



“The Translation Cuddles up to the Original Like the Sheep to the Wolf” Nobel Prize Winner Elfriede Jelinek as a Translator

« La traduction se blottit contre l’original comme l’agneau contre le loup ». Elfriede Jelinek, lauréate du prix Nobel en tant que traductrice

Michaela Wolf

La traduction à l’épreuve de l’écriture : poétiques et expérimentations
At the crossroads of translating and writing: Poetics and experiments
Volume 25, Number 2, 2e semestre 2012

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018805ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018805ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)
Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN
0835-8443 (print)
1708-2188 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Wolf, M. (2012). “The Translation Cuddles up to the Original Like the Sheep to the Wolf” Nobel Prize Winner Elfriede Jelinek as a Translator. *TTR*, 25(2), 119–141. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018805ar>

Article abstract

Elfriede Jelinek’s stance towards translation is full of respect: her own experiences as a translator showed her that what she primarily did was “learning by doing.” Jelinek has produced about a dozen translations from English and French into German, mostly drama texts. As an author, she became famous for the innovative and provocative language with which she denounces patriarchal structures, the enduring oppression of women, and the insidious continuation of fascist ideology in Austria and other parts of Europe. Yet her model of literature bluntly opposes her model of translation. She has repeatedly said that as a translator she supports “basically the method of relatively literal translation”—a claim which can be easily proved by looking at her translations.

In my paper I will first give an overview of Jelinek’s translations (some of which are co-productions with other translators) and present her own views on translation, which will show that she is very much aware of the pitfalls of the translation activity. I will then analyze Jelinek’s notion of translation, followed by a short analysis of her translation of Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*. This will be the basis for my discussion of whether her ideas on translation, as expressed in several interviews and speeches, have been put into practice in her translation. It is, however, my assumption that Jelinek does not follow a strict set of translation strategies; rather, she engages intuitively with every new translation project.

“The Translation Cuddles up to the Original Like the Sheep to the Wolf” Nobel Prize Winner Elfriede Jelinek as a Translator¹

Michaela Wolf

Introduction

Recently it has been claimed that Translation Studies is experiencing a “creative turn.” It goes without saying that a “creative turn” claims to contest traditional notions of translation which stress the activity’s secondary nature and, in addition, foregrounds the figure of the translator as an autonomous, self-assured person.² At first sight, there is nothing to object to in these claims, or developments, if this change is really taking place. Over the last few decades numerous steps have been taken in the theory and practice of translation which challenge traditional views of translation and translator and which dispute hierarchical ideas of “original” and “translation” (see, for instance, Buden, 2005; Cronin, 2006; Wolf, 2008; Simon, 2012). Yet, once we connect these developments to the figure of the author, things become

1 I am very grateful to Kate Sturge for the translation of this article.

2 In the introduction to their essay collection, Manuela Perteghella and Eugenia Loffredo mention that “turn after turn, translation as concept, practice and scholarship has thus changed shape, initiating further shapes, and has accustomed itself to a position between discourses and disciplines” (2006, p. 1).

complicated: doesn't the view of literary authors as one of the key players in the "creative turn" in Translation Studies implicitly mean that authors are supposed to give a creative incentive to the translation activity which translators—obviously—are not, or not sufficiently, capable of doing? Subsequently, the question arises whether translators intrinsically can be expected to bear a creative potential in their activity, or whether at best they depend on authors for bringing to the fore this potential. This—again implicitly—would result in a hierarchical view of the figures involved in the translation field, something that undeniably is (still) a matter of fact but is exactly what Translation Studies has been struggling to transcend over the past decades. In addition, the discussion on the "author's death" (Barthes, 1977 [1967]) and the resulting problematic "translator's birth" which was already questioned in the 1990s (see Arrojo, 1997; for the context of art criticism see Wuggenig, 2004) has shown us that emphasising a dichotomous thinking of the figures involved in the translation process results in an essentialism which fixes existing relations and perpetuates hierarchical relationships in the translation field. Rosemary Arrojo has succinctly illuminated this stance:

If the conscious presence of the author is somehow expected to be found in her or his writing, and if the original is seen as the true recipient of its creator's intentions and expression, any translation is, by definition, devalued since it necessarily represents a form of falsification, always removed from the original and its author. (Arrojo, 1997, p. 21)

To come back to the context of "creativity," I would therefore suggest that we explore the relatedness of the author's and the translator's creativity and particularly scrutinize what they can contribute to elaborating a translation concept which helps to re-formulate the terms under which the translation process takes place and which takes into account the creative nature of writing in view of its potential to "negotiate" the power relations inherent in any writing process.

Regarding the second component of the "creative turn"—the "turn" itself—it seems obvious that there have been too many turns in Translation Studies in the last few years, but the existence of the term does testify to the visibility and the importance of the

phenomenon.³ The discussion of an academic discipline's shifts of paradigm might be seen as a sign of its establishment within the scientific community and a stage in the branch's "evolution" which allows its results and achievements to be questioned, also from outside. In her book *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (2006), Bachmann-Medick asks how "turns" generally come about in the humanities. According to her, a turn moves through three stages that characterize "turns" in general. The first stage is the expansion of the object or thematic field: this implies a shift from the level of object of new fields of research to the level of analytic categories and concepts. Secondly, the dynamics of turns is characterized by the formation of metaphors, such as "culture as translation." Metaphorization is transcended once its potential for insight moves across disciplines as a new means of knowledge and into theoretical conceptualisation. The third stage is that of methodological refinement, provoking a conceptual leap and transdisciplinary application (Bachmann-Medick, 2006, pp. 26-27; 2009, p. 4). With reference to my claim expressed at the beginning of this paper, the "creative turn" appears to be still at the first level of its process of establishment, as there is no evidence of the metaphorization of analytic tools in terms of "creativity." And the third stage seems to be still long in coming, as testified by Perthegella and Loffredo: "A 'creative turn,' then, is slowly taking place [...]. However, for this to happen effectively, it needs to be accepted and supported in the larger socio-cultural, economic and literary systems" (2007, p. 11).

This contribution aims at contributing to the debate on these issues by exploring Elfriede Jelinek's translation activity. The focus will be on her translation concept, which will be tested against her own particularly innovative and provocative style of writing. I will also ask whether her ideas on translation, as expressed in several interviews and speeches, have been put into practice in her translations.

3 I say so although I personally have proclaimed a "sociological turn" in our discipline (see Wolf and Fukari, 2007). For "turns" in Translation Studies in general see Snell-Hornby, 2006.

Jelinek: “Untranslatable Author” and Author-Translator

Elfriede Jelinek stands in a line of tradition with many other writers who have devoted themselves to translating alongside their own writing, or at least have occasionally taken up the task of the translator. The forms that these translation activities may take are multifarious. Often prompted by a situation of exile, and for other reasons too numerous to list here, many of these writers translate their own texts, thus engendering a special form of “encounter with the self” (Greiner, 2004, p. 119);⁴ others are able to afford the luxury of selecting texts for translation and can approach the work of translation with a kind of relish. In self-translation, creativity is a key factor, as is attested in statements such as “[t]he author who translates his or her own texts habitually transcends the limits of the original by means of creative procedures” (Fišer, 1998, p. 33); and once for self-translators it is a requirement to “have a cultural status in both language communities” (Jung, 2002, p.18), it seems indicated to fully exploit one’s creative potential. Norbert Greiner distinguishes between translators who find “congenial compatibilities in the work to be translated and pay reverence to them as translators,” and translators who “see the process of translating as something that resembles and complements that of creative writing” (*ibid.*, p. 112). In my introductory remarks I have already mentioned that there are some difficulties associated with perspectives of this kind; but what does seem relevant here is Greiner’s classification of the different motivations that writers may have for taking on translation work.

As will be shown, Elfriede Jelinek can be regarded as a writer who habitually crosses the borders between the two categories. Here, it is important to consider her view of translating against the background of her own literary work and her international reception. When Jelinek won the Nobel Prize in 2004 for what the committee called her “musical flow of voices and counter-voices in novels and plays that, with extraordinary linguistic zeal, reveal the absurdity of society’s clichés and their

4 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the German sources are my own.

subjugating power” (Nobel Prize, 2004), the reactions of the international public were quite divided, but critics like the ones describing her as an “unknown, undistinguished, leftist fanatic” (Schwartz, 2004) had the upper hand. It is a truism that Nobel Laureates do not receive the prize for mainstream literature; on the contrary. Additionally, in most cases the jury members (of the Nobel and any other international prize) assess not an author’s original works but their translations—though without mentioning that fact. This makes it all the more surprising that Elfriede Jelinek won the Nobel Prize, given that she herself has explicitly said she considers her works to be “untranslatable” and that audiences outside German-speaking countries would never understand them (Jelinek, 2004, cited in Kavenna, 2004). However, her statements seem to be contradicted by the facts: in many countries, Jelinek is viewed as one of the greatest contemporary German-speaking authors, and there is no doubt that the Nobel Prize has reinforced this high reputation.

Jelinek is a caustic and inconvenient critic of Austrian society and its Catholic and authoritarian environment, denouncing the hypocrisies of social conventions and patriarchal traditions. Accordingly, the main issues of her prose and theatre are the enduring oppression of women, feminism in general, and the menacing persistence of fascist ideology in Austria and other parts of Europe. When Jelinek arrived at the literary scene at the end of the 1960s with poetry publications and published her first books shortly after (*wir sind lockvögel baby!*, 1970; *Michael. Ein Jugendbuch für die Infantilgesellschaft*, 1972), she received little notice in the press, yet her first works already heralded her trenchant political and social critiques. Only her third novel, *Die Liebhaberinnen* (1975; *Women as Lovers*, translated by Martin Chalmers, 1994), aroused the interest of literary critics. When *Die Klavierspielerin* appeared in the bookstores (1983; *The Piano Teacher*, translated by Joachim Neugröschel, 1988), fears were expressed that the “breath-taking radical text” would probably be “terribly misunderstood” (Löffler, 1983, cited in Lamb-Faffelberger, 1994, p. 291). This fear proved to be valid. *Lust* (1989; translated under the same title by Michael Hulse, 1992) is considered the most successful work of the author in terms of linguistic brilliancy (Mayer and Koberg, 2006, p. 172). Regarding

translations into English, additionally to these novels numerous drama texts have been translated: *What Happened after Nora Left Her Husband, or Pillars of Society*, 1994; *Clara S.*, 1997; *In The Alps*, 2002; and so on (for more details see Görtschacher, 2004), scripts (*Malina*, 2000), single prose texts such as *Princess Dramas: Death and the Maiden I-V*, 2003; *Bambiland*, 2005, and a series of essays.

As a writer, Jelinek sees her task as showing “how economics, sexuality, discrimination and racism are all intertwined with each other” (Jelinek, cited in Packalén, 2005). Against this backdrop, perhaps the most striking thing when reading her works is her relentless language, the “cold gaze” she directs at social relations (Bartens, 1997, p. 50), the forensic descriptions of women’s and (other) outcasts’ lives. The Austrian writer and composer Olga Neuwirth points out Jelinek’s concern to allow, in the author’s own words, “language itself to get a word in” (Jelinek, 1989, p. 25):

What had always made an impression on me in Jelinek’s texts [...] is her distanced gaze at human beings and things, without compassion, the sharpness of her language, the unmasking deployment of linguistic quotations from everyday life, as well as the ironic coldness and disdainful eye of the satirist, who observes the environment like a scientist. (Neuwirth, 1997, p. 220)

The Nobel Prize jury praised Jelinek’s “extraordinary linguistic zeal”—but in view of the huge power of the author’s language, that statement seem almost trivial. Jelinek’s fundamental stance on language is expressed in the fact that unlike many other writers, she does not try to create a particular poetic language of her own which differs from everyday language. Instead, her texts are open to every “empty phrase, predictable cliché and platitude” (Schlösser, 2003, p. 74). By using automatised, everyday language in a carefully considered way, she “poisons” that language “to such an extent that, at least for the duration of the reading, it becomes unusable” (*ibid.*). One interviewer encapsulated Jelinek’s wish to subject socially relevant issues to continual attack by language. She noted: “These power structures that you record with a very

cold, analytical eye: you unmask them by translating them into language structures” (Winter and Jelinek, 1991, p. 13).⁵

But how can Jelinek’s experiments in language be translated? Is it not something almost beyond the capacity of translators to do? Jelinek herself has often asserted that her texts are simply “untranslatable”—and, indeed, how could they be translatable when she herself says of her language: “give us the set phrases and in they go, and another, and another, until they squirm under my hands in pain or perhaps because they have too little space” (Jelinek, 2000)? For Jelinek, writing is a processual matter for which the classical categories of prose, dialogue, theatre and so on do not apply. The boundaries between the genres are always fluid, and her oeuvre does not obey a fixed code or pre-conceived generic pattern. When it comes to translating, this means that the games with code and genre need to be translated as well if Jelinek’s literary objectives are to be even approximately fulfilled. Jelinek has said that her specific code consists in trying “to force language, often against its will, to disclose its own ideological content. [...] It is almost impossible to translate that into a different culture, a different language” (Jelinek, 2004, cited in Male, 2004, p. 33). She justifies her fundamental view that she is an “untranslatable author” (Augustin and Jelinek, 2004, p. 97) as follows: “because my puns, word and language games that arise from the phonetics and the sound of the language, cannot be transposed” (*ibid.* For the translation of Jelinek’s works into English see Fiddler, 1997; Chalmers, 1997; Vansant, 1997; Wolf, forthcoming.)

In order to illuminate Jelinek’s concept of translation in detail, it is essential to look not only at her comments on the translation of her works but also at those on her own activity as a translator. What view of translating does she set out there? Her attitudes to her own translating, set out in various personal

5 Jelinek explains this procedure with the following words: “I do not write about real persons, but about persons who materialize as language patterns. I always criticize language; I do so for instance in *Burgtheater* [a drama, 1985] [where I] criticize a language which in its perverseness enabled the fascist cultural industry and a never ensued denazification in this industry of entertainment” (Winter and Jelinek, 1991, p. 13).

attestations, seem—at least in part—to starkly contradict her innovative concept of language. An outline of her own problems in translating emerges in her statement that “translating is often like agitating in water: something that looked as clear as a spring now suddenly seems murky and muddy” (Jelinek, 1999a, p. 11). She sees translating as a “fascinating, creative task,” because the product of the labour is ultimately always something different from the original and becomes a “new work”—yet in many ways she attributes a secondary character to the activity of translating. For example, in a 1988 interview she comments on her translation of Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1976), a mammoth project that took her three years of uninterrupted work, that she did not feel any desire to bring in her own language—on the contrary, she wanted to subordinate herself completely to the author. In the same way, she believes that her translations might be criticised for clinging too closely to literalism (Fleischanderl and Jelinek, 1988, p. 25). In an interview of 2004 she says: “When I translate, I am in principle a follower of the method of relatively literal translation” (Augustin and Jelinek, 2004, p. 97). There are certain shifts in her view of translating: in yet another statement, she presents the view that it is quite admissible to spell out and strengthen the original’s points when translating:

Related to this are radicalisations in my choice of words and language: not discretion but excess, wherever possible. A lady of easy virtue can absolutely be called a whore so as to make plain the contempt and hypocrisy [...] of her customers, the superior gentlemen. (Jelinek, 1999b, p. 8)

What is certain is that Jelinek puts the recipient at the forefront of her attention, something accentuated even more by her divergent translation strategies for prose and for drama. When translating prose texts, Jelinek subordinates herself far more fully to the author than she does in her drama translations, where she argues for a freer form of translating that adapts more closely to the German language: as she says, she tries to put dramatic texts “into a German that is as everyday, modern and terse as possible” (Fleischanderl and Jelinek, 1988, p. 26). Likewise, she stresses that the translation strategy used will depend partly on the structure out of which and into which the text is to be translated (Augustin and Jelinek, 2004, p. 101). The balance of power between original

and translation certainly becomes obvious when she says: “The translation cuddles up to the original like the lamb to the wolf” (*ibid.*).

Jelinek’s attitude emerges with particular clarity in those statements where she discusses the relationship between author and translator. She argues that authors could be regarded as better translators in as much as they possess a greater capacity for intuitive empathy with foreign texts (*ibid.*, p. 97); she also emphasises that translating other writers has taught her an enormous amount for her own language and work: “Fundamentally, I have got more back than I could ever have given” (*ibid.*, p. 105).

Asked in an interview what generally prompts writers to translate other people’s works, she answers:

It may perhaps be a phallic need, a presumptuous claim to push your way into something Other. By that I don’t mean pulling a condom of your own language over the other text; it is more a longing for deep, total penetration of a textual body. (*ibid.*)

To be sure, the comments presented here come from a period when the author was no longer more or less obliged to take on translation work for financial reasons. That is reflected in the self-confident tone with which she explains her reasons for taking on a translation—and her use of a discourse that recalls her best-known and most scandalous novel, *Lust*.

Even if Jelinek regards translating as an enrichment for her own work—as she puts it, translating is “an incredibly good way of practising language” (Fleischanderl and Jelinek, 1988, p. 25)—when she compares the two activities she sets up a clear hierarchy:

The problem with writing, which causes me more and more psychological problems as I get older, is getting something out of nothing. But when I’ve finished a piece and translate, it’s an unbelievable relief to really subordinate myself to that. (*ibid.*)

In later years, a certain change can be observed in this viewpoint as well. In an interview held in 2004, Jelinek distinguishes

between one-off translations of great works, where she says she keeps a very low profile, and translating theatrical works that have already been translated several times, such as Oscar Wilde's plays (Augustin and Jelinek, 2004, p. 101). She adds: "At the moment Karin Rausch and I are translating [...] Oscar Wilde's *Ideal Husband*—but in such a way that it will be more like Jelinek's *Ideal Husband*" (Pohl and Jelinek, 2004, p. 3). As theatre reviews show (e.g., see Letnansky, 2011; Pesl, 2011), Jelinek's prophecy proved true: the piece, which had its premiere on 23 November, 2011 in Vienna, introduced both gender and financial discourse in Wilde's satirical comedy and did not spare with obvious hints to real persons of the Austrian political and cultural scene.

Elfriede Jelinek's Translation Practice

Jelinek began to translate very early in her career. Her first translations appeared in 1973 and were short prose texts, including work by Humberto Arenal and Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Poetry translations from Spanish and from American English followed in the 1980s. Particularly notable are the translations I have already mentioned, of *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon, which left a lasting mark on Jelinek's attitude to the act of translating, and her numerous translations of theatrical texts, especially those by Georges Feydeau and Eugène Labiche in the 1980s, Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* [*Der Jude von Malta*] (2001), and finally Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* [*Ernst ist das Leben*] (2004).

In what follows I will re-examine the points made above on Jelinek's concept of translation in the light of her translation of Marlowe's (1564-1593) *The Jew of Malta*. The play, first performed in 1592 in London, deals with the conflict of the three monotheistic world religions, and has often been described as anti-Semitic by literary critics. In the German-speaking world, the play was translated for the first time only in 1831; in very recent times there have been some productions based on Erich Fried's 1991 translation. In 2001 the well-known director Peter Zadek asked Jelinek to make a new translation of the text for his production at the Burgtheater in Vienna. For Jelinek, the play's taint of anti-Semitism was exactly what prompted her to take on the translation: "If you carry the history of Germany

and Austria on your back, so to speak, you have to be interested in anti-Semitism” (Hilpold and Jelinek, 2001, p. 29). Because of her poor knowledge of English and her difficult experiences around the Pynchon translation, she decided to carry out the work in collaboration with the translator Karin Rausch. Rausch provided a basic translation for Jelinek, who is responsible for the particularities of the text, for “sharpening and hurting” it, as Zadek says (2001, cited in Oberger, 2008, p. 25).

The production aimed to create strong links with the present day, addressing themes like the return of Jewish property or religious fundamentalism. Jelinek’s concern to “sharpen” the text finds stylistic expression in her incisive intensifications, especially in relation to political contexts and social criticism. As a whole she delivers an often casual-sounding, witty and ironic translation that, as the following examples will show, does not hesitate to introduce stylistic and discursive ruptures.

For example, while Jelinek’s translation harks back to the “classical” language of theatre, again and again she enlivens that language with modern and colloquial expressions. The opening monologue of the protagonist, Barabas, runs as follows:

<p>But he whose steel-barr'd coffers are crammed full, And all his lifetime hath been tired, Wearying his fingers' ends with telling it, Would in his age be loath to labour so, And <i>for a pound</i> to sweat himself to death. (my italics, Marlowe, 2008, Act I)</p>	<p>Doch der auf schweren Eisentruhen sitzt, gerammelt voll mit Gold, und wer sein Lebtag sich die Finger wundgeschunden hat mit Zählen, dem wärs im Alter wohl verhaßt, sich diese Plackerei noch anzutun und sich zu Tod zu schwitzen <i>für 'ne Tonne Kies</i>. (my italics, Marlowe, n.d., p. 4) [But he who sits on heavy iron coffers crammed full / with gold, and all his born days worked his fingers to the bone with counting, would in old age / be loath to bother with that drudgery / and sweat himself to death <i>for a pile of dosh</i>]</p>
---	---

When the slave Ithamore sends a letter to Barabas, he thinks aloud:

<p>Sirrah Barabas, send me a hundred crowns. (Marlowe, 2008, Act IV)</p>	<p>Kerl, Barabas, schick mir sofort einhundert Kronen <i>oder es knallt!</i> (my italics, Marlowe, n.d., p. 55) [Man, Barabas, send me a hundred crowns right away <i>or you're dead!</i>]</p>
--	--

The wild-west scene evoked in the translation here is further evidence of the switching of register that runs through the entire translation, used by Jelinek to create connections to the present day.

One last example demonstrates Jelinek's bizarre translation style. The courtesan Bellamira promises the slave Ithamore an hour of pleasure:

<p>Now, gentle Ithamore, lie in my lap. Where are my maids? Provide a running banquet; (Marlowe, 2008, Act IV)</p>	<p>Nun, süßer Ithamore, komm zwischen meine Beine, gleich laß ich dich ran. Wo sind die Zofen? Bringt ihm eine Jause!*</p> <p>(Marlowe, n.d., p. 55) [now, sweet Ithamore, come between my legs, / I'll let you go there right away. Where are the maids? Bring him a snack!]</p> <p>* Jause is an Austrian dialect word meaning a small casual meal</p>
--	--

The translation met with a very divided reception in the German-speaking media. While some called it a “lacklustre translation” that deletes the “grotesque, the bizarre, the tragicomic” aspects of the original (Gabler, 2001, cited in Oberger, 2008, p. 26) and is both “flippant and banal” (Sucher, 2001, cited in Oberger, 2008, p. 29), others found it “simply dazzling” and “sensational: light, precise [...], with a biting poetic directness, arranged for the

present day in cynical brilliance without a trace of modishness” (Schwabeneder, 2001, cited in Oberger, 2008, p. 28). One theatre critic sums it up:

In her subjective, headstrong translation, Elfriede Jelinek brings the conflict between antisemitic Christians and excluded Jews to a point with the moralist’s cold fury and her galloping language. (Hirschmann-Altzinger, 2001, cited in Oberger, 2008, p. 25)

Conclusion

Elfriede Jelinek’s concept of translation has undergone a substantial transformation over the years. Here, we must distinguish between her statements on translations of her works and her own translational practice. Her comments on translating indicate that she tends to be an advocate of faithfulness to the original and accords the activity of translating a rather secondary status overall. Interestingly, these views are not reflected in her own translations—at least not those of recent years: here she is an innovative, freehanded and highly manipulative agent. One might ask whether this does not give the lie to her own statements and show her to be the author who—to reiterate her own words—follows a “phallic need, a presumptuous claim to push her way into something Other” (Augustin and Jelinek, 2004, p. 105). Either way, Jelinek the artist enjoys a higher status than Jelinek the translator—which brings us back to the contribution of writers to a “creative turn” in Translation Studies. As long as the agents involved in the translation and the reading public, and certainly also the scholarly debate, work with a concept of translation that draws its meaning only from translation’s relation to the original, the hierarchical relationships between original and translation will endure. In a context like this, creativity cannot develop. It requires a concept of translation that, in a poststructuralist frame, regards translating as a continuous construction of meaning that is located within contingent networks and social discourses (see Simon, 1996). A starting-point for a translation concept of this kind is offered by Gentzler and Tymoczko when they write:

Translation thus is not simply an act of faithful reproduction but, rather, a deliberate and conscious act of selection,

assemblage, structuration, and fabrication – and even, in some cases, of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting, and the creation of secret codes. In these ways translators, as much as creative writers and politicians, participate in the powerful acts that create knowledge and shape culture. (2002, p. xxi)

There is, thus, evidently a connection between translational creativity and a concept of translation shaped by poststructuralism. As I have shown elsewhere, an expansion of the concept of translation in the sense of “cultural translation,” which has received valuable input among other things from anthropology or philosophy (see Buden and Nowotny, 2009; Pratt, 2010; Conway, 2012), and which above all has articulated a clear rejection of ethnocentric or national-culture variants of “translation,” has been accompanied by a reinforcement of the socio-political relevance to the agents involved in the translation process, first and foremost the translators themselves. This has given translation and translators more sharply drawn, politically marked features (see Wolf, 2008). In the context of translators-as-writers these aspects gain further momentum in that their “role” as both writers and translators might be “doubled” in terms of their “creative” engagement as social agents within the translating activity. In such a view, creativity helps to go beyond a view of translation as “an activity that people engage in as a kind of second best because they cannot find words of their own” (Pattison, 2006, p. 92) and puts into motion processes of imagination and invention. Thus, a “creative turn” can only get an impetus if creative thinking and writing goes hand in hand with the conceptualization of a wider concept of translation. Within such a concern, the writer who is also a translator—or may I say, the translator who is also a writer? —is no longer privileged once the hierarchical structure sketched above is self-reflexively questioned. This is the case with Elfriede Jelinek; however—and this also points to the complexities implicit in this claim—the contradiction revealed in my paper between Jelinek’s views on her own translation activity on the one hand, and that of the translators translating her work, on the other, illustrates that the cross-fertilisation between author and translator in terms of creativity is still in need of improvement. Elfriede Jelinek seems to be aware of this necessity, when she says, perhaps with a twinkle in her eye: “[whether I am writing or translating I feel] a curiosity

that drags me along like a dog following a scent” (Augustin and Jelinek, 2004, p. 95).

UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ

References

ARROJO, Rosemary (1997). “The ‘Death’ of the Author and the Limits of the Translator’s Visibility.” In Mary Snell-Hornby, Zuzana Jettmarová, and Klaus Kaendl, eds. *Translation as Intercultural Communication*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 21-32.

AUGUSTIN, Claudia and Elfriede JELINEK (2004). “Die Übersetzung schmiegt sich an das Original wie das Lamm an den Wolf.’ Elfriede Jelinek im Gespräch mit Claudia Augustin” [“The Translation Cuddles up to the Original Like the Sheep to the Wolf.’ Elfriede Jelinek in Conversation with Claudia Augustin”]. *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* [*International Archive for the Social History of German Literature*], 29, 2, pp. 94-106.

BACHMANN-MEDICK, Doris (2006). *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* [*Cultural Turns. New Orientations in the Cultural Studies*]. Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt.

BACHMANN-MEDICK, Doris (2009). “Introduction: The Translational Turn.” *Translation Studies*, 2, 1, pp. 2-16.

BARTENS, Daniela (1997). “Vom Verschwinden des Textes in der Rezeption. Die internationale Rezeptionsgeschichte von Elfriede Jelineks Werk” [“The Text Vanishing in the Reception. The International History of Reception of Elfriede Jelinek’s Work”]. In Daniela Bartens and Paul Pechmann, eds. *Elfriede Jelinek. Die internationale Rezeption* [*Elfriede Jelinek. The International Reception*]. Graz, Literaturverlag Droschl, pp. 28-51.

BARTHES, Roland (1977 [1967]). “The Death of the Author.” In Roland Barthes. *Images. Music. Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. Glasgow, Collins, pp. 142-148.

BUDEN, Boris (2005). *Der Schacht von Babel. Ist Kultur übersetzbar?* [*The Pit of Babel. Is Culture Translatable?*]. Berlin, Kulturverlag Kadmos.

BUDEN, Boris and Stefan NOWOTNY (2009). "Cultural Translation. An Introduction to the Problem." *Translation Studies*, 2, 2, pp. 196-208.

CONWAY, Kyle (2012). "A Conceptual and Empirical Approach to Cultural Translation." *Translation Studies*, 5, 3, pp. 264-279.

CHALMERS, Martin (1997). "In Zungen sprechen. Über die Mühen des Übersetzers, Elfriede Jelinek auf englisch gerecht zu werden" ["Talking in Tongues. On the Struggles to Do Justice to Elfriede Jelinek in English"]. In Daniela Bartens and Paul Pechmann, eds. *Elfriede Jelinek. Die internationale Rezeption* [*Elfriede Jelinek. The International Reception*]. Graz, Literaturverlag Droschl, pp. 181-195.

CRONIN, Michael (2006). *Translation and Identity*. London and New York, Routledge.

FIDDLER, Allyson (1997). "Zur Rezeption Elfriede Jelineks in Großbritannien – oder: Was geschah, nachdem die Briten Elfriede Jelinek gelesen hatten" ["On the Reception of Elfriede Jelinek in Great Britain – Or, What happened After the British Had Read Elfriede Jelinek"]. In Daniela Bartens and Paul Pechmann, eds. *Elfriede Jelinek. Die internationale Rezeption* [*Elfriede Jelinek. The International Reception*]. Graz, Literaturverlag Droschl, pp. 160-180.

FIŠER, Zbynek (1998). "Die Autorübersetzung. Ein Schritt über die Grenze" ["The Author's Translation. A Step Beyond the Border"]. In Ann Beylard-Ozeroff, Jana Králová and Barbara Moser-Mercer, eds. *Translators' Strategies and Creativity*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 33-40.

FLEISCHANDERL, Karin and Elfriede JELINEK (1988). "Schreiben und/oder Übersetzen" ["Writing and/or Translating"]. *Wespennest* [*Vespiary*], 73, pp. 24-26.

GENTZLER, Edwin and Maria TYMOCZKO (2002). "Introduction." In Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler, eds. *Translation and Power*. Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, pp. xi-xxviii.

GÖRTSCHACHER, Wolfgang (2004). "Recreation Rather than Reproduction. Anthony Vivis's Translation of Elfriede Jelinek's *Clara S.*" In Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Holger Klein, eds. *Drama Translation and Theatre Practice*. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Peter Lang, pp. 475-488.

GREINER, Norbert (2004). *Übersetzung und Literaturwissenschaft [Translation and Literary Studies]*. Narr, Tübingen.

HILPOLD, Stephan and Elfriede JELINEK (2001). "Eine braune Tracht Prügel" ["Good Brown Beating"]. *Der Standard*, 14 December 2001, p. 29.

JELINEK, Elfriede (1989). *Lust*. Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt.

JELINEK, Elfriede (1999a). "Für Utta Roy-Seifert" ["For Utta Roy-Seifert"]. In Übersetzungsgemeinschaft, ed. *Übersetzungsgemeinschaft 1981-1999 [Translators' Association 1981-1999]*. Wien, Übersetzungsgemeinschaft, p. 11.

JELINEK, Elfriede (1999b). "Das Über-setzen" ["Trans-Lating"] In Übersetzungsgemeinschaft, ed. *Übersetzungsgemeinschaft 1981-1999 [Translators' Association 1981-1999]*. Wien, Übersetzungsgemeinschaft, p. 8.

JELINEK, Elfriede (2000). *Gier [Greed]*. Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt.

JUNG, Verena (2002). *English-German Self-Translation of Academic Texts and its Relevance for Translation Theory and Practice*. Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang.

KAVENNA, Joanna (2004). "The Untranslatables." *Telegraph*, 30 November 2004. Available at: <www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3632510/The-untranslatables.html> [consulted 3 June 2012].

LAMB-FAFFELBERGER, Margarete (1994). "In the Eyes of the Press: Provocation—Production—Prominence. A Critical Documentation of Elfriede Jelinek's Reception." In Jorun B. John and Katherine Arens, eds. *Elfriede Jelinek: Framed by Language*. Riverside, CA, Ariadne Press, pp. 287-302.

LETNANSKY, Lisa (2011). "Korrupution und Heiterkeit. Oscar Wilde, Der ideale Mann" ["Corruption and Serenity. Oscar Wilde 'The Ideal Man'"]. Available at: <www.nahaufnahmen.ch/2011/12/12/oscar-wilde-der-ideale-mann-schauspielhaus-zurich/> [consulted 3 June 2012].

MALE, Eva (2004). "Die Unübersetzbare? 'Her mit den Redewendungen—bis sie sich winden vor Schmerz'" ["The Untranslatable? Give me the Idioms Until They Contort Themselves With Pain"]. *Die Presse*, 7 December 2004, p. 33.

MARLOWE, Christopher (2008). *The Jew of Malta*. Available at: <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/901/901-h/901-h.htm>> [consulted 3 June 2012].

MARLOWE, Christopher (n.d.). *Der Jude von Malta* [*The Jew of Malta*]. Trans. Elfriede Jelinek and Karin Rausch. Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt Theater Verlag.

MAYER, Verena and Roland KOBERG (2006) *elfriede jelinek. Ein Porträt* [*elfriede jelinek. A Portrait*]. Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt.

NEUWIRTH, Olga (1997). "Über die Faszination der Texte Elfriede Jelineks für eine/n Komponistin/en und über die Schwierigkeiten einer Realisierung von Partituren mit Texten Elfriede Jelineks" ["On the Fascination of Elfriede Jelinek's Texts For a Woman Composer and on the Problems of Realizing a Score with Texts by Elfriede Jelinek"]. In Daniela Bartens and Paul Pechmann, eds. *Elfriede Jelinek. Die internationale Rezeption* [*Elfriede Jelinek. The International Reception*]. Graz, Literaturverlag Droschl, pp. 220-224.

NOBEL PRIZE (2004). "The Nobel Prize in 2004, Elfriede Jelinek." Available at: <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2004/> [consulted 3 June 2012].

OBERGER, Birgit (2008). *Elfriede Jelinek als Übersetzerin* [*Elfriede Jelinek as Translator*]. Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang.

PACKALÉN, S. (2005). "Elfriede Jelinek: Provocation as the Breath of Life." Available at: <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2004/jelinek-article.html> [consulted 3 June 2012].

PATTISON, Anne (2006). "Painting With Words." In Manuela Perteghella and Eugenia Loffredo, eds. *Translation and Creativity. Perspectives on Creative Writing and Translation Studies*. London and New York, Continuum, pp. 84-94.

PERTEGHELLA, Manuela and Eugenia LOFFREDO, eds. (2006). *Translation and Creativity. Perspectives on Creative Writing and Translation Studies*. London and New York, Continuum.

PESL, Martin (2011). "Bitte recht oberflächlich! Der ideale Mann – Barbara Frey inszeniert am Akademietheater eine Oscar-Wilde-Bearbeitung von Elfriede Jelinek" ["Please Quite Superficial! The Ideal Man – Barbara Frey Directs at the Akademietheater an Adaption of Oscar Wilde by Elfriede Jelinek"]. Available at: <http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6311:der-ideale-mann--barbara-frey-inszeniert-am-akademietheater-eine-oscar-wilde-bearbeitung-von-elfriede-jelinek&catid=38:die-nachtkritik&Itemid=40> [consulted 3 June 2012].

POHL, Ronald and Elfriede JELINEK (2004). "Ich werde weiter untertauchen" ["I Will Continue to Submerge"]. *Der Standard*, 8 October 2004, p. 3.

PRATT, Mary Louise (2010). "Response." *Translation Studies*, 3, 1, pp. 94-97.

SCHLÖSSER, Hermann (2003). "Deutschland-Österreich" ["Germany-Austria"]. In Franz Haas, Hermann

Schlösser and Klaus Zeyringer. *Blicke von außen. Österreichische Literatur im internationalen Kontext* [*Glances from Outside. Austrian Literature in an International Context*]. Innsbruck, Haymon, pp. 54-98.

SCHWARTZ, Stephen (2004). "Oops.... They Did It Again. The Nobel Prize for Literature Goes to Elfriede Jelinek: Sensationalist, Communist, and Anti-American Hack." *The Weekly Standard*, 10 August 2004. Available at: <<http://www.weeklystandard.com/content/public/articles/000/000/004/746mjty.m.asp>> [consulted 3 June 2012].

SIMON, Sherry (1996). *Gender in Translation. Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. London and New York, Routledge.

SIMON, Sherry (2012). *Cities in Translation. Intersections of Language and Memory*. London and New York, Routledge.

SNELL-HORNBY, Mary (2006). *The Turns of Translation Studies. New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints?* Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins.

VANSANT, Jacqueline (1997). "Die Rezeption Elfriede Jelineks in den USA" ["The Reception of Elfriede Jelinek in the USA"]. In Daniela Bartens and Paul Pechmann, eds. *Elfriede Jelinek. Die internationale Rezeption* [*Elfriede Jelinek. The International Reception*]. Graz, Literaturverlag Droschl, pp. 196-219.

WINTER, Riki and Elfriede JELINEK (1991). "Riki Winter im Gespräch mit Elfriede Jelinek" ["Riki Winter in Conversation with Elfriede Jelinek"]. In Kurt Bartsch and Günther Höfler, eds. *Elfriede Jelinek*. Graz and Wien, Droschl, pp. 9-19.

WOLF, Michaela (2008). "Translation—Transkulturation. Vermessung von Perspektiven transkultureller Aktion" [Translation—Transculturation. Measuring the Perspectives of Transcultural Political Action]. In Translate/eipcp, eds. *Borders, Nations, Translations. Übersetzung in einer globalisierten Welt* [*Border, Nations, Translations. Translation in a Globalized World*]. Wien, Turia + Kant, pp. 77-91.

WOLF, Michaela (2008). Translation—Transculturation. Measuring the Perspectives of Transcultural Political Action.” Trans. Kate Sturge. *Transversal*, 2008. Available at: <<http://eicpcp.net/transversal/0608/wolf/en>> [consulted 3 June 2012].

WOLF, Michaela (forthcoming) “At the Centre of the Female Inferno”: Elfriede Jelinek’s Novel *Lust* in English Translation.” In Beverly Adab, Peter A. Schmitt and Gregory Shreve, eds. *Discourses of Translation. Festschrift for Christina Schäffner*. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien, Peter Lang, pp. 161-170.

WOLF, Michaela and Alexandra FUKARI, eds. (2007). *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins.

WUGGENIG, Ulf (2004). “Burying the Death of the Author.” *Transversal*. Available at: <<http://eicpcp.net/transversal/1204/wuggenig/en>> [consulted 3 June 2012].

ABSTRACT: “The Translation Cuddles up to the Original Like the Sheep to the Wolf.” Nobel Prize winner Elfriede Jelinek as a Translator—Elfriede Jelinek’s stance towards translation is full of respect: her own experiences as a translator showed her that what she primarily did was “learning by doing.” Jelinek has produced about a dozen translations from English and French into German, mostly drama texts. As an author, she became famous for the innovative and provocative language with which she denounces patriarchal structures, the enduring oppression of women, and the insidious continuation of fascist ideology in Austria and other parts of Europe. Yet her model of literature bluntly opposes her model of translation. She has repeatedly said that as a translator she supports “basically the method of relatively literal translation”—a claim which can be easily proved by looking at her translations.

In my paper I will first give an overview of Jelinek’s translations (some of which are co-productions with other translators) and present her own views on translation, which will

show that she is very much aware of the pitfalls of the translation activity. I will then analyze Jelinek's notion of translation, followed by a short analysis of her translation of Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. This will be the basis for my discussion of whether her ideas on translation, as expressed in several interviews and speeches, have been put into practice in her translation. It is, however, my assumption that Jelinek does not follow a strict set of translation strategies; rather, she engages intuitively with every new translation project.

RÉSUMÉ : « La traduction se blottit contre l'original comme l'agneau contre le loup ». Elfriede Jelinek, lauréate du prix Nobel en tant que traductrice — L'attitude d'Elfriede Jelinek à l'égard de la traduction est empreinte de respect : en effet, ses propres expériences en tant que traductrice consistaient essentiellement en un « apprentissage par la pratique ». Jelinek a produit à peu près une douzaine de traductions de l'anglais et du français vers l'allemand, surtout des textes dramatiques. En tant qu'auteur elle est devenue célèbre pour son langage novateur et provocateur grâce auquel elle dénonce les structures patriarcales, l'oppression persistante des femmes et la présence insidieuse de l'idéologie fasciste en Autriche et dans d'autres pays en Europe. Or, son modèle de littérature s'oppose carrément à son modèle de traduction. Elle a affirmé à plusieurs reprises qu'en tant que traductrice, elle soutenait essentiellement une méthode de traduction relativement littérale – ce dont atteste un examen approfondi de ses traductions.

Dans mon article, je donnerai d'abord un aperçu de ses traductions (dont certaines sont des coproductions avec d'autres traducteurs) et je présenterai ses propres vues sur la traduction qui montrent qu'elle est consciente des pièges de l'activité traductrice. Une brève analyse de sa traduction de *The Jew of Malta* de Christopher Marlowe me permettra de voir si ses idées sur la traduction, telles qu'elles ont été exprimées dans plusieurs interviews et discours, ont été mises en pratique dans ses traductions. Cependant, je pose l'hypothèse qu'elle ne se conforme pas à un ensemble strict de stratégies de traductions, mais qu'au contraire, elle réagit de manière intuitive face à chaque nouveau projet de traduction.

Keywords: Elfriede Jelinek, creative turn, author as translator, translatability, Nobel Prize

Mots-clés : Elfriede Jelinek, virage créatif, auteur en tant que traducteur, traductibilité, prix Nobel

Michaela Wolf

University Of Graz

Department of Translation Studies

Merangasse 70

8010 Graz

Austria

michaela.wolf@uni-graz.at