth, see Ruth Leys (2000) and Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weilnböck (2008).

³ This present study follows on from my (2013) work in which I also draw on secondary witnessing to scrutinize the English translation of Robert Antelme's (1947) *L'espèce humaine*.

⁴ Page references will here be given to the UK edition published in 1959 by Digit Books, an imprint of Brown Watson. See reference list for an overview of all available UK and US editions.

⁵ The retranslation of Wiesel's *La nuit* by his wife in 2006 is a rare example of proximity between survivor and translator.

⁶ All back translations in square brackets are mine and they serve two purposes: as normal, they allow non-French speaking readers access to the original, but they also demonstrate that a more attentive translation is possible.

⁷ For a discussion of how historians have rejected personal testimony on the basis of its supposed inaccuracies, see Laub (1992, 59-63)

⁸ The Eichmann trial is, at this point, still some years off. See Annette Wieviorka (2006) for a discussion of how the trial came to be a global watershed moment in Holocaust witnessing.

⁹ A year later, Mauriac would also help to bring about the publication of Elie Wiesel's *La nuit*.

¹⁰ I use this term as a means of supplementing Genette's (1987) paradigm of authorial, editorial and allographic paratext in order to carve out a more visible and definite space for the translator. See also Deane-Cox (2014, 27-9).