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Translating a Short Story by Hans-Jürgen Greif: Cats, Opera and Proverbs

by

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the challenges encountered when translating Hans-Jürgen Greif's short story "*N'appelle pas le chat pour mettre d'accord deux oiseaux*" into English. In the first part, the thesis briefly examines a biography of Greif and his previous works, before identifying some of the difficulties observed during the process of translation. Particular attention is paid to the translation of proverbs and the challenges of translating the short story structure. The thesis then investigates the differences between sentence structures in the source and the target languages, and how they affected the translation process. Following an overview of the opera world at the time of the story's setting and how it may have influenced Greif's work, the thesis provides an explanation of why this particular story was selected to be translated. The thesis concludes with an original translation of "*N'appelle pas le chat pour mettre d'accord deux oiseaux*" into English.

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Introduction

Over the years, the field of translation studies has grown in both stature and in esteem. Once thought to be a simple vessel by which a text was transformed from one language into another, today the translator is beginning to be recognized as a valuable professional, and one who has a distinct and complicated role in the process of literary creation. Part of the reason for this increased recognition of the translator's role is the presence of commentaries written about the process of translation. In this thesis, I hope to show, through an analysis of some of the struggles I came across when translating a piece of short fiction, that the translator's function should be a valued one, and worthy of consideration.

The short story that I chose to translate was taken from a collection by the German author Hans-Jürgen Greif called *Le chat proverbial*, or in English, *The Proverbial Cat*. It was published by L'instant même, a Québécois publishing house, in 2009. The story is called "*N'appelle pas le chat pour mettre d'accord deux oiseaux*" and it takes place at an opera house in Germany about two decades after the end of the Second World War. This thesis seeks to examine the particular difficulties I encountered in translating this work from French into English, and how I overcame these challenges. The thesis will also briefly illustrate some of the historical elements that contributed to the story's setting, such as the political situation in Germany at the time and the state of opera and music in the 1960s. Finally, I will explain some of my reasons for choosing to translate this text, and how the process of translation influenced and educated me as a translator.

I chose to begin the thesis with a brief biography of the author and his prior works because I feel that the author's linguistic and cultural background is an interesting one, and it was a key factor in my decision to translate one of his works. If the reader knows a little about the original author of the short story, they may have a better understanding of why he chose to write on this particular subject, and why his particular style of writing is unique. I chose to then immediately afterward detail some of the challenges I overcame when translating this work, because I felt that these issues were the main arguments in this thesis. I examined these difficulties in translation by researching theories in translation studies that were developed by well-known translation theorists, and then drawing my own conclusions, whether in agreement or dissent, based on my own experiences translating this text. Then, in the same way that I felt a biography of the author would be valuable in appreciating the text I translated, I chose to include background information on the state of opera in the 1960s, both in Germany and around the world, in order to better situate the story and its events in a global context. I conducted my research with the help of many music textbooks in order to form a clear picture of the world of opera at the time, and in the process discovered that the works of Mozart in particular were highly esteemed during the time period in which the story is set; therefore, I also will analyse the influences this artist had on the world in the post-WWII period.

I believe that this thesis is a valuable resource for the field of translation studies in that it examines some unique challenges that a translator does not encounter very often. In one short story, I had to contend with translating

proverbs, complex sentence structures, and German culture expressed through the French language, all while working within the established literary framework of the short story genre. A detailed analysis of these challenges could prove to be beneficial to the field of translation, and to those studying to become a translator.

Biography of the Author, and His Role in Translation

Part of the reason that I chose to translate this text was that I felt that the author had a unique and interesting background. Hans-Jürgen Greif was born in Völkingen, Germany in 1941. He eventually went on to teach French and German literature at Laval University in Québec City, where he currently holds the status of professor emeritus. As an author, he primarily writes in French, and in German as well. Currently, he coaches singers at the Conservatory of Music in Québec City (Véhicule Press). This experience of coaching classical singers clearly would have influenced Greif's decision to write this short story, and it is possible that the character of Hugo Rabe might have been at least partly autobiographical. Greif has been involved with the Conservatory since his arrival in Québec in 1970, and in 2006 he established the Hans-Jürgen Greif Foundation, which every year awards a prize to the top student studying at the Conservatory (Histo-Couch). The parallels between selecting a singer for a role in an opera and selecting the top voice student in a conservatory may have given Greif some insight into Rabe's perspective during the casting process of *The Magic Flute*. Some of Greif's other published works include the novels *L'Autre Pandore*, *La bonbonnière*, *Orfeo*, and *M.*, as well as another collection of short stories, entitled *Soloistes*.

The works of Hans-Jürgen Greif have been translated into English, French, German, and Spanish. The author even did a self-translation of his own novel *Le jugement* into German as *Das Urteil* in 2011. The issue of self-translation, and the decision of the author to translate his or her own work, has in the past raised interesting questions about the relationships between original creation and translation of a work. In her essay "When Is a Translation Not a Translation", Susan Bassnett claims that when authors self-translate their own text, it can be difficult to determine what constitutes the original text and what the translation is. In her example, Bassnett cites a book of poetry by Samuel Beckett, *Quatre poèmes*, in which the author wrote and published all four poems side by side in English and in French. An introductory note in the book indicates that the poems were originally written in French and then translated into English by the author. However, in comparing the two versions, Bassnett finds that many of the lines appear to present different themes and ideas, leading her to wonder if the English text could truly be called a translation of the French, or whether it should more accurately be called an English-language rethinking of the original concept (30-31). Her solution is to deny the titles of original and translation in this case and instead to consider them two versions of the same text that happen to have been written by the author in different languages (31). This is an interesting approach to consider, and it is perhaps the most appropriate one when considering texts that appear simultaneously in two different languages. However, this may not be the most appropriate response when considering Greif's self-translation of *Le jugement*. The original French work was published in 2008, and the self-

translation was published three years later in 2011. Therefore, in this case the lines between original and translation are not quite as blurred as they are in Bassnett's example of Beckett's poems. In the case of Greif's novel, he clearly wrote the original in French and then spent the next couple of years both publishing other original works and translating this work into his mother tongue of German.

The role of the self-translator is an interesting one, since as both author and translator, one would assume that the self-translator would enjoy a greater degree of freedom and perhaps of autonomy than any other translator would. After all, it would be difficult to argue that a self-translator did not manage to capture the original author's voice in translation. In his article on how self-translators are related to other translators, Shlomit Ehrlich muses that:

> Since the self-translator is a privileged translator who enjoys a level of freedom that other translators often lack, and the additional fact that self-translation takes place after the creation of the fictional world, then there is no reason to assume that the self-translator cannot add a new dimension. One might even say that the reality of the self-translator is not quite the same as the reality of the author – although s/he is one and the same person – thus making her/him no different from any other translator (244-245).

In this article, Ehrlich debates the notion that the self-translator should be considered to be significantly different than any other translator. Since the text is created and set before the process of translation begins (unless, of course, it is in a situation of simultaneous publication such as the one in which Beckett's poems were written), then the task of the self-translator is really no different than the task of the

regular translator. Since the work to be translated is already established, not even the self-translator can add anything new to the text. Ehrlich's article goes on to state that self-translators inevitably end up acting more like translators in the process of translation that they do original authors, since their primary goal in this task is to make their works accessible to others (245). However, what is interesting to the Greif self-translation situation in particular is that, to the best of my knowledge, Greif never really worked professionally as a translator, only as an author. Therefore, it would be difficult to agree with Ehrlich in stating that Greif is working primarily as a translator, since his entire writing career up until then has had him playing the role of author. This already strongly established authorship role of Greif's likely influenced his process of translation, and perhaps gave him more confidence to take liberties within the text and make changes to his original text when necessary.

There are those that believe that a self-translated work should not be referred to as a translation, but that it could more accurately be termed a bilingual work. Since the author is bilingual and is in charge of creating both versions of the text, one could say that the text exists as a sort of original in both languages, and therefore the text itself could be considered bilingual as well. In the introduction to their book *The Bilingual Text*, Jan Walsh Hokenson and Marcella Munson raise some interesting questions, such as, "Is self-translation a unique genre? Can either version be split off into a single language or literary tradition?

How can two linguistic versions of a text be fitted into standard models of foreign and domestic texts and cultures?" (ii) Personally, I feel that self-translation is indeed a unique genre, as it raises a series of questions and reflections discussed above that are not an issue in other types of translation. The dual role of the self-translator as both author and translator distinguishes him or her from those who take on only one role at a time, and for this reason I feel that the field of self-translation is indeed worthy of its own category and consideration.

The choice to mostly write in his second language is another fact that sets Greif apart from many other authors. While it is common, as a translator, to work from a second (or third) language into your mother tongue, as Greif did with *Le jugement*, what is rather uncommon is that the book was written in French in the first place. If one looks at the list of written works that Greif has produced, one would notice that the first works he ever wrote were in his mother tongue of German, but then after 1990 he published works written almost exclusively in French. There may be several possible reasons for this. One such reason might be that, after about two decades of living in Québec and being immersed in the Francophone language and culture, Greif had begun to consider French to have become his first language, as it was the language that surrounded him in his daily life, and also the language in which he gave many of his lectures and presumably the language he used to coach the singers at the Conservatory. As a German speaker living in Canada, I can personally attest to the fact that it is rather difficult to find natural situations in which one can speak that language in this country. It

could be that, over time, Greif had become so used to using French as his everyday language, and not German, that he decided that it made sense for him to write in that language as well. The reason might also be that Greif had simply decided that he wanted to try writing in the French language since, after all, he was a professor of French literature and most likely loved the language and its intricacies enough to try and craft his own works in that language.

While I have discussed Greif's efforts at self-translation, it is also important to note that his works have been translated by others as well. At present, probably the best-known translator of Greif's work is Fred A. Reed. The translation of Greif's *Orfeo* into English by Reed was notable in that it was nominated for the 2008 Governor General's Literary Award. The novel *Orfeo*, much like the short story I have chosen to translate, deals with the world of opera, and features opera singers and music teachers as its central characters. While the prize that year was awarded to Lazer Lederhendler's translation of *Nikolski*, originally written in French by Nicolas Dickner , Reed's translation was still highly praised. When describing Reed's work, the jury for the Governor General's Award wrote that "Fred A. Reed's English version of Hans-Jürgen Greif's *Orfeo* is a well-orchestrated masterpiece. His elegant translation captures the unusual voice of this harmonious work. Reed beautifully brings to life the Italian piano teacher (La Signora), the narrator (Weber) and the intriguing castrato, Orfeo" (Thrasher). The presence of an existing translation of one of Greif's previous works (and not a self-translation) was a reassurance that his rich and challenging works could in fact be translated. However, the fact that such a masterful

translation, and one nominated for a national award, existed led me to believe that his works could be translated well. It was exciting for me to find an author who is not hugely popular in translation, but whose works seem to lend themselves so well to translation, as I found in my own translation of this short story.

The Relationships between Canadian/Québécois and German Literatures

The background of the text I have chosen to translate for this project, much like the background of its author, is an interesting one. Though written by a German author, the book *Le chat proverbial* was written in French while the author was living and teaching at a Québec university. Therefore, it feels as though I am working with three languages and cultures here, instead of two cultures, which is typical of translation.

Since the story is set in Germany but was written in Canada, it is useful to examine some of the relationships between Canadian and German literatures. In their book *Translating Canada*, editors Luise von Flotow and Reingard Nischik have invited the contributing authors to discuss extensively the presence of Canadian literature in translation in Germany. We can examine some of these cases to perhaps learn something about German literatures present in Canada. In the essay that he contributed to *Translating Canada*, entitled "Translating the Canadian Short Story into German", Klaus Peter Müller talks about the history and the tendencies of Canadian literature exported to Germany. It is interesting to conjecture as to how these Canadian works existing in Germany might have influenced Hans-Jürgen Greif's decision to write this particular work. The central characters in his stories are cats, and each story is titled with a feline-centric

proverb. According to Müller, one of the reasons Germans were interested in Canadian literature was due to its "exotic otherness". The author points out that the image of Canada as an untouched wilderness full of animals had drawn Europeans to Canada since before the nineteenth century, and that this popular image continued to pervade the Canadian written works exported to Europe. He mentions Charles G. D. Roberts as an author whose stories were popular in translation in Germany: he had eight short story collections translated in the 1920s; these stories were then translated again between 1950 and 1973. His best-known collection of animal stories was *Augen im Busch* [*The Eyes in the Bush*], compiled from three story collections: *The House in the Water: A Book of Animal Stories* (1908), *Hoof and Claw* (1913), and *The Secret Trail* (1916); was first published in 1923 and was later re-edited in 1965 (Müller 55).

One of the better-known examples of a Canadian short story collection would be Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House*, which lightly satirizes this clichéd fascination with the Canadian wilderness. In the short story "The Loons", the main character Vanessa is forced to spend a summer with Piquette Tonnerre, a Métis girl who was a patient of Vanessa's father. As a young girl, Vanessa does not understand what life is actually like for the marginalized Métis people at the time, and "[u]nable to understand the realities of Piquette's life, Vanessa, the budding writer, reverts to romantic fantasies and pictures Piquette as a serene Indian" (Rosenthal 226). However, these fantasies come crashing down around Vanessa when she finally realizes that Piquette is not a tranquil, mythical figure of the forest, but rather a somewhat angry teenager who has no interest in the great

outdoors. This reveal of Piquette's real personality, and how it opposes Vanessa's ideas which had sprung from reading the kind of adventure stories that romanticize the Canadian wilderness, is portrayed in a subtly humorous way, and it was a way for Laurence to gently caricature the international perception of Canadian literature. The extensive presence of animal and wilderness related tales in Canadian literature affected not only the consciousness of Canadian writers at the time, but also the way that other parts of the world viewed Canadian writing.

Laurence's short story collection also happens to share some parallels with Greif's *Le chat proverbial*. In the first place, there is a common theme of animals running through both of the short story collections: in Laurence's work, there is a bird motif in all the stories in the book, and in Greif's case, of course, there are cats. In this way, both collections appear to fit the previously discussed mould of Canadian literature: animal-related tales that would appear to impart deep, folksy Canadian wisdom to the reader. There is, of course, an important distinction in setting to be made, as most of Greif's short stories in this collection take place in Europe and not Canada. Other similarities, though, are undeniable. However, it is interesting to learn that Laurence's short story collection was not originally going to be published in this form, if the publishers had had their way initially. In her memoirs, Laurence recalls that her editor at Knopf had tried to convince her to publish *A Bird in the House* as a novel, just like the other works in her "Manawaka cycle", a series of works centred on the fictional Canadian prairie town of that name. However, Laurence was adamant that she would rather the book not be published at all than published as a novel. She felt that the more

condensed medium and the possibilities for open-ended narratives better suited the subject matter of the book (Rosenthal 221). This is a prime instance of the bias against the short story as a literary genre: even when the medium is the best representation of a narrative's message, editors are still nervous to accept it, and in the majority of cases would still prefer that the form of the novel be used. I discuss this issue in more depth in a later section.

The lack of extensive short story collections in Canadian writing is a recognized fact among those who are familiar with Canadian literature, including Müller, who believes that "it must be assumed that the expert assessment of the quality of Canadian short stories had not yet been acknowledged by the book-buying public" (73). Even the works of Hans-Jürgen Greif reflect this fact. Probably Greif's most recognized work to date is the novel "*Orfeo*", which I have previously discussed above.

The presence of Canada as an independent entity with its own non-European identity has also historically presented a challenge to those who have tried to translate French-Canadian books into German for German audiences. Canada's linguistic situation is somewhat unique in that it has two official national languages which are of European origin. However, despite the fact that the languages themselves are familiar to European audiences, the culture and character of Canada are very unique. With its history and its reputation as a cultural mosaic and hub of immigration, there are certainly many European aspects to the country. However, with the influence of Aboriginals, immigrants from other continents, its own search for a distinct identity, and many other

factors, Canada has also managed to distinguish itself from its European roots and forge a different, non-Eurocentric image. How to reconcile the differences between Canadian literature's similarities to and differences from European literatures has often proved to be a challenge for those who work with Canadian literature in translation to Europe. There are various ways by which European, and in this particular instance German, publishing houses have attempted to make Canadian works appealing to their target audiences abroad.

In her essay "French, Female, and Foreign: French Canadian Children's Literature in German Translation", Nikola von Merveldt discusses the various ways in which French Canadian children's literature has been translated and exported to Germany over the years, and how those translations have often led to what could reasonably be referred to as misrepresentations of the text. One proclivity that these translators have, explains the author, is a desire to make the text more "European" in content and in tone, so as to make it more accessible, one would think, to the German reader, who may then have an easier time identifying with the story and with its characters. Translators may remove certain references to Canadian places or pop culture and replace them with a European counterpoint. Von Merveldt gives an example of a young adult novel called *Antoine et Alfred*, written originally in French by Yves Beauchemin (1992). The author compares the original text and the translation, and points out some of the changes made during the process of translation. Originally, the French text was published by *Les éditions Québec/Amérique* in paperback with a cartoonish cover illustration of the boy and a large anthropomorphic rat. The German edition, on the other hand, was

published by Erika Klopp Verlag in hardcover format with a cover illustration showing a boy and a more lifelike rat (actually, it almost looks like a weasel…) standing on a tree and looking down at a street of a European-looking town. Despite these changes though, there is still an acknowledgement of the text's Canadian origins. A translator's note on the opening page of the book mentions that the author is from Canada, and briefly notes his reasons for wanting to write the book in the first place. However, in the translation into German, the tone of the writing is altered, and Beauchemin's slapstick humour is significantly reduced. This change in tone may be thanks to the rat's change in gender, from male in the original French to female in the German translation. In the original, the rat is called Alfred, possibly because the word *rat* in French is masculine in gender. In German, however, *Ratte* is feminine, and the translator apparently thought that this feminine gender called for a female name, Albertine (von Merveldt 250).

The changes to this work, as pointed out by von Merveldt, would certainly change many aspects of the tone of the original work. The cover illustration, while it does attempt to situate the work away from Canada and into somewhere in Europe, can perhaps in my opinion be brushed aside as a minor detail (after all, many written works have numerous different versions of their cover art), especially since the translator's note at the beginning does ensure that the reader recognizes the author's Canadian origin. On the other hand, though, there is nonetheless the tendency to, despite the old saying, "judge a book by its cover". The cover of the German translation attempts to bequeath a European origin to the

text, despite its Canadian roots. While the text inside clarifies that the text was not created in Germany, there was a desire by the illustrator and publisher to naturalize at least the outward projection of the text (that is to say, its cover) for a German audience. Perhaps they were hoping that an adult in a bookstore, upon seeing the cover art of a German-looking village, would choose the book for a German child, thinking it would contain German elements familiar to them all. Whatever their reasons, the publishers felt the need to naturalize the very first thing that potential buyers see of the book. This could be an indication that the publishers did not have enough confidence in a book of Canadian origin, and felt the need to camouflage its non-German source, at least externally.

Also, it is not all that odd to find that the names of characters have been changed during the process of translation. While not mentioned by von Merveldt in her excerpt, the boy's name is also changed from Antoine to Andi. What is notable in this instance is that not only the name, but also the gender of the rat character is changed, simply because of the word *Ratte*'s feminine pronoun. While an interesting choice from a linguistic standpoint (and perhaps subject to controversy if one were to do a feminist reading of the original and the translation), what is more significant is that the gender swap also changes the personality of one of the title characters, and therefore the tone of the story. In the French original, Alfred the rat is described as having "*un sale caractère*" (nasty disposition) but also moments of great tenderness. According to von Merveldt, the German translation renders the rat a more gentle character, with fewer opportunities for slapstick comedy (250). Having read French Canadian children's

literature for years while attending French Immersion elementary school in Canada, I personally feel that the often-zany humour that Québec children's authors tend to use in their work contributed to my love of reading and the French language. That the translation did not manage to convey much of this unique humour in an attempt to cater to more European tastes is a great shame, in my opinion. French-Canadian children's literature has its own distinct and often entertaining identity, and it may well be that it is one to which European children might respond as well.

This distorting tendency to "over-Europeanize" Canadian works, however, does have an equally strong opposite inclination. There is also an inclination to preserve a certain "Canadianness" in a text, even though Canada's actual literary identity is so much broader and more varied than one might believe. In keeping with Klaus Peter Müller's point that many Germans saw Canada as an animal-infested wilderness, von Merveldt points out that many Germans were surprised at how modern and urban contemporary Québec literature really was. The German audience had already in previous decades established their own image of what Canada was as a country and thus of how its literature should reflect this only partially-informed projection. It is likely for this reason, states the author, that three of the five novels sold by *Les éditions de la courte échelle* (one of Quebec's most prominent publishing houses for children's literature) to German publishers featured strong nature themes, complete with untouched wilderness and animals. "Themes rather than literary qualities seem to have determined the decision to translate these works", states von Merveldt. "But since little contemporary French

Canadian literature conforms to the image of masculinity and wildlife adventure, it may be perceived as non-Canadian and therefore not importable as 'Canadian'" (252-253). These facts about the Canadian children's literature sold to Germany leads one to contemplate this vicious cycle: since there is no new literature being exported into Germany that will inform them of Canada's newer cultural landscape and literary themes, German readers are only interested in reading literature that adapts to their antiquated image of Canada and its people. This newer, arguably "more Canadian" body of written work is usually rejected by German publishers for being "not Canadian enough". One wonders, perhaps, whether Hans-Jürgen Greif was surprised by the current culture of Québec when he immigrated there in 1969, and how it may have differed from the image offered by the Québécois literature available in Germany.

The Challenges of Translating Proverbs

One of the most distinctive aspects in Hans-Jürgen Greif's *Le chat proverbial* is his choice to use a cat-related proverb as the title of each of the short stories contained in this work. The title of this collection has a double meaning: in the first place, it refers to this inclination to begin each story with a proverb, and therefore the "proverbial cat" refers to the particular cat that is the hero or heroine of each story. In its second meaning, this proverbial cat could refer to any cat that has ever been referred to in a familiar proverb. It is just as common today to hear "He let the cat out of the bag!" as to hear "The proverbial cat's out of the bag!" Alternatively, this proverbial cat could refer to the one killed by curiosity, the one who always came back, the one who caught the canary or any number of cats that

could be referenced by this. In a rather clever use of metonymy, Greif uses one word in his title, *proverbial*, in order to evoke all the stories, sayings and traditions about this particular animal.

The particular work I have chosen to translate is called "*N'appelle pas le chat pour mettre d'accord deux oiseaux*", which I have chosen to translate as "Never ask a cat to settle a dispute between two birds". Underneath each of his proverbial titles, Greif has added, in brackets, an interpretation in "plain" French of what each proverb means. In this story, the author's interpretation of this proverb is that "*Il est dangereux de demander à plus fort que soi de régler un conflit*. '' My English translation of Greif's interpretation would be "It is dangerous to ask one stronger than you to resolve a conflict". The fitting aspect of the titular proverb though, is that it evokes two key elements of the story: the cat, Marcel, and the two birds, the "nightingales" Jonathan and Laurent, whose competition for the lead operatic role makes up the core of the story's drama. According to Hans-Jürgen Greif, this particular story's titular proverb originates from India. Seemingly every country in the world has at least one or two proverbs about cats, and India is no exception. In his book *Behar Proverbs*, John Christian lists at least three proverbs relating to the feline species, including "A scalded cat dreads cold water", which is interpreted by Christian as meaning "Those who have suffered severely in any way are apt to have unreasonable apprehensions of suffering the like again" (85) and "A disgraced cat is as humble as a wife of the rat", which in its common Behar usage "is applied to one who has received a favour from another, and is therefore under an obligation to him"(143-4). This

book compiles a rather extensive list of more than 500 proverbs of the people of Bihar, a state in eastern India. These proverbs exist in their original state primarily in the Hindi language and also in the province's vernacular dialects. In the preface to his work, Christian is careful to state that "[n]o collection of proverbs therefore can be comprehensive enough to include all the variations prevalent in different parts of a province that is larger than England" (xii), a statement whose principal concept we can expand upon to refer to the entire country of India. There is a huge population in India, and among that population there is a huge diversity among the religions, languages and traditions; therefore, it would be nearly impossible to compile a list that could be reasonably called "exhaustive".

In my research, I have yet to find a specific Indian proverb that refers to cats, birds, and conflict in the same way that Greif's proverb does. This then raises the interesting possibility that Greif is inventing these "proverbs" himself and attributing them to countries as a way to add a further atmospheric element to his story-telling. This potentially apocryphal use of proverbs in the short story collection raises some interesting questions. The first, of course, is whether or not Greif created some or all of the proverbs in *Le chat proverbial* himself. In her essay on what constitutes a translation, Susan Bassnett talks about the tendency of certain authors to use false sources in their works, and also to sometimes claim that an original work of theirs is in fact a translation of someone else's work. According to Bassnett, "the literary device of the supposed source that the reader can never verify is a classic one that has survived across the centuries and is indeed a powerful convention" (30). It appears that Greif, along with many

authors before him, may have used a false source in order to boost his credibility among the readers of his short stories. In claiming that the proverbs that he uses are established sayings in other countries, Greif is trusting his readers to accept his source, and to either not attempt to verify the source, or to perhaps attempt a verification but then give up after finding the verification to be an impossible process. The reader accepts that the author is working from a reputable source, and thus allows the author to manipulate him or her throughout the narrative. In the words of Bassnett, the reader "both knows and does not know" that the author's source could be a false one, but for the purposes of being drawn into the story and better able to absorb the narrative, he or she accepts the source and the weight it gives to the story (30).

Part of what might complicate this definition of "creation" when referring to Greif's proverbs is that there are no hard and fast rules as to what constitutes a proper proverb. There is no clearly defined number of people that must use the expression, or number of times for it to appear in print, or amount of years that a saying has been in use, that will elevate a collection of words to the level of "proverb". Even the exact definition of a proverb is sometimes difficult to determine precisely. In her well-known text *In Other* Words, Mona Baker defines it as a sentence or phrase that is not just a series of words with their own signifiers, but rather a collection of words that have an additional significance when examined together. This collection of words also conveys aspects of a specific experience in the mind of the person reading or hearing the proverb, an experience tied to the context in which one usually hears the proverb (64). For

instance, we all know that a "gift" is something given freely to someone else, and that a "horse" is a farm animal of the equine variety. However, when taken together, we (at least "we" in the sense of one familiar with the English language and its sayings) recognize that a "gift horse" is a present that must not be too closely scrutinized or taken for granted. This collection of words is recognized as a proverb, or perhaps more accurately, as part of the proverbial admonition to "Never look a gift horse in the mouth".

Thus, even if Greif were to have invented these sayings himself, it would be difficult to dismiss them as not being "true" proverbs, since we have no real standard against which to measure their authenticity. True, if the proverbs were invented by Greif then the so-called country of origin of each saying would be false. However, since these sayings exist in print form, impart some manner of folk wisdom, and are read (if perhaps not commonly employed) by the people reading this book, should they perhaps be qualified as a proverb just the same? If we are to agree with Baker's definition of what constitutes a proverb, Greif's sayings could certainly qualify. The collections of words, once we have encountered them as titles of the short stories that reinforce the values presented in the proverbs, assume significance to the reader after they read them. Even if they were not recognized as proverbs or sayings before this short story collection was published, according to Baker's definition they could be considered as such if, after experiencing the book, a reader accepts that "Never ask a cat to settle a dispute between two birds" means that it is not a good idea to ask a person who enjoys greater power than yourself to settle a conflict. If the words as a collective

acquire a deeper meaning than the string of their individual qualifiers, then that collection of words could be called a proverb.

Just as one could never discover every proverb that has ever been spoken in a country, so too is it impossible to trace the origin of every proverb. This would be especially true of a country like India, with a very large and varied population, of which about 26% is still considered to be illiterate (Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs). While many of the proverbs of England or France, for instance, are often recorded in written form and many can be ascribed to well-known authors such as Charles Dickens or Agatha Christie, in a country like India proverbs and stories are often spread almost exclusively via word of mouth. In fact, even in countries like England and France, there are still many proverbs that are spread via word of mouth. This long-standing oral nature of the proverb is another aspect that can cause the proverb to be difficult to define. This difficulty, however, also adds to the importance of finding an accepted definition for what constitutes a proverb. One of the first challenges in establishing and defining the oral proverb is to attempt to trace its origins. Of the proverbs of the Bihar province, Christian writes:

> It is impossible now to trace the history of most of the proverbs, to say who were their authors, or how they originated and became current among the people. A few are no doubt of classical origin, and these are traceable to well-known Hindi works, such as the great Epics, the Ramayan, the Mahabharata, etc. Others are the remarkable saying of local poets, seers, and astrologers. For example, a great many of the clever sayings regarding agriculture, seasons, and pastoral subjects in general, are attributed to the two brothers Ghag Rae and Bhag Rae […] Others, again, are no doubt the sayings of clever villagers, being the outcome of experience or of popular superstition (xxix-xxx).

Even though Christian talks at some length in his introduction about the difficulties in deciding how to classify the proverbs he has compiled (whether to attempt to place them into categories, to list them alphabetically by the first letter of the first word, to group them by their intended meanings, etc.), he readily admits that these challenges are nothing compared to the difficulties that translators face in rendering the proverbs into a target language. He goes into greater detail about these difficulties encountered in the process of translation:

> To translate these by their literal meanings would, in most cases, be to make great nonsense in another language. Of course the only safe method in such cases is to translate the idiom of one language into the corresponding idiom of the other. But this proposition, which is so easy to state, is most difficult to carry out. Besides requiring a perfect familiarity with both languages on which the translator is at work, there are seldom exactly corresponding idiomatic expressions to be found in two languages – expressions which convey exactly the same ideas and no more and no less, and with equal force and terseness (xxxvii).

According to Mona Baker, one way to evaluate a speaker's competence in a second language is to observe their comfort in using and manipulating proverbs and idioms. The non-native speaker cannot hope to have nearly the same competence in using and manipulating proverbs as a native speaker, and it is for this reason that the translation of proverbs is so difficult for the translator (64). Adding to this difficulty is that proverbs do not usually have a direct equivalent in another language. Therefore, it is partly for this reason that proverbs are difficult to translate: there is often nothing in the translator's mother tongue that directly compares to the proverb in the target languages. There are many possible reasons

for this. Since proverbs, along with idioms and fixed expressions, only have their recognized values when considered as a group of signifiers, it is that much harder for all of the signifiers to have equivalents across two languages. If we expand upon this idea of signifiers using the ideas of structuralism proposed by Roland Barthes, the reader is not to be considered as a consumer of a text, but rather as a producer of the text (31). He also determines that the best text is one in which the words have a plurality of meanings (34). In fact, the entire theory of structuralism hinges on the idea that words do not have meaning on their own, but rather only have meaning in relation to other words. Also, according to Lois Tyson, "The idea that signifiers, or linguistic sound-images, do not refer to things in the world but to concepts in our mind is crucial for structuralism" (214). This concept of structuralism ties in well to Baker's theory of proverbs: that there is no meaning in individual words, only in an assemblage of words. The ideas of significance being solely in a collective are something that translators must consider in the translation of proverbs, and an aspect that further complicates the process.

Another possible reason for the difficulty in equivalence is that proverbs are primarily intended to impart a value or lesson deemed to be important onto the listener. Values can and often do vary greatly across cultures and, therefore, quite often across languages. In his works about his experiences in translating the Bible, Eugene Nida writes about the trials he would sometimes encounter when translating this religious text across different cultures with their own separate sets of values. For instance, in one case he recalls the challenge of translating a passage in the Bible for an audience in sub-Saharan Africa. The passage in

question is the rather well-known New Testament story of Jesus riding through the streets of Jerusalem on a donkey, mentioned in all four of the Gospels. In this passage, the people of Jerusalem wave palm branches and lay them down on the path before him, an event commemorated in the Christian faith during the celebration of Palm Sunday. However, in many parts of Africa, this laying down of palm branches is a sign of contempt for officials or chiefs. For obvious reasons, this element cannot be changed in the translation, but Nida explained that he did find it necessary to explain in a footnote the different values associated with this practice in the source culture (17). This difference in values that a translator will sometimes encounter in dealing with proverbs is another challenge. It is not always possible for a translator to add explanatory footnotes every time he or she encounters a proverb that deals with values foreign to the target culture, so the translator must find some way of conveying the same general ethics, but in a way that his or her audience can appreciate them.

A second reason to explain the difficulties inherent to the translation of proverbs is the fact that the specific words and images in one proverb are not all carried over into the equivalent proverb in another language. Let us consider, for instance, the English proverb "Do not put the cart before the horse" and its equivalent in French, "*Il ne faut pas mettre la charrue avant les bœufs".* Both of these proverbs have the exact same meaning, which is essentially to remind yourself to do things in the proper order, and not to get ahead of yourself. However, while the meaning is the same, and the proverb is formulated using a similar sentence structure in both languages, the specific words and images

chosen are notably different. The English version refers to carts and horses, whereas the French talks of ploughs and oxen. While one recognizes that both are beasts of burden pulling some contrivance behind them, the different images conjured by comparing horses to oxen and ploughs to carts are important enough to warrant notice. Traditionally, the horse is considered a much nobler and more beautiful animal, and the presence of a cart implies that the owner of the horse will be pulled along by his animal; he does not have to walk and tire himself. On the other hand, oxen are undeniably animals built for hard labour, and a plough, though pulled by animals, still requires a human to walk behind it and keep it straight and steady. There is also the suggestion of a clear distinction between urban and rural, respectively. The former proverb might be more likely to be recognized by people living in a city, whereas the second would be more applicable to those who live on farmland in the country. Therefore, even though a parallel expression does exist across these two languages, there is a difference in imagery and situation that would be difficult to convey across the two versions.

This difference in word choice is supported by a study mentioned by James Geary in his book *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How it Shapes the Way We See the World*. He compares the proverbs used by the French and the British. He found, for instance, that the British used gardening proverbs far more often than the French, and that food proverbs were far more popular in France than they were in Britain. National stereotypes, Geary reasons, might actually have an element of truth to them when you consider how separate nations use proverbs. Geary also points out that there are cultural differences to be noted

in the way that cultures can visualize the exact same proverb in completely different ways:

> There are also cultural nuances in the way proverbs are visualised. Asked to provide imagery for the idiom 'spill the beans,' a phrase used metaphorically more than 99 percent of the time, Americans reported that the beans are uncooked and in a container about the size of a human head. Brits, on the other hand, preferred baked beans in a tin can. There is no accounting for taste, not even proverbially (188).

It is therefore undeniable that different countries and cultures may perceive the same sort of ideas in very different ways. In his book, Geary mentions that "[b]oth nature and nurture are at work in the choice of proverbial metaphors" (188). In the same section, he cites the example of Dutch proverbs. Many of them are of a nautical nature, which is easily explained by the fact that Holland lies mostly below sea level, and because much of the country's economy has historically relied on marine trade. It makes sense then that the people of Holland would choose to employ metaphors and proverbs that contain objects and imagery familiar to them. For instance, let us say that one wanted to express the idea that, when a loss in a certain situation is inevitable, it is better to examine the options and then sacrifice whatever is least important. An English speaker would likely say something like, "Cut your losses and move on", whereas the Dutch have the saying "*Beter nog een anker kwijt dan het geheele schip*", which translates into the English language as "Better lose the anchor than the whole ship". While perhaps not one hundred percent identical in meaning, the two proverbs do both suggest that when facing the certainty of loss, one must try to

make the decision that leads to losing as little as possible. As one can see, the Dutch proverb uses nautical imagery with its anchor and ship, imagery that is not at all present in the English version. This is an example of the country using the same ideas common to an internationally known proverb, but adapting it in such a way that it will be familiar to its people and easily recognized within that culture.

In creating a proverb, however, care must be taken so that the proverb is potentially recognizable across different cultures. The idea of synthesizing a proverb in the first place (as Greif many have done) is an interesting one to consider, since typically a proverb is passed down throughout generations, oftentimes, as I have pointed out, via word of mouth. Proverbs, much like idioms and figures of speech, are often one of the last things that a foreign speaker learns in a language, and it takes a significant amount of time and constant exposure to a language and culture to even recognize that a particular grouping of words is in fact an idiomatic expression. Often, the only clue that a translator or reader has encountered an idiom is that the literal meaning of the words makes little or no sense in the given context (Baker 65). There is thus a significant challenge in attempting to establish a collection of words as a proverb, and to have it be recognized as such even by native speakers of the language, let alone by anyone who is a non-native speaker. While it is important that the source culture be able to recognize their own proverb and feel that it can pertain to their lives, in order for a proverb to become popular it should describe situations that could hypothetically apply to anyone. In the words of James Geary, "[t]o be effective, though, proverbs and parables must not be too specific. The scene must be

detailed enough to be credible but general enough to be universally applicable. Otherwise, minutiae outweigh metaphor and parable degenerates into anecdote" (Geary 191). However, I am still not convinced that it is possible for many proverbs to be accepted as "universal". Certain elements of proverbs can certainly be universal: their structure is often very similar across languages and cultures, and indeed sometimes this formulation is the only thing that can distinguish them as proverbs. However, the very fact that translators and non-native speakers often can only distinguish proverbs by their structure shows that, in terms of content, proverbs are often not universal. As pointed out in my earlier citation, it appears that even Geary can contradict his own ideas: he talks about the possibility of a proverb being universal, but even when the proverb is recognized across more than one culture, these two cultures can visualize the exact same proverb in different ways. This lack of universality leads to the proverb being one of the most difficult elements of language for the translator to work with.

It is also impossible to have a proverb be recognized universally when it refers to a thing or to a concept that is completely foreign to the non-native reader. Another aspect of the difficulty in proverb translation occurs when a proverb in the source language refers to something that is simply not known to the target language audience. Kwame Anthony Appiah reveals this point in his essay on thick translation, in which he employs a few proverbs which are well-known to the people of his hometown of Kusami in the country of Ghana. One such proverb, in its original language of "Akan", a dialect of the Twi-language, is: "*Asém a éhia Akanfoö no na Ntafoö de goro brékété*", which Appiah translates

into English as “A matter which troubles the Akan people, the people of Gonja take to play the brékété drum” (389). Now, as a second-generation Canadian of European descent, none of the images expressed in that proverb are recognizable to me. In reading Appiah’s footnotes at the end of his article, I learned that the brékété drum is a Dagomba drum used by the Akan people to accompany dancing. Once I learned this, I could assume that the brékété drum could serve as a metaphor for celebration or merry-making. Of this specific proverb, Appiah writes that he would use it in conversation with his father when he did not want to go to church on Sundays, to clarify that he simply did not care to go to church, but that he should be permitted to have his own opinion about how he spends his time. He writes:

> ‘Different people have different attitudes’ is the generalization that seems to cover both cases, the one we may suppose he [Appiah’s father] will grasp, by the Gricean mechanism, as my target thought. In this inference the literal intentions of the proverb-sentence have to be identified to go through the reasoning – the literal meaning is there and is what the sentence means; but it is not what I mean by it, not the indirect burden of the speech-act, which marks itself by its form as non-literally intended (394).

In this passage, the author remarks that the proverb has two meanings: the literal meaning, and the intended meaning, which he says can be understood via a process he calls the Gricean mechanism. “The Gricean mechanism”, writes Appiah, “– the act that achieves its purpose because its purpose is recognized – is central to meaning just because it occurs both in the cases where meaning is conventional and in those cases where it is not. If I say that ‘John is in the kitchen or in the den,’ in ordinary circumstances, I get you to believe, by way of the

Gricean mechanism, something I have not literally *said* – namely that I don't know which" (391). Mona Baker uses Grice's ideas to introduce the concept of *implicature*: the way by which a listener can understand more than what is actually said by a speaker (223). However, Baker is careful to point out the differences between implicature and non-literal meaning, such as that encountered when dealing with proverbs. Baker explains that understanding the non-literal meanings in proverbs requires an in-depth knowledge of the language, a knowledge that non-native speakers can rarely attain. However, implicature is a language concept much more easily grasped, mostly because it relies much more on context and on other cues than on understanding the meaning of the words. Baker uses the example of different possible responses given to someone who suggests going for a walk. An example of an idiomatic response to this would be, "I'll take a rain check". Understanding this response requires the listener understanding that a rain check refers to an offer to do something later, an understanding that a non-native English speaker is not guaranteed to have. However, the respondent can also give an answer that requires that the other person use implicature to understand: "It's raining". The other person understands the meaning to the words "it's" and "raining", and that these words are to be taken at their literal meaning, however they also recognize that it is not a simple yes or no response to their query. Depending on the tone employed by the speaker, as well as the context in which the response is uttered, the answer "It's raining" could mean anything from, "No, the weather is too bad to go outside", to "Sure, we can go for a walk, but we have to take an umbrella" (Baker 223-4). Both the

idiomatic response and the non-idiomatic response require a level of interpretation from the listener, but Baker points out that a non-native speaker is much more likely to understand the meaning of the non-idiomatic response, as it requires less experience in the language to recognize its meaning. The non-idiomatic response relies more on non-linguistic clues, which are far more universally recognized than the linguistic structures of proverbs. This also serves to further dispute Geary's notion that a proverb can achieve universality: it is rare that a group of non-literal words themselves have a recognized collective meaning for a non-native speaker, but when individual non-literal words are examined in a specific context, their meaning can be guessed. Further compounding the difficulty of having the reader understand the written proverb in translation is that the Gricean mechanism in this case does not have the added benefit of nonverbal clues in context. For this reason, the translator must find some way to have the reader grasp the intended meaning of the idiomatic expression or proverb.

Another factor to consider is that for instance, in the case of the Akan proverb cited by Appiah, a reader with a background similar to mine would lack the ability to understand anything other than the literal meaning. Without knowing what a brékété drum is, or who the Dagomba and Akan people are, we are left with only the image of one group of people troubled by another group playing a drum, though we have no idea why that first group is troubled. Our previous knowledge and background does not permit us to properly apply the Gricean mechanism in this case to interpret the intended meaning of the proverb.

In translating proverbs such as these, where the target audience cannot be expected to understand the context and therefore the intended meaning, a translator may have to resort to what is known as "thick translation". In the translation, especially, of African proverbs for an English-speaking audience, Appiah advocates the use of extensive explanatory footnotes throughout the translation, so that the reader might understand more of the cultural context, and therefore the intended meaning, of the text. This is in accordance with Nida's idea, which I discussed earlier, to use footnotes to explain elements that are foreign to the culture of the target audience. Appiah explains his reasoning for the necessity of thick translation: "Remember what I said at the start: utterances are the products of actions, which like all actions, are undertaken for reasons" (399).

In these situations, where the reader of the translated text is distant in so many ways from the culture of the source text, an understanding and respect of that source culture is vital to understanding and appreciating the written work that has been produced. Without that background knowledge provided by a thick translation, a reader can all too easily discount the text as something he or she could never possibly hope to adequately understand. Appiah concludes his article by arguing that the translation of African texts for a Western audience should be done in a "highly context-dependent" manner, and that understanding African writing requires "a thick and situated understanding of oral literatures", (400) the very literatures that traditionally comprise the majority of African works. For instance, in his article on cross-cultural translation, Theo Hermans proposes that thick translation is a valid way to examine the effects that translation across

cultures can have on a text. He feels that many elements of translation theory tend to make over-generalizations, and that thick translation, on the contrary, focuses more on the specificities of the text being translated, which he calls "the microhistories of particular situations" (386). Hermans also appreciates that the practice of thick translation acknowledges the presence of the translator: no longer an invisible force converting the text from source language to target language, the commentary provided in a thick translation gives the translator his or her own voice (387). I agree that the practice of thick translation as advocated by Appiah and Hermans does lead to significant steps in the public's recognition of the translator's task. Especially in this era of computers and machine translation, the availability of thick translations would certainly raise awareness that a translator's job involves interpretation, research, and a certain degree of sensitivity; and that the translator is not merely a living foreign-language dictionary. Thick translations can also be extremely useful in academic settings: for instance, an ancient Greek play translated into modern English for use in an introductory American college course could benefit from the addition of certain background details about which the students might not be knowledgeable. In the field of translation studies, students and even educators could benefit from the study of thick translations, as they provide an opportunity to not only examine a finished translation, but also parts of the process by which that translation came to be produced. The details provided in a thick translation which refer to a specific work could provide a valuable contrast to the more general theories of translation studies that are currently taught in translation programs. However, while I

recognize the utility of the thick translation in certain contexts, I do not feel that it is a particularly useful or practical method to be employed in all translation. It seems as though the process of thick translation has the potential to all too easily lead to an overly long and pedantic finished product, one that might exhaust all but the most zealous of readers. It has also been my experience that an abundance of footnotes makes for a very erratic sort of reading: one is always compelled to read the annotations that are presented, and often this can lead to forgetting what was being said in the main body of the text. A thick translation is often a translation that must be read at least twice in order to absorb all of the information presented and to have a coherent reading experience. Many people would not have the patience or the enthusiasm for such a process, and therefore I feel that there may be better alternatives.

There are other ways to translate foreign proverbs so that they are understandable to the target audience, without resorting to the extensive background information and footnotes characteristic of a thick translation. Vinay and Darbelnet also discuss the issue of translating proverbs in their "Methodology for Translation", in which the authors condense the process of translation into seven possible methods. They make a distinction between what they term "direct" and "oblique translation". In the first category, translation is done in a more literal, word-for-word manner, since directly parallel equivalents exist across the source and the target language. In the process of oblique translation, the task of the translator becomes more complicated, the authors state that "more complex methods have to be used which at first may look unusual but which nevertheless

can permit translators a strict control over the reliability of their work" (128). The authors suggest that translators first attempt a direct translation then, if found unsuitable, turn to oblique methods. Vinay and Darbelnet advocated the use of equivalences in the translation of proverbs. They feel that in this way, the text can be more familiar to the target audience, and that it will flow in a more natural way to the reader of the translation. If a reader of a translation encounters only proverbs and expressions with which they are already familiar, theorists such as Vinay and Darbelnet reason that the target text will then have a more cohesive and comprehensible rhythm. Of equivalences, the authors say that "more often than not they are of a syntagmatic nature, and affect the whole of the message. As a result, most equivalences are fixed, and belong to a phraseological repertoire of idioms, clichés, proverbs, nominal or adjectival phrases, etc. In general, proverbs are perfect examples of equivalences" (134).

While I admit that this method of finding equivalences can have its uses in translation, I chose to use a different method in this translation. For instance, when proverbs or idiomatic expressions are used in children's literature, I feel that equivalences can be a good solution during the process of translation. The target adult audience of Greif's *Le chat proverbial* stories, in my opinion, could probably be expected to be able to extrapolate their knowledge of their own language to guess the intended meanings of an unfamiliar expression. On the other hand, though, children have a more limited grasp of language, and therefore cannot be expected to guess quite so easily the intended meaning of an unfamiliar proverb translated word-for-word. Also, since many children tend to take fixed

expressions at their more literal meanings, perhaps only proverbs that are already familiar to them will be understood. Therefore, if it is something like a children's book being translated, I feel that the use of familiar equivalences in translation is the only logical choice in this situation. In the majority of situations, however, I am an advocate of more foreignization in the translation of proverbs, and I feel that, in a way, the translator should "trust" the reader to recognize that a proverb is an unfamiliar one, but that the meaning can often be guessed from the context. I would even advocate that, if necessary, a translator could opt for the sparing use of thick translation of a given proverb, before I would choose to use an equivalent target language proverb in translation.

This quandary of proverbs in translation draws attention to the matter of naturalization versus foreignization in translation, and to what extent foreignization should be employed in the translation of proverbs. As seen above, the principles of Vinay and Darbelnet can be said to support the ideas of naturalization in translation, since they suggest that in the case of translating fixed expressions, one should choose to pick an equivalent expression in the target language. Their goal is to produce a naturalized translation, one that reads like the text would have been written had it originally be penned in the target language. One translation theorist who wrote a definitive work on the concept of foreignization in translation is Friedrich Schleiermacher. In his essay "On the Different Methods of Translating", he states that, although it is tempting for a translator to try to render a text into a foreign language so that it seems as though the author had originally written it in that language, this is, in his opinion, not the

best choice for a translator to make. This attempt to translate as though it were originally written in the source language, reasons Schleiermacher, is as illogical as trying to determine how someone would look if he would have had a different father (59). He thus prefers that a translation retain a foreign essence in translation, since the text is in its very quintessence foreign to the target reader. Schleiermacher also points out the differences between the languages themselves:

> If we consider, however, a master's power to shape the language in a larger context, his use of related words and their roots in great quantities of works that make reference to one another, how is the translator to find his way, given that the systems of ideas and the signs for them in this language are completely different than the original, and the roots of the words, instead of neatly corresponding to each other, rather overlap in the most curious patterns? It is therefore impossible that the language use of the translator could cohere everywhere exactly in the same way as that of his author. Here, then, he will have to be content to achieve in the particular what he cannot on the whole (51-52).

The author argues that the two languages in translation are often so different that it is not worth the effort to attempt to render a translation that seems identical to the original. Therefore, he suggests that a translator should embrace the differences between the two languages, and between the original and the translation of a written work. Since the differences between them are so significant, any attempt at strict equivalence between the two works is destined to be, overall, a futile attempt. Schleiermacher argues that an attempt at a word-for-word translation can only lead to frustration, as words cannot, on a large scale, mean the exact same things across their own languages.

In his essay "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign", Antoine Berman writes about some of the challenges in translation, and especially this problem of foreignization also discussed by Schleiermacher. Berman argues that there is a certain loss experienced through every process of translation, but in this work he does devote a section exclusively to the translation, or, as he calls it, the destruction, of expressions and idioms. While he admits that many proverbs do have a parallel in another language, he is careful to note that:

> Now it is evident that even if the meaning is identical, replacing an idiom by its 'equivalent' is an ethnocentrism. Repeated on a large scale (this is always the case with a novel), the practice will result in the absurdity whereby the characters in Typhoon express themselves with a network of French images. […] To play with 'equivalence' is to attack the discourse of the foreign work. Of course, a proverb may have its equivalents in a foreign language, but…these equivalents do not translate it. To translate is not to search for equivalences. The desire to replace ignores, furthermore, the existence in us of a proverb consciousness which immediately detects, in a new proverb, the brother of an authentic one: the world of our proverbs is thus augmented and enriched (287).

Based on Berman's study, it seems that, in the translation of proverbs, there is more of a tendency to try and find an equivalent proverb in the target language than there is to actually examine and translate the original proverb itself. Berman argues that the recognition of a new proverb, previously unknown to the reader, is actually more beneficial than the translator supplying an equivalency, in that the reader is then forced to think about the proverb, analyse it, and draw parallels for themselves between the proverbs they already know. In not translating a proverb by using a target language equivalent, the result is that the readers are forced to

read the text in a more analytical fashion, and become more engaged in their own reading experience.

An option in the translation of proverbs, and one that Berman and Appiah would seem to prefer, would be to translate the proverbs in a more word-for-word fashion, rather than finding an equivalent proverb in the target language. In this way, the exact images of the original proverbs are intact, and there is a foreignizing effect on the reader that forces them to examine a proverb in its original cultural context. This word-for-word translation approach advocated by Berman is the one I have chosen to use in the proverbs I encountered in this translation. The first and foremost reason is that the central image running throughout the entire work is that of "the proverbial cat". While a number of the proverbs used as titles for the short stories might not have direct equivalents in English, there are some that do. For instance, one of the short stories is titled "*Bon chat n'a pas besoin de collier d'or*", the general meaning of which is that it is foolish to put too much stock in one's material wealth. An equivalent proverb in the English language, which coincidentally is also animal-centric, would be "It is not only fine feathers that make fine birds". The literal translation, and in this particular work the correct one, would be "A good cat has no need of a gold collar". To translate these proverbs with an equivalent proverb that did not feature cats would be to completely change the overall theme of this short story collection, and to skew the author's intention of placing the feline animal in a central and titular role in every tale. While the literal translation would take a little

more time for the reader to process and interpret, in the context of the short story collection it is the only possible option.

While this particular instance of translation does not exactly relate to the contentious issues of ethnocentrism raised by Berman and Appiah, it does examine the role that particular images play in the interpretations of a proverb and the work in which the proverb is employed. The author's intention in this work, I feel, is to evoke in every story the images suggested by the feline species: their grace, mystery, and aloofness are an intriguing combination that has fascinated countless authors before Greif, and it is only natural that he should want to use this imagery in his own work. It is primarily for this reason that I decided to translate his proverbs in a word-for-word manner. To translate the proverbs using equivalences that do not refer to cats would change the tone of the story. True, an equivalent proverb might present the meaning of the expression in a more obvious fashion, but I truly don't believe that Greif was aiming for the reader's immediate recognition of the proverb's meaning. On the contrary, I believe that he wanted the readers to have an idea of what the proverb might mean, and that is also why he chose to add subtitles to the proverbs that explain the titles. Also, in a way I feel that Greif would not have wanted these proverbs to be completely familiar and transparent in translation. The imagery of cats that runs throughout the book alludes to an idea of the mystery and remoteness that is often encountered with these animals. I think that, even if the reader of the translation did not completely understand or recognize the exact meaning of Greif's proverbs, the reader would still have an understanding of the tone, and that this sense of not completely

understanding could tie in well to the mythology of the feline, that animal that man so often tries to understand, but never quite manages to fully comprehend. In his short story collection, I think Greif intended for the reader to have a deeper appreciation, if not necessarily a deeper understanding, of "the proverbial cat".

The Challenges and Rewards of Creating and Translating Short Stories

One key reason for which I was compelled to translate this work was that I have always been a big fan of the short story genre. When searching for a project to translate for my thesis, my immediate first thought was to translate a short story, and I never really deviated from that basic desire. The short story is such a fascinating medium, with its own rules and conventions that are so different than those of other literary genres. Far shorter than a novel and usually longer than a poem, I have always loved the sheer "readability" of short stories: they are usually the perfect length to read in one sitting, and to give the satisfying impression that you have read a "whole" story. Giving the reader this sense of wholeness is undeniably a considerable challenge for the author, and one that has always captivated me. In only a few pages, the author has to create a rich and clear picture of the characters, setting and theme of the story, and to do so capably and efficiently enough that the reader can identify with these elements and feel the emotions necessary to have an enjoyable reading experience. In the introduction to one of my all-time favourite collections of short stories, *Twisted*, author Jeffery Deaver talks about his own love of the short story genre growing up, and how, as a child, he would always take the opportunity to read stories by authors like Ray Bradbury and watch episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, one of the greatest and best-

known mediums for the telling of short, yet complete and well-rounded stories. He eventually decided that he had a passion for creating his own short stories. Although he is primarily known today for his mystery novels (such as *The Bone Collector*), he was encouraged to write short stories professionally when a fellow author asked him if he would contribute an original short story to an anthology that he was in the process of compiling. In this introduction, he details his interest in the short story genre and its creation:

> I found, to my surprise, that the experience was absolutely delightful – and for a reason I hadn't expected. In my novels, I adhere to strict conventions […]
>
> With a thirty-page short story, however, all bets are off.
>
> Readers don't have the same emotional investment as in a novel. The payoff in the case of short stories isn't a roller coaster of plot reversals involving characters they've spent time learning about and loving or hating, set in places with atmosphere carefully described. Short stories are like a sniper's bullet. Fast and shocking. In a short story, I can make good bad and bad badder and, most fun of all, really good really bad (Deaver 2-3).

Perhaps one of the greatest appeals to the writer when it comes to writing a short story, at least according to Deaver, is that the author does not owe quite as much to the reader. There is not the sense of obligation to the reader to provide a cohesive ending for a character that has been well developed over the course of an entire book. The author has the ability to shock the reader, whereas in the novel or a longer medium the author has more of a duty to ensure that the environment he has spent so much time establishing is well-rounded and cohesive. Of course, the short story author should still provide the reader with an enjoyable and memorable experience, but the reader is far less likely to complain if some of the

elements, such as the setting or the characteristics of some secondary characters, are not as detailed. What might be interesting for the author, then, is deciding what elements to bring to the forefront of the storytelling, and which to perhaps devote less attention to, in order to create the best short story possible. After all, in the novel, there is no restriction as to its length; however, there is a certain point in reading when a reader begins to doubt that a work could be classified as a short story.

An important difference to note between the short story authors Jeffery Deaver and Hans-Jürgen Greif is that Deaver is in the business of creating mysteries, and his short stories (as suggested by the collection's title) mostly have a twist ending in which one or more characters are revealed to be not at all as the reader had thought them to be. As evidenced in the above-quoted introduction, Deaver takes great pleasure in shocking and tricking his readers (and as a reader of his works, I must say that I myself enjoy being shocked and tricked by him). Greif, however, does not seem to be interested in such dramatic reversals of character and circumstance. That is not to say though that Greif does not enjoy playing with his readers and his characters: in the short story "*Le lait couvert n'est pas lapé par le chat*", he starts the story by telling a fable explaining why men and dogs hate cats, and why women love them. He then introduces a young couple who have been together for seven years and decide to move in together; however, their relationship is tested when they acquire a cat and a dog. By the end of the story, the couple, who at the beginning of the tale had appeared to be so blissfully in love, are no longer together, and the man, who had previously defined himself

as a “dog person”, ended up falling for the charms of the cat that his girlfriend, “the cat person”, had insisted they acquire, while she keeps the cocker spaniel that he had originally wanted.

While not a shocking reversal of character or startling revelation in Jeffery Deaver’s style (for example, in his story “Together”, we learn in the final sentences that a man telling the tale of his own Romeo and Juliet-style love story is in fact a murderer on death row for the crime of murdering the girl who is the object of his affections), this story nevertheless shows that Greif is not afraid either to reveal different aspects of the character and story. As readers progress in the story, their mood shifts from easy happiness at reading about the couple’s relationship, to a growing sense of unease and sadness as the relationship falls apart. There is also a shift in character as the man realizes that the one he loves and trusts most in the world is not his girlfriend but her cat. By the end of the story nothing is as it seemed at the beginning, but because these characters had not been extensively examined throughout a full novel, there is no sense of betrayal or having been unfairly misled by the author.

An element of this character revelation is also present in the story I translated. Throughout the lengthy audition process to find the perfect performer for the role of Tamino, the reader is led to believe that either the Frenchman Laurent or the Englishman Jonathan is the favourite for the part, and will eventually be picked for the role. A third tenor, Josef Schmidt, is also auditioning for the role, but he is scarcely mentioned in the story, and the other characters either ignore him or scoff at his inexperience and less prestigious schooling.

However, almost at the end of the story, Rabe asks Schmidt to sing, and it is made clear to the reader and to the theatre's audience that he is the perfect singer for the part. The reader also discovers that Rabe had wanted Schmidt for the role all along, and that the elaborate audition process was just a ruse so that Jonathan and Laurent's voice coaches (friends and colleagues of Rabe's) would not be offended by his rejection of their pupils. The reader may be surprised to discover this, but he or she is not likely to be outraged or cry foul. I greatly enjoyed the process of translating this short story, of reading and re-reading it in order to better perceive the nuances in the character's actions.

The short story is a challenging medium not only for its original creator, but for its translator as well. In an essay about the Portuguese-English translator Giovanni Pontiero, Richard Zenith talks about how the short story is a lens or a focal point, rather than being the whole complete story in the same way that a novel is. The author, to conform to the restrictions in length, must omit certain parts from the story and trust the reader's imagination to fill in the possible gaps in the reading experience. In this same vein, says Zenith, the translator must not try to aim for a close reading in the translation. The translator must not attempt to do too literal or too close a translation, for that would result in a reading experience that is far too closed-off for the reader of the translated work. The short story is created to be open-ended and subject to various interpretations, argues Zenith, and thus any translation of a short story should achieve that as well (155).

Poems are often seen as the most difficult genre for any translator to translate: there are after all many rather strict parameters inside which one is forced to work. There are elements of rhyme scheme, of pattern, of structure, that sometimes are all but impossible to convey from one language into another. According to Zenith, however, a short story can be even more difficult to translate than a poem, since the poem is by its very nature complete, whereas the short story is often only a fragment of what the author had wished to say: the creator of the short story is constantly fighting the urge to explain and to elaborate, in order to remain faithful to the short story format. Zenith compares poems and short stories using a rather creative imagery:

> The poem, with its complex system of associations surrounding it like an aura, presents other, perhaps even more formidable difficulties for the translator, but it is a fundamentally solid object, a gemstone with precisely cut facets, while a story is more porous, its brilliance farther removed from the surface of its language (156).

He argues that a poem could never be written using other words and language and yet still be considered the very same poem, whereas a short story could. It is the number of possibilities inherent in the creation and translation of a short story that causes it to be so difficult to work with and to master. Zenith even admits that he does not know the methods by which Giovanni Pontiero was able to produce such masterful translations of Portuguese and Brazilian short stories into English, and he confesses that "the only explanation I can offer for *how* a particular artisan – in this case Giovanni Pontiero – manages to fashion better

objects than others with equivalent experience in the trade is to say that he has a greater gift" (156).

One can therefore say that a large part of what makes translating a short story so challenging is that it is difficult to say how one might produce a masterful short story translation. On one side there are those who would argue that a translation is best when it conforms most exactly to the original short story; on the other side there are critics such as Zenith who feel that a great short story translation is one that allows the reader to create his or her own interpretations of the text. Ambiguity is often considered an important aspect of the short story genre, and therefore it is one that is not to be overlooked in translation. However, the degree of ambiguity which the translator decides to (or is even able to) convey will vary greatly from one case to another.

In one of the entries in his series "Paragraphs on Translation", Peter Newmark discusses some of the difficulties that he has encountered in the translation of short stories. Newmark begins by stating that, with the exception of poetry, "the short story can be regarded as the most intimate and personal form of writing in imaginative literature. […] Its essence is compactness, simplicity, concentration, cohesion" (118). Just as I have pointed out above, Newmark believes that a key feature of the short story is its brevity. Every word has to be carefully selected for its meaning, since there are only so many words that can be allowed in a text of that length. For this reason, the words selected have so much more weight than they would in a longer medium, and thus the task of the translator is more difficult: the author has only a limited space to write what he or

she wishes, and the author has chosen to write exactly that; therefore, the translator must work hard to find a just equivalent for the author's intended and carefully chosen meaning. The author of a short story must be careful with his or her words and how they are used, therefore the translator must be almost doubly so.

Perhaps before we speak further about the difficulties of writing and translating the short story, it would be a good idea to first try to arrive at a better understanding of exactly what constitutes a short story.

In his opening paragraph, Newmark also goes on to identify what he feels are the significant features of a short story. These include, but are not limited to: the structure (opening and closing paragraphs and lines are often connected, punctuation often plays a more significant role, etc.), stylistic markers that may be repeated often throughout the story and must be reproduced in translation, cultural references and metaphors, and functional sentence perspectives (118). While Newmark lists nine significant features, these four are the ones that I found to be most relevant to my overall experience with short stories, and to my experience in translating this short story in particular.

The structure of "*N'appelle pas le chat pour mettre d'accord deux oiseaux*" is very important to the telling of the story. The narrative does not unfold in a strictly linear fashion. The story begins in or around the present day, as the unknown narrator explains the circumstances surrounding the story that had occurred a long time ago. There is then a break between paragraphs and the story

jumps about forty years into the past, to one year before the opera house is set to open and premiere Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. The narrative continues all through the casting process and up to the successful opening night of the work. The closing paragraphs of the story then make a complete circle back to the present day: the narrator explains what happened to the composer, the cat and the concert hall in the decades following the events in the story. In this case, the opening and closing paragraphs and lines of the story are certainly connected, both chronologically and thematically. The story starts with a recollection of a bygone era, and ends with the narrator informing the reader that Marcel, the cat with the amazing, supernatural gift that had such a powerful impact on the casting of the opera and eventually on the global opera scene, was completely forgotten by the world. This framing device is a popular one in short stories, where there is a narrator recounting events from the past and then revealing something about the situation in the present day. The Deaver short story "Together" mentioned earlier follows this format as well. For the translator, working with this type of narrative device can be challenging: despite the story jumping around in its setting (both time and place), the translator must work hard to ensure that the entire plot flows, and reads harmoniously as a whole story.

A second significant feature that is vital to the consideration of short story translation is the repetition of stylistic markers in the text. One such stylistic marker often encountered in Greif's short story is the varying types of sentence structures. For instance, Greif has a tendency to use a number of sentence fragments in this short story. This literary feature is far more common and

accepted in French than it is in English, therefore in translating I had to try to find a way to convey Greif's original words and intentions, while still trying to have the story be considered grammatically correct and well-written in the target language. This challenge, I found, was also closely linked to another one of Newmark's significant features: the functional sentence perspective. Newmark talks about the necessity of preserving stresses within the sentences, and of ensuring that the sentences are still linked together in a coherent and cohesive manner (118). This difficulty is further amplified when a translator finds it necessary to modify sentence structure in order to make the translated sentence more readable in the target language. I will, however, not go deeper into discussion of these quandaries here, as I talk more extensively about my difficulties in translating sentence structure in a later section.

The final Newmark significant feature that I chose to examine in more depth in this analysis was cultural references and metaphors. This feature is vital to the interpretation, and therefore the translation, of a short story. Much like a proverb, a short story often takes an aspect of what daily life is like for a certain people and culture, and uses that to tell a story or convey an idea. Therefore, just as how comprehension of a proverb relies on some background knowledge of the original culture, the short story begs some familiarity with the culture and circumstances surrounding the narrative. While it is not absolutely essential to understand all of the background knowledge of a short story in order to enjoy it, it does help the reader to have a more profound understanding and appreciation of the text. This is especially important since, as I have mentioned earlier, the key to

a short story is its conciseness and brevity. In a novel, if there is some element that the reader might not understand, the author has the luxury of being able to explain it to the reader in a few sentences or even a full paragraph or two if necessary. The author of the short story, however, cannot afford to grant this much space to explanations, and thus must hope that the reader is sufficiently familiar with the pieces of the story to understand and enjoy the tale as a whole. However, I felt that this particular story, with its setting during post-WWII Germany and its reverence of the opera world, necessitated a bit of background research for me to fully interpret, and therefore properly translate, this short story. It is for this reason that I chose to write an entire section later on in this paper on the world of opera in the 1960s.

Short story anthologies are not the most popular entities in the literary publishing world. In the introduction to his essay on short story criticism in the United States, Charles E. May acknowledges that "[a]lthough the short story is respected by its practitioners, it is largely ignored by both the popular and the serious reader. The question for the short story seems to be: can the writer alone keep a genre alive once it has lost both its basic audiences?" (3) He recalls a symposium organized by Doubleday in 1970, where all of the authors present were enthusiastic and full of praise for the short story genre; however, the publishers, editors, and literary agents in attendance were not so keen. Unfortunately, if a genre is not accepted by popular readers, it is also not considered by serious critics (May 3-4). Publishers are often much more likely to accept a novel for publication than a collection of short stories. There may be

various reasons. For one, a collection of short stories, especially one where the stories do not share a common narrative thread, may be seen as an overly fragmented work, especially when it is compared to the long, unbroken narrative presented in a novel. Another factor that may contribute is that a short story collection may be easier to leave unfinished: it is hard to put down a novel before reading the last few chapters and seeing the resolution of the action, however a reader may feel that he or she wouldn't miss anything vital if they were to simply not read the last story or two in an anthology. May suggests that finishing a short story collection does not leave the reader with the same sense of satisfaction and completion as finishing a novel, and that the short story does not always have a cohesive beginning, middle and end as a novel would (5).

The history of the short story has also been more complicated than the history of many other literary genres, which may contribute to its inability to find a strong foothold in the ranks of the literary world and to attract a lasting audience. For instance, in the 1940s, the short story began to become more formulaic in plot and in structure. May talks about the writings of Warren Beck, who posited that the short story could have a more reflective tone, rather similar to the tone of a critical essay, and referred to the stories written by Edgar Allen Poe as an ideal of the genre: Poe strove to write about real life, and in the process also gave a sort of introspection while telling the story. However, Beck claims, writers such as O. Henry later came along who made the pattern established by Poe into a mechanical procedure by which many similar short stories were produced. May then goes on to state that writers have since moved on from this

formula and “have stopped trying to concoct plots”, preferring instead to seek value in a certain incident in their short story (7).

I agree with this assessment of the short story to a certain extent; however I feel that it might be necessary to point out that O. Henry’s style of short story writing was hardly revolutionary to the whole world at the time: the writing style of French author Guy de Maupassant was very similar, and likely served as an influence to O. Henry, who started writing about two decades after Maupassant was in his prime. The claims made by Beck against the often formulaic style of O. Henry’s writing could certainly also apply to the works of Maupassant: most of his short stories do have a twist ending of sorts, to the extent that the reader of an anthology of his short stories knows almost inevitably to expect some reversal of fortune after reading a few of his works. For instance, in “The Diamond Necklace”, one of his best-known stories, the heroine dreams of nothing other than climbing the ranks of high society. When her husband, a clerk of low social standing, is invited to a high society party, she excitedly borrows a diamond necklace from a friend in order to make the best possible impression. The evening goes well, but at some point during the party the necklace is lost, never to be found again. In a panic, the couple buys an expensive replacement and returns the new necklace to its owner, who remains none the wiser. The heroine and her husband, plunged into debt from having to purchase a replacement necklace, spend ten years earning enough money to pay back their debt. At the end of the story, the heroine finally admits her secret to her friend, only to be told that the original necklace had been made of fake diamonds, not real jewels, and was only

worth a nominal sum of money (Maupassant 28-33). Such a twist is a common theme in Maupassant's short stories. While shocking the first few times that one encounters it, after a few instances of the cruel reversal of fortune for the main character the reader can rapidly begin to grow weary of such a storytelling device. I can therefore certainly understand Beck's impatience with O. Henry's narrative style, and I can see how the entire short story genre might have been negatively affected by such a trend. In fact, this common strategy in Maupassant's stories is the reason for which a collection of his works has been sitting half-read on my bedside table for almost two years. His stories are well-written and captivating, but after a few tales I begin to feel as though I am reading the same basic stories over and over again. As Beck stated, this tendency in short fiction could certainly have impacted the popularity of the short story among readers, and I only wished to point out that the trend had been established in France even before Beck speaks of its influence in America.

May goes on to talk about the history of the short story, stating that in the 1950s, the calibre of the short story genre (in his opinion at least) improved, thanks in no small part to the short story writing classes being offered in universities and colleges at the time. These institutions did not teach "The O. Henry formula", but instead strove for a more poetic and psychological sort of story-telling experience (7). Unfortunately, however, this led to a new formula replacing an old formula, and while the genre was revitalized for a time, ultimately it began once again to stagnate in a particular comfort zone. The shift of short fiction away from character and plot development and into a more

technical and emotions-driven narrative may have served to isolate the popular reader of short stories, and instead cause the genre to appeal only to the writers and the academics.

It would appear that, in a historical back-and-forth even more pronounced than that of other literary genres, the short story suffers from an inability ever to appeal to both critics and audiences at the same time. While every medium, such as long-form fiction, theatre and film have all had to contend with this balancing act, it seems as though the short story has had the least success in reconciling the two extremes. It is this delicate balance that would appear to dissuade publishing houses from releasing more collections of short fiction than they already do, and this lack of availability would then lead to a lack of readership of the genre. It is a vicious cycle, and one that I personally hope the short story can one day manage to escape.

Whatever the reasons for the short story's lack of popularity, the financial aspects of the publications of short stories must be considered when examining their translations. In his text *The Scandals of Translation*, Lawrence Venuti writes about the particular challenges faced by the translator when confronted with the task of translating a "bestseller". Venuti tells of publisher's tendencies to choose realistic foreign texts for translation, and also their desire that the target text produced appear to be completely fluent, and even to seem as though it were not a translation at all. These fluent strategies, according to Venuti, "pursue linear syntax, univocal meaning, current usage, lexical consistency, they eschew unidiomatic constructions, polysemy, archaism, jargon, any linguistic effect that

calls attention to the words as words and therefore pre-empts or interrupts the reader's identification" (126-7). Now, as evidenced by my previous section detailing the part that language, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs play in Greif's collection, I did not choose a text that lends itself well to this fluent strategy of translation. However, contrary to what the publishers of these "bestsellers" might desire, this does not bother me in the slightest. Since I am not translating a work that I hope to see on the top of international bestseller lists, all bets, if I may borrow Jeffery Deaver's quote from the beginning of this section, are off. In this translation, I was able to fiddle about with wordplay and with various complex aspects of the French and English languages, and I thoroughly enjoyed the process. When I did not have to work within the fluent translation strategies favoured for works destined to be bestsellers, I felt that I had more freedom in the process and that I arrived at a more interesting translation in the process.

Translating a "Bicultural" Literary Work

As I hope you may have realized by this point in my writing, this short story by Hans-Jürgen Greif has many fascinating features that are not always present in other stories through which one experiences the process of translation. I believe that the biggest factor in my decision to translate this short story as my thesis is the fact that this story has both German and French linguistic and cultural backgrounds. My focus for my undergraduate degree was French and German language and literature, and ideally I would have loved to work with both of those languages simultaneously during my MA scholarship in Translation Studies.

However, that was not the case, and I ended up working primarily in French-to-English translation, and some English-to-French translation as well. My third language, unfortunately, fell by the wayside. This story, however, while not written in the German language, does have very strong elements of the German culture. The author was born and raised in Germany, and this story is set his native country. As such, I feel closer to the language, even though I am not working closely with it in the strictest sense of the word. There are bits of the story that are in German, primarily lyrics from the Mozart opera *The Magic Flute*, but just as the author chose to leave them in German in his original French work, I have chosen to leave them in German in my English translation. However, the strongest influence of the German language, I felt, came through toward the end of the story, when Rabe recounts an old German Hessian proverb to the German tenor Schmidt. Greif wrote this proverb in French, as "*L'oiseau qui chante le matin est mangé le soir par le chat*" (260). This is almost a word-for-word translation of the actual Hessian proverb, which in the original German is *Vögel, die am Morgen singen, holt am Abend die Katze*, which would be said to someone to advise them that if they start (the day, an undertaking) with too much energy, they will likely not last to the end (of the day, the project, etc.). This saying brings the reader closer to the German setting of the story, especially a reader who might be familiar with German sayings. Therefore, even if I wasn't really working with the French and German languages simultaneously, it was still wonderful to be able to work with French language and German culture simultaneously.

When studying to become a translator, one thing that most students end up learning is that translators do not exist to precisely transfer a work from one language into a second language. Such an undertaking would be impossible, and besides, two people could each produce a significantly different translation of the same work, yet both translations could be considered correct. The best that a translator can hope to do (and indeed, what the best translators end up doing) is to produce a valid interpretation of the original work in the target language. In her article on teaching the translation of fiction, Riitta Oittinen contends that translation is a dialogic process, and that the dialogue will vary based on the translator's own experiences and background (76). The context in which the translator reads and experiences the original work will influence the translation that is produced. In this case, my background in both French and German affected my reading and translation of this text into English. In a sense, I was working across three cultural experiences while translating this work. A different translator, who had never spoken German or traveled to Germany as I have, would have produced a different translation since his or her linguistic and cultural experiences would have differed from my own.

This past summer, when I began to translate this project, I had the opportunity to travel to Germany with my family. While I was there, I tried to absorb as much as possible of the "feel" of the country, and how it differed from Canada. I also attempted to tour a German opera house during my time there; however, it was just my luck that the ones I attempted to tour were either undergoing renovations or closed for a holiday. Still, I took pictures and perused

the brochures and floor plans of the opera houses. While translating this short story, whose plot and atmosphere rely so heavily upon the world of opera singers and theatrical productions, I would sometimes look at the pictures of German opera houses and even the German countryside, to try to perhaps subtly infuse my translation with the atmosphere of the story's setting. On a conscious level, I cannot say for certain whether this influenced my decision to, for instance, translate "*les chats exterminaient la vermine*" (Greif 245) into English as "cats took care of vermin", instead of perhaps writing that they chased or exterminated the creatures. Unconsciously, though, theorists such as Oittinen would say that my experiences would have coloured my translation, and influenced the work I eventually produced. There are even those who feel that translation is not solely a linguistic activity, but more of a sociocultural event whereby a text (and not a language) is transformed into something that can be enjoyed by a different culture (Snell-Hornby 11). According to this school of thought, it is not my expertise in the language that matters, but rather my experience with the elements surrounding the work: the traditions and tastes of both the source and the target cultures. According to Mary Snell-Hornby,

> If we see language as a part of the world around us and agree that knowledge of that world is a prerequisite for translation, the profile of our envisaged professional translator becomes bolder: he or she is not only a bilingual but also a bicultural (if not multicultural) specialist working with and within an infinite variety of areas of technical expertise (11).

To this way of thinking, a translator could not possibly have translated this short story without having studied German life and culture and opera. While I am

not convinced that my previous experiences were absolutely vital to the translation of Greif's short story, I am certain that they did influence my decision of which source text to translate, as well as the final product that resulted from my translation. These experiences also, I am sure of it, contributed to my involvement and enjoyment during the translation process.

Translating the Sentence Structures Across Two Languages

While reading this particular short story, I revelled in the rich literariness of the story's language, and I predicted that I would find the translation of that level of French into the English language an enjoyable challenge. As I mentioned above, there is an interesting relationship between French Canadian literatures and European literatures. This collection of short stories amazed me because it was written in Quebec by an author who had been living in the province for decades; however, the German-born author's final work, in my opinion, ended up having more of a European than French Canadian flavour. In reading certain stories, I felt that they were more in the style of an old French story than a modern Québec one. They read more like Maupassant than Roch Carrier. A large part of this likely had to do with the language used. I have written in one of my sections above about Newmark's significant features that are vital to the consideration of short story translation. One such feature is the repetition of stylistic markers in the text. I found in this short story that there were certain elements of language repeated over and over in the narration that greatly impacted my experience in translating it into English. The original French-language story, for instance, is absolutely full of sentence fragments. The author would often emphasize a point made in the

previous sentence by using a sentence fragment to underscore a certain element of it. For instance, at the beginning of the story, Greif writes about the tricky fact that both Jonathan and Laurent are coached by teachers that are friends of Rabe's: "*Le dilemme de Rabe: leurs professeurs comptaient parmi ses bons amis. Impossible de choisir sans blesser l'un d'eux*" (240). Here the author uses a sentence fragment to underline how offended either teacher would be if the other singer were to be chosen. While this is a somewhat common tool to use in French language storytelling, the sentence fragment in English is rarely used and is seen as an example of poor grammar. For the most part, I had chosen to preserve the sentence fragment structure in my English translation, but, especially near the end, I thought that the device was beginning to feel overused to my native English speaker sensibilities. Even Newmark, in his paragraphs on translation, is adamant in stating that "[t]he more an author uses his/her stylistic markers, the less meaning and force they have" (120). Therefore once or twice I chose to slightly modify the phrase so that it did form a complete sentence. In its original French, the abundance of sentence fragments is hardly noteworthy, and in their own particular way they help to advance the story and set the pace of the action. When reading the story, you get the impression that it is being dictated from a story told by an intellectual and slightly harried narrator, who wants to make absolutely certain that the reader understands certain points. I tried to preserve this tone in the translation, but after a certain number of instances the sentence fragments felt too unnatural. Challenges such as this were one linguistic aspect that drew me to this translation.

Another challenging interlingual aspect of this translation process was translating the various long, almost run-on sentences that Greif used in his story. This is ironically the polar opposite of the problem I described in my previous paragraph, and therefore you may realize that the combination of these two types of sentences made for a varied and interesting process of translation. Again, I feel that these long, multi-part sentences with an abundance of commas are far more common in French than they are in English. These sentences, perhaps more than anything else in the original story, led me to believe that this narrative had an old French feeling to it, rather than something more modern or Canadian. For instance, near the beginning of the narrative, we have the sentence, "*Une authorité inattaquable,désormais, même si certains éléments du monde musical chuchotaient derrière son dos qu'il était dépassé par la nouvelle musique émanant de l'École de Cologne*" (239). When one tries to read this sentence, it seems a bit long: there are several elements present in the sentence that must be transcribed into English, including this man's authority, the mistrust others have in him, and the new direction in which music is now heading. The problems arise when one tries to translate it into English: attempting to translate it word for word and punctuation for punctuation feels like it results in something far too long and unwieldy. This is one area where I felt that literal translation may not have been the best course of action. However, the majority of the time I felt that I could not break up the sentence into shorter sentences without disrupting the feel of the story. As I mentioned earlier, the impression I got of the narrator was that he is probably an older, academic type, and therefore prone to longer, more poetic

sentences. While once or twice I did change a sentence fragment so that it was a slightly longer complete sentence, when faced with the opposite problem of a run-on sentence, I mostly chose to keep much of the original sentence structure intact. With these particular challenges in translation, my primary goal was always to try and produce a worthwhile English translation, while trying to remain true to the spirit of the French language original.

A Brief Overview of the 1960s Opera World

As mentioned at the beginning of "*N'appelle pas le chat pour mettre d'accord deux oiseaux*", during the 1960s, in the postwar period, many cities in Germany were still recovering from the ravages of their defeat in WWII. Understandably, cultural development at that time had taken something of a backseat to more pressing political and economic rebuilding.

In 1960s popular music, one recalls that The Beatles had a huge amount of international fame, rock and roll was in its infancy, and folk music had become a popular way for musicians to express themselves. In *A History of Western Music*, the editors examine the musical culture of the 1960s, when this story takes place. In the world of opera at this time, the tradition of classical music performance became stronger than ever. Opera pieces enjoyed larger audience, music schools grew, and music education in primary and secondary schools increased in both quantity and quality (Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca 921). Also, as we see in Greif's short story, the government at the time was more willing than ever to finance the arts, specifically the opera and performances of classical music. Much

as the brand-new committee in the story seeks a perfect piece to debut their new theatre and raise the morale of their townspeople, other cities in Germany and around the world were hoping to turn to the familiar and long-beloved world of classical music to forget the collective sorrows of their recent world history. However, despite this desire to return to the music of old and the comfortingly time-honoured themes it presented, composers at the time who saw themselves as "traditional" composers shared less and less common ground and found it hard to agree on questions of style, aesthetic, and purpose. While some composers wanted to preserve and extend certain aspects of the tradition, from audience appeal to modernist complexity, others demanded a focus on new directions in the music world. After two world wars, nationalism was now seen as a dangerous relic of the past, which had all too recently led to horrible consequences. The international nature of musical influence was more pronounced than ever before, since every nation had its own variety of styles and approaches, and ideas that had initiated in one place were often imitated elsewhere around the globe (Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca 921). The artistic directors in Greif's story seem to be aware of this wave of internationalism in the music world, and are concerned about being considered isolated from the rest of the worldwide opera community and left behind in this surge of global assembly.

In Greif's short story, the city is in the process of rebuilding after the war, and even though most of their buildings were spared from air strikes, the town is still not back up to its pre-war standards. The newly-elected mayor decides that a proper theatre will boost the morale of its citizens and stimulate the city's

economic and cultural growth. After WWI's end, there is finally an opportunity for the residents to experience internationally popular works, both the classics by composers such as Beethoven as well as more modern pieces, such as the newly-developed phenomena known as the *rock opera*.

All over the world, people and their governments were beginning to re-evaluate opera as an art form, and it enjoyed a bit of a popular renaissance. The genre of opera was not very popular during the period of the Second World War in Germany. This was mainly due to the fact that when the Nazis rose to power, they banned many musical performances, as they considered them to be far too indulgent (Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca 883).

The role of the composer in the 1960s also experienced a shift in its definition and interpretation. In this period, there were a number of well-known composers, such as Benjamin Britten and Olivier Messiaen, who composed music using traditional tools and instruments, such as classical pianos, strings and wood instruments. However, at the same time, there were also many composers who created music using more modern and unconventional instruments. One such composer was John Cage, who invented the prepared piano,

> in which various objects- such as pennies, bolts, screws, or pieces of wood, rubber, plastic, weather stripping, or slit bamboo- are inserted between the strings, resulting in delicate, complex percussive sounds when the piano is played from the keyboard. Essentially, the piano is a one-person percussion ensemble, with sounds that resemble drums, woodblocks, gongs, and other standard or unusual instruments (Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca 931).

Cage composed many pieces in the classical style, using unusual instruments. What is notable about this period in relation to the world of opera and classical music is that, unlike the avant-garde movement, pieces such as those composed by Cage were created to be enjoyed alongside the classical compositions of the old masters. The avant-garde movement, on the other hand, was created to challenge the listener's previous perceptions and prejudices about music. The listener of avant-garde music is supposed to reject everything that they believe music "should be", and instead to simply enjoy the music and exist in the moment. In contrast to this idea, artists like Cage intended for their music to be enjoyed like a classical piece, even though modern instruments were used to create it (Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca 930). They intended for their works to be cherished for generations to come, hopefully alongside the works of great classical composers from centuries before.

Another aspect of the performing arts that would have had an effect on the opera scene in the 1960s was the growing popularity of performance art. Somewhat similar to the avant-garde movement challenging the perception of music, and composers such as Cage introducing new media to the creation of classically-styled music, the performance art movement challenged the definition of art by consisting of an action undertaken in a public place, rather than the more traditional definition of art, which usually consisted of something like a painting or sculpture being put on public display. Perhaps one of the best known performance artists of the 1960s, Yoko Ono earned fame for her performance art pieces such as *Earth Piece*. Her relationship with John Lennon and her subsequent

influence on his musical works changed the direction in which the music of Lennon's band, The Beatles, was heading. The performance art movement was fronted by Fluxus, a group of avant-garde artists (including Ono) who were spread all throughout Europe and the United States. The works of Fluxus composers often included unusual directions for the musicians to follow, such as instructions to build a fire onstage or stop and listen to the Earth turning (Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca 936). As described by the authors of *A History of Western Music*:

> Performance art is intended to be temporary, experienced in the moment and essentially unrepeatable. Such pieces had no place in the concert repertoire because they proceeded from wholly different assumptions. But they left lingering questions about what music is and what purposes it serves, opening up possibilities that are still being explored (936).

The connotations of this new way of experiencing music as art were interesting for the opera world at the time. Opera, of course, is not a strictly "musical" way of experiencing music: there is also a very strong performance aspect to it. Opera singers are not only highly trained musicians, but professional actors as well. The introduction of performance art into the concert halls of the 1960s would likely have added a more daring element to the staging of operas, since the conventions of the music world were in the process of being turned upside-down. With artists producing classical-sounding pieces using revolutionary methods and instruments, and with performance art causing musical performance to become more abstract and enterprising, the opera world would have had to adapt some elements of its production and staging in order to fit in with the significant changes in the music world. While the influence of the

introduction of performance art is not examined in Greif's short story, I believe that new techniques, such as performance art and other innovations, might have served to influence the builders of a brand-new performance space in that era. I think that the board of advisers in the story, while chiefly comprised of older, traditional members, was very aware of the changing nature of the musical and performance worlds, and that their insistence that the new theatre be the very best and most impressive building ever built for miles around was influenced by the desperate desire to keep up with the overwhelming fluctuations in the arts world. In Greif's story, there is a sort of frantic energy subtly underlying the discussions of the board of directors, and I feel that the dizzyingly rapid changes in the world of music and opera would have contributed to that. Some of the characters in the story talk of how the neighbouring towns have their own established cultural milieus, and it seems as though the theatre's advisers are worried that the new horizons of the art world are leaving them trailing far behind.

While these changes and inventions of the 1960s were significant, they did not really succeed in establishing any kind of lasting popularity. While the music of popular artists of the era, such as The Beatles and Elvis Presley, is still beloved today, many of the trends in more "artistic" music fell out of use. According to *A History of Western Music*:

> Postwar classical or art music has not fared as well. Some works have become established in the permanent repertoire, such as the postwar symphonies and quartets of Shostakovich and the operas and choral music of Britten, and a few others are part of the cannon that well-educated classical musicians and listeners know, including Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, Boulez's *Le marteau sans maître*, Crumb's *Black Angels*, and Penderecki's

> *Threnody*. But most art music of the era, whether traditional or innovative, found few listeners when it was new and has no longer an audience today. Some of the experiments in indeterminacy, performance art, total serialism, electronic music, and other new ideas now seem dated, and works whose impact depended in part on the unfamiliarity of their sounds or techniques do not always stand up well to rehearings (956).

However, despite the failure of these types of music to achieve lasting status, they did succeed in expanding the horizons of music at the time, and they continue to influence composers and artists to this day. Creators of music and art were no longer afraid to push the boundaries of their fields, and many great works resulted when these creators became less contingent on any rules that they may have previously relied on in their compositions.

The committee of the opera house in the short story ultimately decides that its first ever performance will be Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. According to Jan Smaczny's article on Mozart and the twentieth century, a Mozart piece would have been a popular choice at the time. The style of his compositions was seen as a refreshing switch from the music that had been common in previous decades. In the early years of the twentieth century, the popular music at the time was more heavy and theatrical, as evidenced by the elevated status of Richard Wagner's works. Mozart's lighter classicist style was a welcome antidote to the Wagnerian drama of the era's music. Also, in the post-war years, there were many scholarly works published on Mozart, which served to give the public a greater context by which to appreciate his music (Smaczny 188).

The availability at this time of more extensive biographies on Mozart led to a fascination in this era with his personal life. In the 1960s, when Greif's story takes place, there was an explosion of interest in the translation into English of Hermann Hesse's 1927 novel *Steppenwolf*, which was undertaken in 1929 by Basil Creighton. The story, about a middle-aged man grown dissatisfied with his life, struck a chord with the 1960s counterculture. In the novel, the protagonist meets Mozart, who comes to stand for youthful exuberance and a lust for life, and whose music recalled the classical styles valued by the "refined" tastes of the novel's characters. What apparently appealed to people at the time was that Mozart, having died at the age of thirty-six, perished at a young age; however, he had accomplished so much that he was viewed as an almost mythical being. This accomplished life, they reasoned, could only have been lived with the aid of a tremendous talent and boyish enthusiasm. Also, at thirty-six, Mozart was old enough to have lived through all of life's stages: childhood, adulthood, marriage, fatherhood, all at a rather efficient pace, and also including a genius body of creative work. Having died so young, though, Mozart would have never had the opportunity to really grow sick of life and its challenges (Smaczny 186-7). In the eyes of the people enamoured with the translation of Hesse's novel, Mozart's life represented the ideal: an accomplished life, but one that had never lost its flavour.

Also popular at this point in time was the growing field of psychoanalysis, which was in turn used to analyse the life and music of Mozart and its effect on people. As previously mentioned, music aficionados were more interested in reading biographies on Mozart; however with the advent of psychoanalysis, there

were also attempts to give a deeper exploration of the nature of Mozart as a person. The characters created by Mozart were also examined, as well as the links between the composer's personal life and the personas of his characters. According to Jan Smaczny, thanks to the influence of musicologist and Mozart expert Alfred Einstein, Mozart biographies after about 1935 are more inclined to seriously examine the personal complexities of the composer's life, and to avoid an overly simplistic analysis. An important development in this area was Wolfgang Hildesheimer's biography, which contributed greatly to the more well-rounded image of Mozart popular in the later part of the twentieth century. Hildesheimer sought to dispel beloved myths about Mozart's life in order to achieve a new psychological portrait of the composer. He was most devoted to critiquing Bruno Walter's image of the composer as a 'happy simple-hearted young man', and therefore Hildesheimer was able to create a greater potential for richer readings of the composer's character (Smaczny 189).

In this era of music appreciation, fans of Mozart were no longer satisfied with simple analysis of the composer. In the examination of his personality and possible motivations, students found many interesting aspects of the man and his music, and as such his works enjoyed resurgence in popularity. Analysts were discovering new facets of the works every time they listened to them; therefore, demand for his works to be performed grew even greater in this period.

Perhaps what most intrigued people at the time when thinking of Mozart (and indeed, what continues to fascinate people today) is that the music of Mozart is unusual in that there seem to be few links between Mozart's personal life and

his musical compositions. While beautiful and expressive, Mozart's pieces appear to have little to no connection or basis to his life at the time. While many other composers drew on personal experiences, such as their own love affairs or infidelities, Mozart seemed to compose music based on more fantastic events, or events with which he had little to no personal experience. People know of Mozart's near-supernatural talents, but they still feel they know little of the man himself. According to Edward Said,

> The language of music is both expressive and mysteriously elusive: a piano concerto by Mozart *says* nothing at all, and is only incidentally tied to the moment in his life when it was composed. Musicological analysis can describe changes in style, illustrate features of form and of the tonal palate, characterize the logic and the harmonic language of a work. The problem remains of connecting, in some meaningful way, the experiences of Mozart's life with the actual music he produced, revealing how the former somehow sustained and – to some degree at least – can explain the latter (189-190).

It was likely this compulsion to understand Mozart and his works that caused people to flock to the theatres and opera houses in droves. It is also perhaps this mysterious persona of Mozart that compelled both Hans-Jürgen Greif to write about one of his best-known works, and drove his protagonist Hugo Rabe to devote so much excruciating time to finding the perfect singer to embody the *Flute*'s Tamino. One could almost argue that the figure of Tamino is similar to the figure of Mozart the artist: young, rather pure and uncorrupted, and interested only in the joys brought about by true love and by music, respectively. Rabe's quest for the perfect Tamino in the story may be a reflection of the public's quest for the "perfect" Mozart. Few could ever hope to understand the legendary and

enigmatic composer, although many have tried over the years. In the same way, neither Jonathan nor Laurent in the story could properly embody Mozart's Tamino: each could get certain aspects of the character right; however they never quite succeeded at the embodiment of the whole persona. Josef Schmidt's quiet dominance of the competition and the eventual (yet, to all those assembled, obvious) realization that he is the perfect singer for the role may perhaps be a parallel between the desire the world has to understand Mozart and the desire Greif's opera house has to make their first production a rousing success.

Since the works of Mozart were so popular at the time, it makes sense, from a financial standpoint of course, for a newly-opened concert hall to choose a Mozart opera as its first production. In Greif's short story, the opera's board of administration chooses the opera not only because it is popular, but also because it is beautiful. They hope that a staging of this work will help lift the townspeople and the visiting spectators out of the melancholic mood the German nation found itself in after the Second World War. The work is approved by the musical adviser who refers to the need for a "*Beau message humaniste après notre passé récent si sombre*" (239), which I have chosen to translate as "A splendid humanist message after our recent black history". Any monetary aspect of this decision is glazed over. However, when one considers that the opera's interim president is primarily a businessman (and a used car salesman at that), one cannot pretend that this character would not have been thinking of money at the time. A newer, more modern opera would likely not attract the crowds in the same volume as a beloved classic would. Therefore, it would make sense for a profitable composer to be

chosen for the opening production, especially Mozart who, according to Smaczny, may well have actually been *the most* profitable composer at that time:

> The Mozart-musicology advances: studies of his life, individual works (especially the operas), context, performance, reception and psychology are unrolled with bewildering frequency, confirming the view of the academic publishing world that Mozart is the most bankable of Classical composers and that anything with his magical moniker will sell to some constituency (190-1).

Whatever the exact reasons may have been for the opera house to choose this particular work as its grand opening production, the reader cannot deny that the world of opera comes richly to life in this short story.

The Real-Life Opera Stars Present in This Story

While the central characters of "*N'appelle pas le chat pour mettre d'accord deux oiseaux*" are all fictional creations of Hans-Jürgen Greif, there are nevertheless a few real-life characters from the opera world that make an appearance. Greif's reasons for including these figures may vary: the majority of the time, he refers to these characters in relation to how their voices affect the sensibilities of Marcel, the gifted Angora cat at the centre of the story. It may be that Greif inserted references to real opera singers in order to present a more well-rounded and realistic setting to the reader. One could also surmise that Greif inserted these characters into the story in order to be able to subtly critique or praise their singing talents. Greif, an avid opera fan and somewhat of an expert in the field of trained operatic singers, may have used the lens of the short story to express his views on these opera singers, while also benefiting from the distance

that the fictional short story could provide him from this opinion. Without reading a review or an article on professional opera singers written by Greif, we still can get a sense, from reading this short story, of how he felt about certain virtuosos of the 20th century.

The very first mentions of actual opera singers in the short story occur early in the narrative, when the author is introducing us to the central character of the voice coach Hugo Rabe. Greif mentions Alfredo Kraus, Ernst Haeflinger, Michel Sénéchal, Léopold Simoneau, and Fritz Wunderlich as singers alongside whom Rabe had sung as a tenor in the old days, and who were considered to be dear friends of his (239). Every one of these singers was an accomplished musician, and collectively their friendships with Rabe impress upon the reader that this man must truly have a significant presence in the opera world. Even if Rabe were to have closely associated with but a single one of these singers, he would have still been considered an important figure in the opera world. Alfredo Kraus, for instance, was a Spanish tenor acclaimed as the greatest Spanish tenor of his generation and renowned for his recordings of *zarzuela*, or Spanish operetta, during his career (Martinez). Ernst Haeflinger was a Swiss tenor known for his masterful interpretations of Bach's work; he became world famous for his interpretation of German Lieder, opera and oratorio, which he performed all around Europe, Japan and the USA (Oron). Michel Sénéchal, a French tenor, was well-known for his tendency to masterfully play character roles in operas such as *Don Quichote* and Tchaikovsky's *Yevgeny Onegin* (Eriksson). Léopold Simoneau was, interestingly enough for this particular collection of short stories, a French

Canadian tenor who studied at Laval University, the very same institution where Greif himself would one day teach. Simoneau was celebrated for his starring roles in *Don Giovanni* and *Oedipus Rex*, among many others (Oron). Finally, Fritz Wunderlich, like Hugo Rabe in the story, was a German tenor famed for his numerous roles in Mozart and Wagner operas (Praefcke).

Perhaps due to both of them being German tenors, Wunderlich and Rabe appear to share a special bond in the story: there is mention of a note written from Wunderlich to Rabe, thanking him for his help with his characterization of Tamino in *The Magic Flute* (239). This note is a clue to the reader that Rabe has a knack for helping a singer really fill a role to the best of their ability, and the fact that a world-famous singer is thanking him profusely is an indication of the talent that Rabe must have. Also, the fact that the role of Tamino is mentioned here proves that Rabe must know the role inside and out and is thus qualified to find the perfect singer for the part. Wunderlich's note in the story is dated February 2, 1960, which was five years before an article appeared in the *Gramophone* praising his performance as Tamino in a recording conducted by Karl Böhm. The author marvels that he had never before heard a Tamino with such tone-colour and control of dramatic tension. Of his overall impressions of Wunderlich's Tamino, the reviewer says:

> Many operas of many different schools tend to be dominated by the principal tenor, but I never expected to find Zauberflöte joining the group. What shines out from this performance even perhaps above Karl Böhm's masterly direction, is the gloriously realized Tamino of Fritz Wunderlich. To begin with his voice has a natural beauty and an ease in the topmost register which none of the other Taminos on record begin to rival. But on top of that Wunderlich,

> no doubt with Böhm's help, shows musical and dramatic imagination to a degree I hardly expected even after his many fine records to date (EG 69).

The author of this review is struck by the mastery that Wunderlich commands in this role and lavishes praise upon the tenor, while also mentioning that a good composer could have also helped to deliver this performance. Greif, however, inserts a note into his story, dated five years before this review appeared, suggesting that Wunderlich would have given much of the credit to Rabe's coaching (if, of course, Rabe had been a real person). As a way of building a background for this character and establishing Rabe's credibility, Greif cleverly reaches into the past, into the opera world in the 1960s, to show what a powerful influence Rabe would have had on the musical world at the time.

While these singers are used to establish the reputation of Hugo Rabe and his influence on the opera world at the time, there are other real-life singers appearing in the story that play a role that is seemingly more subject to the author's opinions. A number of real-life opera singers are mentioned in the passage where Rabe discovers Marcel's unique gift for the first time. There are two singers that notably irritate the cat when he listens to their recordings. The first of these singers is Maria Curtis Verna. In the story, Marcel is bothered by Verna's interpretation of *Or sai chi l'onore rapir a me volse*, an aria from Mozart's "Don Giovanni". Verna was an American opera singer in the 1950s, and was generally a

respected performer. Indeed, Greif never tells the reader what is wrong with Verna's voice or her interpretation of the character. He instead leaves whatever it is that riles Marcel deliberately vague, and refrains from any specific critique of Verna or her performance. The same is true in his mention of the soprano Ilse Hollweg. Little explanation is given as to why the cat hates these particular performances, all that is given is the description of the cat's dramatic and obviously annoyed reactions. It appears that the author may have been conflicted in his desires to have actual historical opera figures present in his story, but also his wish not to offend the singers in question. After all, later on in the story when the narrator (or the author) is talking about the two failed candidates for the Tamino role, he is willing and able to discuss exactly what had lost the singers the part, whether it was an inability to properly project his voice or a clumsiness in executing the choreographed movements of the character. It is odd that later on in the story, the reader is able to know exactly why Jonathan or Laurent was not picked to star as Tamino, while in the cases of Verna and Hollweg, the reader only learns that, for some vague intangible reason, their voices were just not suited to the part. It is possible that, over the years between discovering Marcel's talent and judging "the battle of the nightingales", Rabe was better able to pinpoint specific reasons as to why a singer was unsuitable for a role. However, it may also be the case that Greif did not have enough courage, or a strong

enough dislike of these two sopranos, to risk a specific critique of their work.

When it comes to praising specific singers, Greif is also not really given to singling out any particular trait or ability that causes these singers to appeal to the cat. When the cat and his owner are listening to recordings by the singers Cesare Vellenti, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, and Rabe's friend Simoneau, the reader is again given only Marcel's physical reactions to analyse. When reading the story, one can only guess at what it is in these voices that give the cat such rapturous enjoyment.

The reader gets a better idea of the extent of Greif's admiration of certain opera stars through other elements of the story, outside of the aforementioned passage where Rabe and Marcel listen to records. One of the more significant clues that Greif might be a fan of the German tenor Marcel Wittrich is the fact that the "proverbial cat" in this short story is named after him. When taking his new pet to the veterinarian for the first time, Rabe is asked for the name of his animal, and in that moment decides to name the cat after his recently deceased friend. A second example of this occurs at the end of the story, when Rabe enlists the famous soprano Régine Crespin to sing at the cat Marcel's funeral. While the author is not explicitly singing the praises, so to speak, of these performers, the fact that he has chosen them for significant roles in the narrative demonstrates his admiration for their work. The reader can

conclude that Hugo Rabe is a great fan of these singers, and one might extrapolate that Greif himself could be considered a fan as well.

Interestingly enough, in my research on real-life opera singers of the era, I discovered that there was a lesser-known Romanian singer in the pre-WWII era named Joseph Schmidt. Like the Josef Schmidt at the centre of Greif's short story, the real Schmidt was an underappreciated talent who was physically unimpressive. Unfortunately, unlike the fictional Schmidt, this singer's story does not have a happy ending. Although acknowledged as being talented and having a terrific voice, Joseph Schmidt was hampered by his diminutive stature: he stood less than five feet tall. Therefore much of his work consisted of either recordings or film roles. He became immensely popular to German audiences, which may explain why a similarly-named character came to appear in Greif's work: perhaps as a sort of homage. An upstanding member of the Jewish community, Joseph Schmidt was also recognized as an outstanding performer of Jewish cantorial music. However, his religious background would also be his doom: his rise to fame occurred at the same time as the Nazi's rise to power, and he was subsequently chased from much of Europe and forced to flee to a Swiss refugee camp, where he later died of inadequate care following a heart attack. He was only 38 years old (Oppenheim). Had he been born in a different era, and been permitted to perform without being ostracized for being Jewish, who knows how famous the real-life Joseph Schmidt might have

become? Perhaps the spectacular rise to fame of Greif's Josef Schmidt is a wistful look at what might have been.

Why I Chose to Translate this Particular Story

All technical challenges and wordplay aside, I decided to translate this short story simply because it was fun to read and there were elements in the story itself that I really liked. I have always been an animal lover, and growing up on a farm over the years, I have had more pet cats than I could ever possibly hope to count. I have always admired these odd, graceful, mysterious creatures, and in reading this story, I found myself completely believing that a cat could possess an almost supernatural ability to appreciate and judge music. I enjoyed this entire short story collection by Greif and I got the impression that the author also enjoyed writing this book and exploring many different aspects of feline personalities and modern mythologies.

I also liked reading this story because it recalled my years spent in the theatre arts. While I never seriously pursued singing, operatic or otherwise, I did spend many years acting on stage as well as assisting with some technical aspects of various productions. Drama was the minor I chose for my Bachelor of Arts degree, mostly because I simply enjoy acting and the theatre, and I always have. The story of the young singers drawn into an excruciatingly long audition process resonated with me to a certain degree: I remember all too well the nervousness I would feel during an audition and the sense of occasional bafflement at something the director, for no readily obvious reason, would ask me to do. I also felt

transported back to the world of theatre by the descriptions of the brand new opera house and the excitement leading up to its opening night. The hours of rehearsal and the anticipation of the arts community are universal among the opera and the theatre communities before a show, and I recalled those emotions as I was reading this story. This tale resonated with me, and the feeling of nostalgia it produced motivated me to want to translate it into English. Interestingly, in translating and researching this short story that takes place in the musical opera world, I happened upon a quote by the translator Giovanni Pontiero that likens literary translation to learning a piece of music. He says, "We are all reading the same notes, but only careful study will permit us to go beyond an accurate reading to an imaginative one. Ideally, we are aiming to emulate that handful of exceptional musicians who respectfully serve composers while establishing their own distinctive style" (301). In some ways, I suppose I did sometimes feel like a musician interpreting a composer's work. Perhaps the translator's struggle can be compared to this story's central storyline: just as each of the three singers strive to perfectly embody the character of Tamino, the translator strives to best embody the spirit of the original work in his or her translation. Unfortunately though, there is no Marcel, the Angora cat with nearly-divine abilities to recognize genius, to guide these translators. They must simply rely on their own training and experience to guide their work, and hope that they have produced a worthwhile interpretation of the original.

Conclusion

The process of crafting a worthwhile translation of Greif's short story was an interesting and involved one, and it taught me much about the field of translation studies and the task and duties of the translator. In the following section, the reader will have the opportunity to read my translation of Greif's story, and I hope that they will be able to appreciate the literary qualities of the work and also perhaps observe the aspects that would have been considered challenging to convey in English.

Some of the difficulties I encountered in the translation of this piece were problems I could not have anticipated before starting the translation process. The relationship between Canadian literature in translation and European audiences has long been a complex one, and will continue to be mutually influential. Also, the definition of a proverb, and the role it should play in translation, is an issue that has challenged translators for decades, and it will continue to incite debate in the future. Other difficulties I encountered had less to do with theories of translation studies and more to do with linguistic factors, such as the differences between French and English sentence structures. Overall, I firmly believe that my varied cultural and linguistic background influenced not only my choice of which text to translate, but also my decisions throughout the translation process. Just as the real situation of the opera world during the period in which the story takes place, and its well-known singers, would have guided Greif's creation of this story, so too did my background influence my translation. I hope that my

translation will be enjoyable to read, my choices and my research will be beneficial in the long run to translators and the field of translation studies.

“Never ask a cat to settle a dispute between two birds”

The “battle of the nightingales” recounted here occurred more than forty years ago in a German city. We must keep its name a secret so as not to antagonize the protagonists, some of whom are still alive and interested in the affair. Let us simply say that it is located on the shores of a river than flows into the Main. Known for its old university and its tall, narrow half-timbered houses built in the Middle Ages, the city had luckily been mostly spared in the war.

In 1964, a new mayor had just been elected. What won him the election was his slogan, “Culture: our pride”, an astonishing choice for someone who had made a fortune in the strong after-war economy, thanks to the construction of hospitals and cinemas. To anyone who would listen, he would say that the town deserved its own theatre. The funds were at their disposal, the citizens wanted to attend operas and dance recitals. Twenty years after the armistice, the whole world had access to blockbuster shows, the classics as well as modern pieces. And why not steal some of the spotlight from the bigger neighbouring cities, all with their own cultural milieus? The man, an excellent public speaker, electrified the city’s stakeholders. They thus proceeded swiftly and, two years later, the building was inaugurated with all pomp and circumstance on the spot left vacant by an old store destroyed in a flood, near the river. The mob of guests gathered and listened to the speeches, before throwing themselves onto the *petits fours* and *sekt*. Another slogan was repeated, “Whoever does not have a theatre, hates culture”.

The building, a block of cement, steel and glass, clashed with this art nouveau neighbourhood, shunned by the old bourgeoisie who lived in the side

streets uptown, in the shadow of the old castle. The theatre had a large foyer on the ground floor covered with a royal blue and gold carpet. At the grand opening, women greeted one another, dripping in jewels, while the men discussed business affairs. The concert hall, whose mediocre acoustics were revealed during the first rehearsals, was dedicated to major performances, whereas the small “pocket studio” was the meeting point for the bohemian and the avant-garde.

The next day, *The Magic Flute* would debut. The posters advertised an international cast. According to rumours, curious circumstances had surrounded the choice of who to cast as Tamino. No one could wait to see it.

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One year before the official opening, the board of administration, comprised mostly of businessmen allied with the mayor, had decided to go big and open the first season with “something popular and beautiful”. The musical adviser, a former piano teacher, had said, “Mozart, let's go with a Mozart. It's timeless. The *Flute* would be perfect. What a beautiful life lesson, where good triumphs over evil! A splendid humanist message after our recent black history”.

Heads nodded in agreement at the last sentence. Like so many other musicians, the old teacher had suffered under the Thousand Year Reich; he had defended Schönberg and Hindemith, which brought about his expulsion from the conservatory of music and his ban from giving private lessons. He was considered an unimpeachable authority from that time forth, even if certain members of the musical world whispered behind his back that he had been surpassed by the new music from the Cologne School. Be that as it may, they must call upon

impresarios.

"We'll hire the best of the best", the musical adviser had insisted. But these voices cost an arm and a leg. So they descended each rung of the celebrity ladder one at a time until they came to the "up-and-coming" singers – a rather nice way of saying "unknowns".

Before long, candidates were lining up outside the door of the opera's interim president, a prodigious used-car salesman. The musical adviser had suggested that he avoid using a full jury and instead make use of Hugo Rabe, a voice coach who had retired years ago, as a solitary judge. He had been a glorious tenor in his day, as evidenced by photos of him smiling alongside Alfredo Kraus, Ernst Haeflinger, Michel Sénéchal, Léopold Simoneau, to name only the most prestigious. His favourite snapshot showed him with Fritz Wunderlich. The latter had written an enthusiastic dedication: "Without you, my dear Hugo, my Tamino would have been a frightfully boring piece of tripe. Your eternally grateful Fritz, February 2, 1960".

The management had made it clear that they preferred foreign singers. This, they felt, would add an air of sophistication to the production. It would be an engagement that bore witness to "our opening up to the world". Rabe had proven himself efficient: in only a few days, he had unearthed The Queen of the Night (Romanian), Pamina and Papagena (Bulgarian), all three of whom were real finds, young, passionate, and not at all expensive. The male casting was equally swift: Sarastro (Finnish), Monostatos (Japanese), Papageno (Serbian). As for their names, they were all marvellously exotic and unpronounceable.

All that was left was Tamino, the role in which Rabe had shone in the years after the war. He knew exactly what he wanted: a suave voice, a *spinto* tenor, powerful, musical, and intelligent enough so as not to anger the guest conductor, an impatient and nervy Hungarian.

After having made his preliminary selection from amongst twenty candidates, Rabe retained three singers, two of whom had won first prize at their respective conservatories: Laurent Dehusse from Paris and Jonathan Bicker from London. Rabe's dilemma: both of their teachers were good friends of his. Impossible to choose one without hurting the other. Moreover, the young men had diametrically opposite styles of singing: Laurent's clear, light timbre made every note seem effortless, despite the trebles that resonated too much in his nasal cavity. His problem was volume: too quiet when compared to Jonathan's, which might, perhaps, be apt at projecting sound in the thankless acoustics of the great hall. The Englishman's voice, while less pliable than that of his French adversary, was still attractive for its emotional charge and its musicality.

The third candidate, a recruit from the school of music in the Freie Universität Berlin (an unpopular institution among those in the music world), had graduated two years beforehand. His achievements were limited to the occasional engagement, solos during mass, and membership in the RIAS Berlin choir. Upon hearing the hopelessly banal name of Josef Schmidt, the interim president had shrugged:

“I don't understand why you're considering this runt. And really, *Schmidt*?!”

Rabe had responded that he was holding on to him, “just in case”.

As for their physiques, Jonathan was of medium height and rather stocky with black hair and eyes. Laurent, a tall, thin blond, looked like a classical French opera star: Rameau, Gluck. Josef looked like a teenager who hadn't had enough to eat in months.

Bolstered by the support of their teachers and their respective prizes, the first two contenders saw this role as the beginning of their careers, whereas Josef needed the job to earn a living. For nine interminable days, either Laurent or Jonathan would stand in front of the studio door, spying on one another, while Josef, not really in the running, sat silently at the end of the room. Laurent and Jonathan had feebly protested: during an audition, a competitor is not allowed to sit in, even if he had no chance of being selected. Rabe had brushed off their concerns, saying, “Schmidt is there to learn. He has less experience than either of you, and he is not a threat to you in any way. Be gracious and let him sit in his corner”. Thus the two rivals concentrated on their perceived mistakes after the auditions, on separate sides of the hall. Both were staying with music lovers whose art nouveau houses were as massive as their bank accounts; the Frenchman and the Englishman only saw one another at the theatre. They greeted each other politely, a studied smile on their lips. By now, they were completely ignoring Josef. The two candidates, quickly nicknamed “the nightingales”, were ready to do battle in order to please either the Queen of the Night, or her daughter, but above all Rabe.

The latter never stopped running them through the mill. He had them take

up, day after day, Tamino's three solos as well as his spoken lines with the Queen, Papageno, Pamina, Sarastro, as though he wanted to test the nerves of the two singers. Not without a certain cruelty, he asked them to sing pieces from other Mozart operas, from *Don Giovanni* to *Così fan tutte*, not forgetting forays into Rossini's masterpieces, with difficult arias such as the *Ecco ridente il cielo* from the *Barber*, where the tenor is pushed to his very limits by *passi d'agilità*. Laurent did much better than Jonathan in these exercises, imposed by this judge who only allowed them one day to practise. According to those in the know, the balance was beginning to tip in favour of the French singer.

Little did they know that the decision would not be made by Rabe. The verdict would depend on a cat's ear for music.

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Before continuing our tale, we should explain this cat.

When Rabe had been recommended to cast the production of the *Flute*, he had only one condition, the same one that he had imposed for the last fourteen years of his career: his cat Marcel must be present at every audition. This had brought a smile to the lips of the interim president. Knowing nothing about opera, he had no way of guessing that Rabe and Marcel were inseparable: once you thought of one, the other would come to mind. The interim president, noticing that Rabe only asked for a modest daily allowance, and not even a hotel room or meals (as he lived on the outskirts of the city), accepted it unquestioningly.

Marcel was an imposing blue-eyed Angora. If Rabe had entered him into a cat show, the animal was likely to have won prizes. A powerful, well-proportioned

body, large paws, eyes rimmed with a thick black stripe, almost as though they had been lined with kohl, small ears, and a proud, pink, prominent nose. And what a coat he had! Long, thick and silky, it was such a pristine white that you wanted nothing more than to run your fingers through it. In fact, this cat looked like a cloud with two topazes in the middle, which stared at you with a cold and somewhat self-satisfied gaze.

The first morning of the “Battle of the Nightingales”, the animal waited until his master opened the car's passenger side door. He rose, stretched for a moment, then hopped off the seat onto the sidewalk. Motionless, his tail – fluffier than three feather dusters! – stuck straight up in the air, he stood next to the judge and started to walk as soon as the car doors were locked. Without hesitation Marcel followed Rabe to his dressing room. His master gave him a quick brushing before entering the spacious studio. This ceremony was repeated every day, right up until the end of the competition. The cat, with his fuzzy outline and majestic bearing, never got excitable or started to meow. He behaved like the star of a theatrical extravaganza, without the slightest affectation. In short, he knew who he was. He recognized his own value. There was no need to get nervous about the work his master had set for him; in the past, he had survived situations that were much more difficult.

One knew little about Rabe's private life since he had left the spotlight several years prior. He lived in seclusion in a hillside villa with a fabulous view of the valley and the picturesque meanderings of the river. He still employed the old maid who did his housework when he lived in an apartment downtown, near the

marketplace. Every week, she would prepare seven meals for him, and their order would remain strictly unchanged: from roast turkey to pork chops, from stewed fish to Viennese-style veal cutlets, stuffed chicken breasts, shrimp with dill sauce, a hearty pea or lentil soup, and always a roast beef on Sundays. He alone, however, saw to Marcel's meals, preparing them in a particular way that we will revisit later. Rabe did not receive visitors, except for some former students whose careers he still followed and who still came to him for advice.

He had never taken a wife. Yet he was still a handsome man, big, smiling, and amiable, with rosy skin and a thick mane of snowy white hair, a moustache tapering to a fine point, and blue eyes that resembled gemstones, though neither hard nor cold, since they were softened by the ever-present smile. Perhaps it was this feature that made him seem related to Marcel. This, and his measured movements. He expressed himself in short sentences, in a soft, firm voice, demonstrating an exquisite civility no matter the circumstances.

On the villa's ground floor, he had knocked down walls to create one giant room which he used as a living room/studio/library/listening room. Here there was a small grand piano on which he would accompany his former students who wanted to revisit a role since, as he would say, "one sheds his skin every seven years. We must therefore present the character we embody based on our own life experiences". After these visits, he would sit in a comfortable armchair and listen to music, vocal as well as instrumental, with an inclination toward the 18th and 19th centuries, sprinkled throughout with pieces where the voices of his old friends, Mozartians like himself, shone through: these he compared to his own

recordings, which were sometimes taken up in album collections.

In the summers, he liked to wander through fields accompanied by Marcel. The winters he spent in the large ground floor room with his albums and his scores, the cat curled up on his lap. He would stroke this magnificent fur, awaiting the moment when the cat would signal that it was time to change performers.

It was this sign that guided the master in all his decisions relating to a voice.

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Rabe had found the cat in an alley behind the Strasbourg cathedral, during a walk after one of his recitals of German lieder in November 1948. This type of evening fatigued him more than a role in an opera: alone on the stage with a pianist, he sang twice for forty minutes each time, not counting encores. After such exertion, he needed some air, and to do some breathing and relaxation exercises to calm his rattled nerves.

He stopped for a moment at an archway in a darkened corner. His light, thin-soled shoes slipped on the wet pavement. He told himself that the cold, humid air was not good for his throat after the overheated concert hall. It was at this moment that he noticed the cat. At first, he paid it no mind. Having grown up in a village in Hesse, he attached little importance to animals. Cows gave milk, horses and oxen pulled wagons, dogs guarded their masters' property, and cats took care of vermin. Owning a pet had always seemed absurd to him.

In this alley, the strangest thing happened: the cat, still very young, had stood up and followed him, meowing as though it were trying to talk to him. Rabe

had had to stop because the animal was jumping from left to right between his legs. Annoyed and afraid of being tripped, the singer made “psh, psh!” sounds and clapped his hands to chase it away. The cat did not run off. Rabe lengthened his stride, hoping to lose the cat. The beast seemed to read his thoughts and forestalled him, its tail whipping through the air. Often it would stop and turn to see if the man was still following. They arrived at the hotel’s entrance. When the singer opened the heavy glass-panelled door, the cat darted inside and sat in front of the reception desk. In the soft light of the hall, Rabe noticed the cat's dirty wet fur, stuck to its skinny body, its paws full of mud. Its irresistibly beautiful eyes stared at him. Even if Rabe had not understood the meowing, this stare now touched him deeply. He had the feeling that there was a message he was supposed to decipher.

While the woman at reception waited for her guest to request his key, Rabe stood frozen a few feet from the desk, as though hypnotized by the cat's eyes. Suddenly, he removed his gloves, stepped forward, and knelt to scratch the animal's breast. When he stood up, the cat lifted his front legs and stretched up against the tenor's leg. Rabe addressed the receptionist, unmoved in the manner befitting good hotel personnel, saying:

“You will find him something to eat from the kitchen, will you not? Calf liver, ham, anything. He will spend the night in my room”. After a brief pause, he added, with his disarming smile, “And for me, a slice of kouglof and a cup of tea”.

The singer picked up his key and headed toward the elevator, still followed

by the cat who entered the elevator car with him as though none of it were out of the ordinary: the man, the warmth of the hall, the large carpet, the exotic plants and the gilded ceiling, the dim lighting. Cats have the wonderful ability to almost instantaneously gloss over their old lives and apparently throw them out the window. The cat began to purr so intensely that Rabe burst out laughing. In German, he told him:

“You'll sleep on one of the couches or on the bed, as you wish. But first, we'll have some supper, what say you?”

In reply, the cat, a good Alsatian accustomed to the language of Goethe, simply watched Rabe. They entered the room. While the singer changed out of his evening wear into pyjamas and a robe, the cat settled into a sofa where he began to thoroughly groom himself, from his ears to the tip of his tail. The waiter brought up the plates – “We had some leftover filet mignon, sir, which we sliced up. I hope that it will do?” The cat sniffed the raw meat carefully, then savoured it in tiny bites. This self-restraint pleased Rabe greatly, and he watched the cat attentively as he ate his slice of kouglof. When he went to bed, he said.

“Come here, if you like. It's comfortable, and it smells good”.

That night, Rabe's slumber was as deep as the sleep of the just, mentioned in the Gospels.

When he awoke, he felt reinvigorated and happy. He ordered two breakfasts: his own and two slices of ham for the cat. Afterwards, Rabe got dressed and went out, only to return with a large wicker basket. He packed his clothes into his suitcase, went into the bathroom to collect the toiletries he had left

there, opened the lid of the basket and settled the cat inside, then descended into the hall where the concert organizer awaited him.

“What a lovely cat! And so well-behaved. Does he travel well?”

“We're about to find out. Funny sort of creature. He followed me right to the hotel. Believe it or not, I don't think he'll ever let me go. Rather nice, don't you think?”

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At that time, the singer was still living in his downtown apartment. It was in the calm of his living room, over the room where Luther had insulted Zwingli in 1529, where Rabe discovered the cat's secret.

The veterinarian's office was only a few steps from Rabe's place, in an alley behind the inn where, on the first floor, the Brothers Grimm had met with their students, students who had been as passionate as they about the idea of putting together the ultimate German language dictionary (at the time of their deaths, they had barely finished the letter *B*), and where they had created a treasure trove of popular German fairy tales.

“What is your cat's name?” asked the assistant. The singer hesitated, then replied:

“Marcel”. After a pause, he added, “In remembrance of a very dear friend, the tenor Marcel Wittrich, who passed away a few years ago”. The young woman, to fill the silence, responded:

“Oh yes! And does your cat sing?” This brought about a glacial stare from Rabe.

Marcel submitted to his operation and was vaccinated. The veterinarian cleaned out his mite-encrusted ears. The cat was washed and brushed. As for the food offered by the clinic, he did not care for any of it, neither wet nor dry. It must be mentioned that in the sixties, there were very few of the appetizing options available everywhere today. This cat had learned to feed himself by imitating his fellow strays. He caught mice, and when this was not possible he foraged in restaurants' trash cans to find whatever was still edible.

One short week later, recovered from his surgical intervention, Marcel took over the singer's apartment. From that first day, they initiated a ritual, henceforth unchanging: while the master listened to his music, Marcel would sit on his lap, curled up into a ball, his head pointed toward the speakers.

Rabe was stunned by what followed. They were listening to a series of Mozart opera recordings. The master had started to listen to the *Dalla sua pace la mia dipende*, sung by Cesare Vallenti. Marcel had stretched, his paws opening up like hands, showing shiny white claws that he retracted at once. However, at the first notes of the *Or sai chi l'onore rapir a me volse*, interpreted by Maria Curtis Verna, where Donna Anna laments having been betrayed and seeks vengeance, the hair stood up on Marcel's back. With a deliberate motion – no doubt about that – he dug his claws into Rabe's pant leg. With the sensation of several sharp needles being thrust into his skin, Rabe leapt to his feet, shocked and angry. Up until now, the cat had shown great gentleness and had been perfectly well-behaved.

Rabe turned off the CD player and watched Marcel, seated in front of the sofa, his hackles still raised, his eyes aglow with a troubling light. In the silence of

the room, the cat gradually calmed down, grooming himself with a series of quick licks to the stomach.

Still in shock, Rabe continued the afternoon's programme with another Donna Anna aria, *Non mi dir, bell' idol mio*, from Act Two of *Don Giovanni*. The interpreter was Elisabeth Schwartzkopf. This time, Rabe stood on the alert and awaited the reaction of the cat, who was curled up on the floor like a miniature sphinx. During the superb *Il mio tesoro intanto*, still interpreted by Valletti, he half-closed his eyes, as though he were letting a piece of ham fat – his favourite food – melt slowly on his tongue. Rabe changed records in order to play *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, with Belmonte's *O wie ängstlich, o wie feurig* sung by his friend, the admirable Léopold Simoneau, and accompanied by Lois Marshall as Konstanze. The cat did not move, his eyes half-closed, looking every inch the gourmand. However, at the first notes of *Welche Wonne, welche Lust*, the second aria of Konstanze's servant Blondchen sung by Ilse Hollweg, he glared irately at the speaker and bunched his muscles, prepared to spring to the attack. He flattened his ears and, as a final step, unsheathed his claws and dug them into the carpet.

This time, Rabe understood: Marcel became enraged when he heard a voice that did not suit a particular role. He showed his disapproval in a manner more direct than that of any music critic. “Prodigious, really, quite astounding”, Rabe murmured, as he repeated the experiment to confirm that he was not simply hallucinating. It was a divine revelation. From that moment onward, the master treated Marcel as though he were his other half, the twin of the young Hugo who

had since his childhood adored certain voices while others, though highly lauded, simply riled him, without him ever knowing why. It was visceral: an impression, a taste. There had previously been no need to analyze these peculiar aversions.

From that time on, he and Marcel were inseparable. Up until the end of his career, the cat became more than a simple companion, he was a precious adviser. Rabe's contracts stipulated that the cat be present during rehearsals. If the theatre objected, he would refuse the role. Soon, the opera world, or at least the German one, acquiesced to this strange request: Marcel was to have a sofa to himself, set to either side of the stage so that Rabe might observe him. Following the behavioural clues from the cat, he would adjust his acting, the volume and intensity of his voice, all the while taking advantage of the shortcomings of his partners. In other words, he shone brightly in comparison. This resulted in critics only having eyes and ears for him. Opera houses clamoured for him with increasing imperiousness. He was celebrated as one of the greatest interpreters of Mozart. His impresario booked him attractive roles, in Germany as well as abroad. His Tamino, Don Ottavio and Belmonte brought him recognition beyond anything he had ever thought possible. He abandoned entirely his 19th century Italian repertoire of Donizetti, Verdi, Boito, Puccini, roles he had nevertheless relished before his rise to the top.

Marcel followed him around faithfully. He was never reluctant to undertake his allotted task and stoically tolerated train trips, napping for hours on his master's lap. With time, he had learned to manifest his displeasures less violently: he would unsheathe his claws halfway, just enough to warn his friend of

a voice deemed to be problematic. It was but a discreet movement, of pads quickly spread then closed, just enough time to pierce through the cloth and scratch the skin of the thighs. However, when he sat alone on his couch, he did not hold back: ears flattened, fur on end, he dug his claws into the fabric upholstering the sofa.

As the cat did not suffer kindly through airplane travel (the cabin pressure irritated his eardrums), the two always traveled by train or by car. Several months after the initial failings of his voice, Rabe announced his retirement. Even though others assured him that it had lost none of his brilliance, he was not fooled: Marcel clawed at the carpet during his rehearsals. The cat was incorruptible. He would never have allowed his palm to be greased, and to leave his friend ignorant as to the quality of his instrument.

Rabe did not worry about the future. Having amassed a considerable fortune, he purchased a villa in the country where he wished to live the rest of his life, in a golden cocoon with the company of his cat.

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Before returning to the city's theatre studio, a word about Marcel's longevity. At the time when our two nightingales (the Berliner was nothing but an unimportant sparrow) were battling mercilessly before this amiable yet demanding judge, the cat had reached a respectable age, around eighteen or nineteen by our calculations. Contrary to what one might believe, his health was excellent, despite the trips and their disagreements, diarrhea, vomiting, the impossibility sometimes of eating appropriately, the lack of exercise. During the

daily brushing, Rabe erased all stiffness. The master prepared all Marcel's meals himself, a mixture of carrots, fennel, spinach, a few cubes of potatoes, calf liver, ground lamb, all accompanied by a succulent sauce sprinkled with brewer's yeast. Added to this were vitamins and fortifiers as well as the weekly bath. A child could not have been better cared for. The feline was in fine form.

However, we are convinced that even the greatest care in the world and the most competent veterinarians could not have preserved the sheen of his beauty and assured his longevity without the veneration Rabe had for him. With time, the physical resemblance between him and the cat might have led to astonishment or smiles: white hair and white fur, eyes the colour of topaz, perfect teeth, elegance and suppleness, Olympian serenity. Rabe did not forget that during their fortuitous meeting, it had been the cat who, gifted with a mysterious intuition, had immediately recognized the very essence of this human being whom Fate had put in his path. He had spontaneously attached himself to Rabe *because he knew*. On his end, the master, in a moment of lucidity or insanity – it would be foolish to speculate on this point – had accepted this exceptional animal, with a gift for music. Impossible to diminish their attachment to something like love, an elective affinity. They had woven a unique relationship, attached to each other by an invisible link, more strongly established and reinforced throughout the years.

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For nine days, the judge and his councillor held the two competitors captivated, as well as the interim president. In the hallways, one whispered: Rabe did not know what he wanted; he had lost his senses when he had cast the other

roles too rapidly. He seemed to lean toward the Frenchman; however, nothing was certain. Some muttered that a new judge should be found. Even the musical adviser was starting to have doubts. But finally, on the tenth day, Rabe left the studio and brought Laurent and Jonathan up on stage. He set Marcel down on a sofa, sat down facing him, gave his instructions to the accompanying pianist. In the front rows sat around fifty people, mostly privileged observers, but also voice students from the university's school of music. The interim president openly displayed his impatience. "Sir, we must finish up! The dress rehearsal is in two weeks!" Rabe reassured him that his verdict would be known that day.

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The truth was that during the auditions held at the studio, Marcel had not given any valid signs, except for a few barely perceptible scratches, warnings at the most, as much on Laurent's side as Jonathan's. Today, the master let the cat act freely, just as he did during his engagements for a new production. He did not doubt that the cat would manifest himself as soon as one of the candidates revealed some shortcoming which had previously remained hidden.

The interim president (who, since the third day, had been calling Rabe's examination "the martyrdom of the nightingales") said to the musical adviser:

"What is wrong with our Mister Crow?" which earned him an offended silence from the old piano teacher, since in German *Rabe* means "crow", synonymous with the "bird of evil". Moreover, the crow is not known for its melodious song. The allusion, simple and cruel, caused a sensation in the auditorium. "You have told me that this role is one of the least important in the

Flute, with only two solo arias and some dialogue with the other characters. In my opinion, the candidates are good, and each has his advantages according to what you've allowed me to hear. So, let's finish up!"

"It is too late to change the procedure now", said the musical adviser. "At this point, the master will not tolerate being pushed. The first ten performances are already sold out. The staging is set, the costumes and sets are ready, the guidelines have been given to the lighting technicians and stagehands. Be patient, we are close to the goal, I am sure of it".

The judge signaled to the accompanying pianist that he wished to start with the *Zu Hilfe!* aria where Tamino, pursued by the enormous serpent, is saved by the three ladies-in-waiting of the Queen of the Night who kill the monster before the young prince faints. It is a very short aria, an introduction to the fairy tale world of the *Flute*. The vocal difficulties are all but non-existent, two *fa* notes which were nothing at all. What really matters is how the singer interprets the piece. The prince must not give the impression of being cowardly: when he faints, he avoids passing out like a young girl seeing a mouse run across her shoe. The prince realizes that a parallel world rests within him; he discovers the principles of Good and Evil. His actions translate this new awareness without resorting to the melodrama of the silent film: no hand on the forehead or over the heart, and absolutely no arms thrown back to seek support when facing the ghost surging from the hell of the human heart. It is into this precise trap that Jonathan fell: he moved far too much, gesturing as though to make himself understood by the deaf. He sang the piece well, but when he let himself fall, tumbling onto his behind

with a thud, no one could keep from smiling.

Laurent, with his less extroverted disposition, gave a bravura performance, displaying just enough fear in face of the serpent. His cries for help, his *zu Hilfe!* and *rettet, schützet mich!* imbued with a well-measured hint of panic, his discrete gestures, but especially his controlled movements when he collapsed (a glide instead of a noisy fall) seduced everyone. During Jonathan's performance, Marcel had turned around to find a more comfortable position; whereas with Laurent, the cat contented himself with watching him attentively.

Next came the aria where Tamino receives Pamina's portrait, a gift from the Queen, *Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön*. Here, the prince forgets all that is happening around him, Papageno's chatter, the comments of the three ladies-in-waiting. It was love at first sight when he saw the princess. The queen had expected this. She needed him to free her daughter from Sarastro's clutches. In this aria, Tamino says that Pamina's portrait is enchantingly beautiful. Already, he wants nothing more than to make her his own forever. In other words, the frightened young man is silenced into sighs according to the desires of this *ancien régime,* as opposed to Pamina who, from their first encounter, pursues him and seizes each opportunity to reveal her love for him.

It was once again Laurent's turn. With his light and nimble voice, he sang without misrepresenting, but one barely understood the words. The phonetic distortions were such that the meaning of the words was changed, which caused laughter among the audience. With his feeble sound projection and the lacking acoustics of the concert hall, the melody did not carry back to the singer's ear.

Though he had indeed pushed for volume, he heard nothing but the laughter from the rows before him and the vague murmur of the piano, reduced to background noise, behind him. In the thirty-ninth measure, during the *O wenn sie doch schon von mir stünde!* where Tamino expresses his ardent desire to see Pamina in the flesh, the disoriented Laurent visibly brought himself back down to earth by shaking his head, which he turned to avoid seeing the spectators.

It was perhaps this gesture that lost him. Even the most experienced singer finds it hard to concentrate if his inner balance is disturbed. Laurent sought a focal point. His eyes landed on Marcel, whose slow tail motions indicated his growing irritation. It is impossible to watch a moving object when one sings: the "interior pendulum", a mental image established during long years of practice, begins to increase, obliterating one's concentration, destabilizing the physical equilibrium. The singer literally loses his footing in the music. It is better to stop oneself and restart, but in this moment of truth, Laurent knew that he would not get a second chance. It was all or nothing. In measures forty-seven to forty-nine, where Tamino affirms that he will press Pamina to his "ardent heart", was where the catastrophe occurred. Emanuel Schikaneder and Mozart had agreed, at least for this aria, on a text of insipid flatness. However, the divine aria reflects nascent love, free of affectation. In the forty-eighth measure, Laurent slid on *Busen*, a simple *la* note which was certainly not slippery. A ridiculous "quack" escaped his throat, like from a choking duck.

Marcel stood, eyes gleaming, before him, paws stretched before him, claws ready to sink into the fabric. Rabe was on the verge of interrupting the

Frenchman who was continuing on with “Forever then would I be true”, without conviction, when he saw the cat lay back down, resuming his sphinx-like pose and awaiting what was to come. All that remained was the *terzetto* sung by Sarastro, Pamina and Tamino, in Act II Scene 21, where the prince reassures his beloved: they must be apart, but not for long. Rabe asked Laurent to sing only his part, *Glaub mir, ich fühle gleiche Triebe*. The Frenchman concentrated, but in vain. He could not suppress the memory of what had just happened. From the forty-third measure, there was the same thinness, the unpleasant slide on *Wie bitter sind der Trennung Leiden!* The judge shifted and saw Marcel do the same, in a manner which could not be more conspicuous: the cat turned his back on the singer, and hooked his claws firmly in the upholstery. He did not retract them until there was once again silence in the room.

It was one of those painful moments, known to all juries in a competition, when the singer is overcome by stage fright. The spectators would have preferred to be leagues away from what they were in the process of witnessing. They suffered along with the candidate; they tensed up and shrank down into their couches. In his calm voice, Rabe found some kind words for Laurent, thanked him and then called Jonathan back in. The Frenchman left the stage like a boxer after a K.O.

An artist, once rejected, no long exists. One might say that as soon as Laurent left, the audience, to regain its composure, expected this rival performance to supersede that of the also-ran. They uncrossed their arms and legs, they shifted into comfortable positions on their couches. Rabe smiled and waited

impassively. Marcel had reclaimed his original position, still irritated, as evidenced by his tail constantly sweeping the sofa. However, as soon as Jonathan started to sing, he froze and concentrated, his eyes half-closed.

At the beginning, all went well. The Englishman had a good set of lungs, his voice resonated, and during the four *Liebe* in measures twenty-eight to thirty-three, Marcel rested his head on his paws. It was during the long and dynamic passage expressing Tamino's growing desire, in measures forty-seven to sixty-one, when the aria was really spoiled. "Surely", thought Rabe, "this boy is not at all ready. He must work on his decrescendos from the chest and the head; this will take him a long time to do. It is far too rough. Ah! And now he's garbling it too! He is not understanding measures fifty-three, four, five, six. He should *glide* over these notes, with elegance, whereas he is attacking them as though they were Verdi. Wunderlich would have a fit. It's a shame, really, a great shame". He glanced at Marcel, already standing, furious, his hackles standing up so much as to make him appear twice his size. And his claws sunk deep into the upholstery.

Rabe interrupted the torture.

"Thank you, Jonathan, thank you. Go rest a little. We will see later".

He turned toward the interim president:

"I am sorry, sir. Truly sorry. But you heard for yourself…"

The other man, enraged, pointed in the master's direction:

"Nine days for that? Ten to arrive at nothing at all? We will fix this right now. Pick one, it doesn't matter which, you will deal with it, one way or the other. You are wasting my time! And money!" He was probably thinking of all the

vehicles gone unsold in his absence. “Go on, make your choice!”

Rabe had stood. Marcel had left his couch and stood beside his master. The other man was still raging:

“Worst case scenario, make your cat sing!”

It was then that the judge motioned toward Josef Schmidt, who was standing in the wings. Rabe settled Marcel onto his own couch, nodded to the pianist to start playing, and stood a few steps from the young man, blinded by the stage lights. He said quietly:

“Breathe, move into position. Concentrate. The lyrics, you know them by heart, same with the melodies. Go on, throw yourself into it. You have nothing to lose. Do not try anything new, this isn’t the time for it. Act as though you were practicing alone in a studio. Breathing, concentration. That’s all”.

Josef nodded, red with emotion. He turned to face the room, looking at a point in the middle of the second row of box seats, took a wider stance for greater stability, squared his shoulders, lifted his head, bent his elbows and held his fingers as though he were clutching Pamina’s portrait, thus finding the best support for his diaphragm. All of a sudden, this scrawny boy was transformed. He went through the aria without hesitation, with the confidence of a budding professional. Along with his solid technique, he knew how to deliver what the others had been missing: a Tamino who was convinced that he had found the love of his life. His voice rolled miraculously through that thankless room and filled it with a full, light sound, at once soft and penetrating, with solid foundations. He had a nobility in his attitude, the dignified assurance of the prince he was

embodying. His interpretation of *Liebe*, with its delightful soaring lyricism on the last repetition of the word, was heart-rending. At the moment when Tamino hopes to hold Pamina close to his heart and keep her forever, *und ewig ware sie dann mein*, Josef expressed the fervour of desire, at the exact point where the Englishman had produced, in Rabe's words, "mush". At the end of the aria, the audience burst into spontaneous applause. Josef sought Rabe's eyes, who smiled encouragingly as he nodded his head. After this, the young man started the *Zu Hilfe!* and then jumped to Act two, Scene twenty-one. Josef delivered his lines with exuberance. The master asked him to take up the first two songs, "just for the fun of it".

Marcel was lounging on his sofa. He was watching the singer, spellbound. His paws hung limply off the seat, opening and closing as though he were kneading his mother's belly. Rabe took a deep breath.

"Sir", he said, talking to the interim president, "here is Tamino".

He turned to shake the young man's hand, gave him a wink that no one other than Schmidt saw, and murmured,

"Always remember the Hessian proverb: *The bird that sings in the morning is eaten by the cat in the evening*. It worked well, our little plot. From the very first audition, I knew that you were the Tamino we needed. But I had to go through this whole rigmarole because of the other two candidates' teachers. Those two were not ready for the role, you heard them throughout your residency. In our world, we must avoid making enemies at all costs". He added, in one breath, "Rest assured, no one caught on, not even the musical adviser, and the town's elite

don’t know a thing about music, they all fell for it”.

He bowed once more before the audience, then disappeared, followed by Marcel.

People ran onto the stage. The musical adviser’s face was lit up with joy.

“Excellent! Really incredible! And to think, you weren’t even one of the front-runners! Good old master, he always has a trick up his sleeve. Please accept my congratulations”.

He turned toward the interim president:

“Who would have believed it? An old fox, our judge. For ten days, he had us holding our breath!”

The other man grumbled, without looking at Josef much,

“That’s perfect. It’s about time that he made up his mind. But all the same, look at the time we’ve wasted because of all this fuss!”

* * * * * * * * *

How does this story end? The cat had eaten the two nightingales. They had been too young to be wary of him. On opening night, Josef brought down the packed house, which still could not drown out the voices. The *Flute* was such a success that critics from the major dailies traveled far and wide to hear it. The opera’s new director, a veritable musician, offered Josef a five-year contract. For his part, Rabe took in the young man as his student, “my last”, he said.

They worked together until Marcel’s death at the age of around twenty-three, a grand old age for a cat. His soul – and he did have one, that was certain – was transported to heaven by the voice of the divine Régine Crespin, singing the

part of Didon from Berlioz's *Les Troyens*. Josef had quickly recognized and admired the cat's genius, and he wept for him almost as much as did his master.

After Rabe's withdrawal, the former interim president commissioned an artist to paint a large portrait of the singer. The businessman, whose interest in the artistic world had grown since he had, in his second marriage, wed a singer, had wanted to pay the ultimate homage to this "particular" judge. The painting can be found today in the foyer of the theatre, whose concert hall acoustics had been greatly improved through renovations done in the middle of the 1990s. The similarities between the faces of the master and the white Angora on his knee are striking.

Today, young music enthusiasts still remember Hugo Rabe, although they know nothing of the cat, not even his name.

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