Translating Queer: Dino Pešut’s Daddy’s Boy

Martić, Blaž

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

Blaž Martić

Translating Queer: Dino Pešut's Daddy's Boy

Diplomski rad

Zadar, 2021.

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

Translating Queer: Dino Pešut's Daddy's Boy

Diplomski rad

Student/ica:

Blaž Martić

Mentor/ica:

izv. prof. Tomislav Kuzmanović, MFA

Zadar, 2021.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

Ja, **Blaž Martić,** ovime izjavljujem da je moj **diplomski** rad pod naslovom **Translating Queer: Dino Pešut's Daddy's Boy** rezultat mojega vlastitog rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima te da se oslanja na izvore i radove navedene u bilješkama i popisu literature. Ni jedan dio mojega rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno nije prepisan iz necitiranih radova i ne krši bilo čija autorska prava.

Izjavljujem da ni jedan dio ovoga rada nije iskorišten u kojem drugom radu pri bilo kojoj drugoj visokoškolskoj, znanstvenoj, obrazovnoj ili inoj ustanovi.

Sadržaj mojega rada u potpunosti odgovara sadržaju obranjenoga i nakon obrane uređenoga rada.

Zadar, 8. rujna 2021.

Table of Contents:

1 Introduction

Describing queer is a notoriously perilous task. Over the course of history, the term has undergone a radical transformation with regards to its deployment. At worst, it was used as an expression of homophobic sentiments, while at best, and only in recent history, it came to represent all nonnormative sexualities and genders, as well as a theoretical field that subverts ideas and values of the dominant culture. As such, its critical and political potency rests on its elasticity, that is, its refusal to be defined. To remain subversive, it requires constant transformation, and this transformability can be mapped out by examining the evolution and emergence of sexual categories over the past decades. This includes the long-standing debate between essentialism and constructionism, the transformation of queer identities and politics, and its impact on other theoretical fields.

Queer emerged as a critical theory in reaction to rising homogenization of queer discourse in the early 1990s, arguing it reflects binary views of gender and centers interests and values of gay white men. Around the same time, a similar process occurred in translation studies, a process that came to be known as a cultural turn. A new approach to translation emerged, one that focuses on inequivalence between cultures and frames translation as being a part of a system that is influenced by larger ideological, cultural and social contexts. Born out of cultural translation, queer translation analyzes how concepts that relate to gender and sexuality travel across cultural boundaries, as well as processes by which translation sustains heteronormativity.

Every literary product is inadvertently imprinted with pre-existing ideas and notions that reinforce our lived experiences, the subliminal coding of narratives in most cases goes unnoticed because it affirmatively relates to our knowledge about what is “ordinary”. However, when the “ordinary” is challenged, literary works can enter a problematic place of conduct when it comes to translation, publishing, and book-business. In this regard, translation can become a

medium through which ideology is enforced by way of rewriting the original. A relatively recent controversial case of publication of Mima Simić's short story "My Girlfriend" testifies to existence of such issues and the problematic influence exerted by Lefevere's patronage. On the other hand, translating works such as Dino Pešut's *Daddy's Boy* and preserving their "queerness", can further the articulation of queer identities that offset and challenge existing notions and ideas about gender and sexuality in the receiving culture.

2 The Becoming of Queer

Before queer, there was gay and lesbian, and before gay and lesbian, there was – homosexual. Explanations about what constitutes homosexuality, or rather, who is homosexual, have had a rocky history that has, to some degree, been marked by a debate between two differing perspectives – the constructionist and essentialist perspective. As it will be presented in further chapters, each of the two perspectives have informed queer movements for equality, queer politics, and queer literature in their own way.

2.1 The Essentialist Perspective

The essentialist perspective can be traced back to 1880s when the prevailing medical discourse around homosexuality deemed it a medical condition. The logic behind the medical model of homosexuality is rooted in the presumption that homosexuality can be traced back to one's biological makeup. In his 1983 book *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, John D'Emilio states that with the emergence of scientific literature, members of the medical community debated whether homosexuality was simply a vice of depraved individuals, a form of insanity, or an inborn defect (15). In the early twentieth century, a consensus emerged, and homosexuality was determined as being a hereditary condition, that is, "a mental health problem requiring psychiatric treatment" (D'Emilio 16).

In line with the medical model, essentialist hold homosexuality to be fixed, natural, and innate. In his 1990 book *Forms of Desire*, Edward Stein writes, "Essentialists hold that a person's sexual orientation is a culture-independent, objective and intrinsic property" (325). To put it more simply, according to essentialists, homosexuality is a condition congenial to an individual in the same way some people have green eyes, while some have brown. In her 1996 book *Queer Theory*, Annamarie Jagose argues that essentialism frames homosexuality as being a universal phenomenon that exists across time and has its own continuous, yet marginalized

history (9). Consequently, essentialists would argue that it is not fallible to say that there were both homosexuals and heterosexuals in Ancient Greece and that their sexuality is "just a matter of whether or not a person has the relevant properties" (Stein 326).

The ramifications of essentialism and the medical model have informed the queer people's self-perception up until the mid-20th century, however, in trying to pathologize homosexuality, a new kind of identity emerged as men and women took on self-definitions as lesbians or homosexuals (D'Emilio 22). Once the World War II started, a restructuring of the social life ensued due to the conditions of war, as it "temporarily weakened the patterns of daily life that channeled men and women toward heterosexuality and inhibited homosexual expression" (D'Emilio 31). Consequently, people who were previously restrained by their environment could more easily come out and connect with others. Soon, with the ordinary life upset, queer communities began springing up, and first gay bars started emerging, places which nurtured the new, homosexual identity. However, regardless of the newfound ways of expression, the prevailing ideology still imposed self-hatred, encouraging gay people to see their sexuality as a defect (D'Emilio 22).

2.2 The Constructionist Perspective

To say that before gay and lesbian there was homosexual is to imply that the terms differ in some way, that a homosexual man is in some way different to a gay man. This is the central argument of the constructionist perspective. The constructionist perspective regards sexuality as being fluid – the result of social conditioning in combination with available cultural categories of self-identification (Jagose 9). Thus, social constructionists argue that sexuality is a culturally constructed category that is "culture-dependent, relational, and perhaps, not objective" (Stein 325).

In the same line, constructionists argue that the meanings of same-sex sexual acts differ in varying historical contexts, i.e., they are not universal across space and time. So, a constructionist position would argue that engaging in sexual acts is a common occurrence in every culture, but only in some of them, people have been assigned with sexual orientations. In other words, a constructionist would claim that even though in ancient Greece there were men who had sex with other men – none of them were homosexuals because homosexuality as a category of human sexuality was not available (Stein 326).

2.3 Homosexual Identity as a Modern Construct

Many theorists trace the origin of the constructionist perspective back to British sociologist Mary McIntosh and her 1968 article "The Homosexual Role". In her article, McIntosh problematizes the conception of homosexuality, claiming that homosexuality should be seen "as a social category, rather than a medical or psychiatric one" (41). Arguing against the medical model and essentialist claims that suppose homosexuality as a condition, McIntosh condemns "medicalizing" homosexuality, as such practice acts as a tool of social control.

She distinguishes two ways in which this happens. On one hand, such practice "helps provide a clear-cut, publicized and recognizable threshold between permissible and impermissible behaviour", while on the other, it serves to "segregate the deviants from others", restricting supposed deviant practices exclusively to the group labelled as deviant (McIntosh 27). Rather, it is suggested that instead of labelling it as a condition, homosexuality should be seen as a social role that encompasses more than patterns of sexual behaviour, because such patterns "cannot be dichotomized in the way that the social roles of homosexual and heterosexual can" (McIntosh 29).

In a bold attempt, McIntosh tries to define the exact period in which homosexual role had developed in England. Nearing the end of the seventeenth century, McIntosh writes, The

Mollies' Clubs started springing up, city taverns in which homosexuals gathered to party and freely express "vanities natural to the feminine sex", adopting them in their speech, walk, etc. (34). Thus, according to McIntosh, "a distinct, separate, specialized role of 'homosexual' emerged in England", while at the same time, homosexuality has been conceptualized as a condition observable only in certain individuals (36).

In similar fashion, Alan Bray traces the emergence of modern homosexuality to the same period in his 1982 work *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*. According to Bray, London's molly houses were places where homosexual subculture first emerged, as a result, homosexuality was no longer defined exclusively by the same-sex sexual act, but it "came to be understood as the grounds for community" (qtd in Jagose 12).

On the other hand, in his 1976 book *The History of Sexuality*, aligning himself with the same constructivist rhetoric, Michael Foucault provides a different historical framework of the formation of homosexual identity, tracing its origin back to the medical model. Foucault claims homosexuality to be a modern formation, arguing that "while there were previously same-sex sex acts, there was no corresponding category of identification" (Jagose 10). Foucault pinpoints the exact year homosexuality was conceptualized, the year in question being 1870. According to Foucault, it was then that the homosexual as a discernible type of person emerged in several medical discourses: "The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history […] Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality" (qtd in Jagose 11). Before 1870, as Foucault claims, sex acts defined as homosexual were condemned, but they were viewed as "temptations to which anyone might succumb" (Jagose 11).

Following the constructionist argument, D'Emilio offered his theory about the formation of homosexual identity in the United States. According to D'Emilio, social attitudes of colonists that came from England to North America were dominated and driven by the need

for procreation and self-sustainability. Thus, homosexuality was inconceivable, and although there are some records of homosexual acts between members of colonies, homosexual behavior was not labelled as such, but rather as a sin or a crime that was not in any way different from fornication or adultery, that is, a transgression against the procreational unit (D'Emilio 10). However, as D'Emilio suggests, with the advent of industrial capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century, restructuring of the social and economic organization enabled the conditions for the emergence of lesbian and homosexual identity:

> The interlocking processes of urbanization and industrialization created a social context in which an autonomous personal life could develop. Affection, intimate relationships, and sexuality moved increasingly into the realm of individual choice, seemingly disconnected from how one organized the production of goods necessary for survival. In this setting, men and women who felt a strong erotic attraction to their own sex could begin to fashion from their feeling a personal identity and a way of life. (11)

Apart from D'Emilio, all mentioned authors write only about the construction of male homosexual identity, partly because these authors have chosen to focus on male sexuality, and partly because the formative processes they describe do not overlap with the formation of lesbian identity. As Jagose puts it, "Female homosexuality does not occupy the same historic positions as male homosexuality in discourses of law or medicine" (13).

According to Jagose, there are two reasons behind this non-simultaneity. On one hand, during the colonial period, Britain's judicial system, which served as a legal template in a number of other countries, criminalized only male homosexuality while ignoring female homosexual acts. On the other, the formation of subcultural identity on the basis of female homosexuality occurred much later, which is also, as Jagose argues, one of the reasons why legal persecution of female homosexuality came later (13). In her book *Feminism is Queer*, Mimi Marinucci proposes another reason behind this:

> Despite the shift to the wage labor system, however, many women remained financially dependent on men well into the 20th century, still relegated to the private world of home and family, women lacked access to the social world of taverns and public houses in which the parameters of the male homosexual role seem to have been negotiated. (21)

One of the first and most prominent theories regarding the formation of modern lesbian identity was laid down by Lillian Faderman in her 1981 book *Surpassing the Love of Men*. Faderman provides an in-depth analysis of the western literary corpus, describing how lesbian identity was shaped and expressed throughout different periods. Before twentieth century, Faderman argues, romantic friendships and affectionate relationships between women were not pathologized, and even when they were depicted in a deprecating way "lesbianism was seldom the focal point of attack" (45). Rather, explicit depictions of lesbianism in literature had a twofold purpose: to arouse the reader and to criticize female assertiveness, autonomy, or any kind of behavior that transgressed female submissiveness. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the first wave of feminism caused a change in attitude, fueled by sexologists' efforts to pathologize lesbianism (Faderman 238). Fiction was weaponized for the same purpose, as Faderman writes:

> Twentieth-century fiction, reflecting society, played a large role in keeping women down through associating feminism with lesbianism and lesbianism with everything horrible. In most of the anti-lesbian novels written in the first half of the twentieth century, the lesbian is a feminist, a woman with a powerful ego, frequently in a position of authority over innocent girls. Almost invariably she is 'twisted'. (343)

Thus, even though presented theories regarding the development of modern homosexuality differ, they all share a distinction between "homosexual behaviour, which is ubiquitous, and homosexual identity, which evolves under specific historical conditions" (Jagose 15).

2.4 Queer Politics: Homosexual vs. Gay

Essentialist and constructionist positions have also permeated the politics of groups that fought to secure rights and freedoms of queer people. This struggle, and the political/ideological division among queer people yielded two different movements, each with their own view of homosexuality and its position in relation to the dominant social order.

2.4.1 Homophile Movement

Mid 20th century, homosexual men in Europe started to form homophile organizations, including Daughters of Bilitis, the Mattachine Society, and Janus Society, to name but a few. As Jagose points out, this came in time when "homosexuality crystallized as an identity, when for the first time it was possible to *be* a homosexual" (22). Adopting essentialist arguments, homophile movement worked towards decriminalizing and increasing tolerance of homosexuality by noting the medical community's consensus that regarded homosexuality as congenital or present from birth (Jagose 22).

The foremost politic of the homophile organizations was assimilationist. And while assimilationist politics is still critical of the prevailing social order, it is the way of resolving its conflict with that order that is interesting. In his 2008 book *Gay Male Fiction Since Stonewall*, Les Brookes describes assimilationists as those who are "keen to show their allegiance to heterosexist norms, seeing such loyalty as evidence of their right to social inclusion" (2). However, plenty of people resented the apologetic sentiment that characterized the homophile movement, and its contribution to the medicalization of the word 'homosexual' (Jagose 27). Thus, Marinucci writes, "gay identity emerged as an alternative to homosexual identity, and the gay liberation movement emerged as an alternative to the homophile movement" (30).

2.4.2 Gay Liberationist Movement

Many refer to the 1969 Stonewall riots as the birth of the gay liberation movement. Located in New York's Greenwich Village, the Stonewall Inn was a drag and gay bar which was subject to frequent police raids. However, on 28 June 1969, patrons of Stonewall fought back, protesting the discrimination, injustice, and violence they have endured (Marinucci 30). The riots incited a "nationwide grassroots liberation effort among gay men and women", in great part fueled by other radical movements that had been present during the 1960s (D'Emilio 233). Liberationists were, however, far more radical in their politics, wishing to see the existing social order destroyed, rejecting the "pleading" sentiment of the homophile organizations. Brookes states that the liberationists went so far as to condemn relationships that lasted for more than one night for the purpose of showing "abject deference to the heterosexual ideal of lifelong partnership" (2).

Liberationists also redefined the act of coming out, reframing it as a deeply political act that symbolized the rejection of self-hatred widely internalized by gay women and men (D'Emilio 235). As D'Emilio concludes, "the post-Stonewall era witnessed a significant shift in the self-definition of gay men and women […] gayness and lesbianism began to encompass an identity that included a wide array of private and public activities", consequently, they started building new spaces of social and cultural activity that were no longer invisible (249).

Nearing the end of the 20th century, these spaces penetrated the academia, first through gay and lesbian studies, and later through queer theory. Simultaneously, the paradigm of sexuality underwent multiple reconsiderations in the decades following the gay liberation movement. Steadily, it was expanded to include identities, that is, sexual and gender minorities other than gay and lesbian (Marinucci 32).

3 The Coming Out of Gay Literature

The importance of literature for queer people cannot be stressed enough, both throughout history and today. Not more than a few decades back, literature was the only source where a queer person could seek validation for their existence and experiences. In his 1993 article "Gay Voices, Gay Genealogies", Claude J. Summers makes a distinction between sexual minorities and religious, ethnic, and national minorities, arguing that while the latter are likely to face discrimination from the dominant group, in many cases, they enjoy nurturance and cultural support within their families, whereas the majority of queer people grow up having to conceal their sexuality or gender from their families, for fear of being rejected or condemned (157). This is why, Summers argues, a trip to the library is "a staple of the gay coming-out story", especially for those individuals who do not have access to a queer community, who mold their self-understanding, consciousness and identity "on the basis of what they read" (157). Brookes makes a similar argument, emphasizing that before the Stonewall riots happened "literature has been the only place where one could learn about homosexuality […] there was little to be learned from parents, the wider culture, or mass media" (2).

It is suggested that Stonewall riots were the turning point in the wider perception of gay people as well as their own perception of selves (Brookes 4), a sort of climax of the events that unfolded in the century prior to Stonewall. As it has been mentioned earlier, it was in that pre-Stonewall period that the term homosexuality was conceptualized and introduced into the mass consciousness of the West, and later, medicalized and weaponized against sexual minorities. However, the changing of the consciousness after Stonewall was best conveyed through literature, "[which] although informed by the new consciousness, is not simply celebratory" (Brookes 4).

What changed the most was the volume of gay literature, especially fiction, which, as Brookes suggests, has been "the vehicle best equipped to represent gay man's sense of place

and role in society" (5). But as the gay liberation movement gained momentum so did the ideological rift within the movement itself, which, naturally, had been translated to literature and writers' altering approach toward it. On one side, there were writers who translated assimilationist politics into their work, who had no issue with the existing social order, believing loyalty and subversion to the dominant, non-homosexual group would yield social inclusion of gay people (Brookes 2). On the other side were radical writers who sought to invert the social order by breaking free from the heterosexual norms and ideals, refusing to accept them as absolute (Brookes 2).

This ideological conflict between assimilationists and radicals boils down to two choices that have informed the American literature of the post-Stonewall period: integration into the society or the assertion of an independent identity (Brookes 4). But the dividing line between the two is far from clear, Brookes explains this in the following way:

> In the assimilative strain, for instance, the general insistence on the normality of homosexuality is accompanied by a sometimes equally strong assertion of difference; while in the radically transgressive strain, the rejection of the concept of normality – the celebration of difference – is made in reaction to, and thus dependent on, the very norms it would defy. (71)

3.1 Themes in Queer Literature: From Stonewall to AIDS

The changes that had been building throughout the 1960s and 1970s made space for the development of a gay movement and a gay culture that entailed a radical rethinking of social norms. It is in this period, especially in 1978 – which is the year deemed as the beginning of the "modern gay literary movement" – that some of the most prominent works of gay literature were published (Brookes 74). These include Larry Kramer's *Faggots*, Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*, Armstead Maupin's *Tales of the City*, and Edmund White's *Nocturnes*

for the King of Naples, novels that have, as Brookes states, signaled the rise of a new type of gay fiction (74).

Thematizing and investigating the hedonistic tendencies of the new gay culture and the newfound sexual freedom that was fundamental to the ideology of the new movement, it can be said that these novels have come to epitomize the gay life between the Stonewall Riots and the first reported cases of AIDS (Brookes 75). Thus, central to this period's gay literature is "a passionate moral engagement with the ideals of the new gay movement and the values implicit in the new post-Stonewall social and sexual experiment" (Brookes 75). This "moral engagement" was most expressed as a disappointment with the direction in which the new gay movement was developing. Namely, many have felt that that the promises of Stonewall Riots have been betrayed. Instead of deconstructing the existing order and creating new ways in which people could relate to each other – a space of solidarity – the new gay culture had stuck on role-playing heavily codified with heteronormative binarism: butch-femme, experienced-innocent, etc. (Brookes 76).

Thus, the problem of identity became central to post-Stonewall gay politics and culture. In an attempt to radically question and invert the conventional codes of morality, the gay culture ended up defining itself withing the bounds of dominant ideology, creating a mirror image that was both "shockingly different […] yet depressingly the same" (Brookes 76). Congruently, the main themes in gay fiction of the 1960s and 1970s reflect this moral panic, criticizing the gay subculture for its mechanisms; "its shallow hedonism, its mindless trendiness, its self-indulgent irresponsibility, its empty narcissism", while at the same time, celebrating the newfound freedom, communion, and creativity (Brookes 85).

Things took a turn in the early 1980s when the first reports of AIDS started emerging. The new disease was shrouded in mystery and its novelty status offered a myriad of possible discourses being built around it. The dominant one was designed to insulate the unaffected from

the infected, and thus the initial term GRID, or Gay-Related Immune Deficiency. In their 2014 article “AIDS Literatures”, Dean and Ruszczycky argue the following: “the discursive desire for containment, born of fear and ignorance, dominated early representations of the epidemic” (712). Thus, not only was there a threat of a potentially fatal virus, but HIV/AIDS patients had to combat the overwhelmingly intense stigma that was being created around it. After the initial response, HIV/AIDS was quickly enshrouded in silence and denial (Dean and Ruszczycky 713).

Along with the changing social attitudes, HIV/AIDS also transformed the gay writing, permeating it with themes of death, tragedy, and loss. As a by-product of a traumatic response, AIDS literature bears much resemblance to war literature, while the landmark works of literature have taken on the shorter literary forms: memoirs, short stories, poems, diaries. The main reason for this is that most people were discouraged from taking on larger projects due to the rapidity and scale at which people were dying during the early years of the pandemic (Dean and Ruszczycky 715). The gay writers of this period sought to combat the “helpless” narrative by writing intimate nonlinear testimonies of characters who were actively living with HIV/AIDS, and thus “resisting the totalizing narrative of irreversible decline” (Dean and Ruszczycky 715).

4 Queer Theory and Translation

Queer theory developed in the early 1990s, and as Brookes argues, the birth of queer theory was fueled by the prevailing negligent attitude towards AIDS crisis, as well as the "resurgence of belief in the revolutionary potential of dissident sexuality [that] entailed a corresponding condemnation of assimilationist politics and complacent lesbian and gay accommodation to bourgeois ways of life" (26). In response to gay and lesbian identities that have been able to emerge throughout 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, queer theory reframes binary contrasts between male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual, etc. as social constructs (Marinucci 34).

On the other hand, queer theory is also a response to the construed homogenization of queer movements that have emerged since the 1950s. Homophile organizations and gay liberationist movement centered white gay men, pushing queer people of other race, gender, and sexuality to the margins. Thus, as Baer and Kaindl explain in their introduction to *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer*, in its broader sense, queer theory "challenges the status of dominant regimes of knowledge/power as natural and universal by focusing on the constructedness of those models, on their historical contingency and the politics of those models" (3).

The emergence of queer theory overlaps with the cultural turn in translation studies that came about in reaction to rapid globalization and the growing awareness of the cultural embeddedness of literary texts, and the importance of preserving rather than erasing cultural differences through translation. Extracting a literary text from its originating habitus and planting it into a different cultural soil is a violent practice. In his 1992 book *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Andre Lefevere argues that an inevitable part of the translating process is rewriting, or the act of "adapting, manipulating the originals to some extent, usually to make them fit in with the dominant, or one of the dominant ideological

and poetological currents" (8). This means that the new literary product – the translation – is always, to a certain extent, different than the original. According to Susan Bassnett, the translation shift brought about a different approach to translation activity, one that emphasizes the fact that translation is always doubly contextualized, embed both within the source culture and the receiving culture (Bassnett 30). Therefore, it requires awareness of "the dominant norms" that operate in both contexts. Translation is an integral part of every literature, and as a cross-cultural process, it is a valuable source of knowledge for deconstructing and analyzing issues that pertain to more than linguistic equivalency and syntactic agreement. When it comes to queer translation, this pertains to concepts about gender and sexuality, and the way they are constructed, perpetuated or subverted through translation.

4.1 Gender and Translation as Performance

Judith Butler is one of the most prominent philosophers and gender theorists, and their seminal work *Gender Trouble*, published in 1990, has greatly influenced feminist theory, gender theory, and queer theory. *Gender Trouble* frames gender and sex as performance, as an ongoing and self-referential process of production, which is generated and regulated by the discourse of power. Although Butler's project is primarily concerned with issues in feminism, their interpretation of gender and sex is key for understanding queer theory.

In the Preface to the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains their motivation behind writing the book. They state that they are against the regimes of truth, which lay down certain gendered expressions as derivative or false, and others, as original and true (viii). This "policing of gender" is used, within the matrix of normative heterosexuality, to secure and reproduce heterosexuality. In relation to this, Butler seeks to uncover in their text ways in which non-normative sexual practices destabilize gender as an analytical category (xii).

According to Butler, it is impossible to separate gender form the cultural and political mechanisms which underlay its production and regulation (6). In claiming that gender is culturally constructed, that is, composed of cultural meanings that are assigned to a sexed body, Butler reveals how the institution of compulsory heterosexuality consolidates itself as "true" and "original" through assertions that gender follows from sex, where sex is established as being pre-discursive – a fact (11). This coherence between gender and sex "requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire" (30).

In relation to sex, Butler argues that gender is employed as a discursive means by which "natural sex" is established as existing prior to culture, that is, a "politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (11). Consequently, these acts stabilize and consolidate gender as binary and internally coherent with sex, and desire. This stabilization of gender, sex, and sexuality renders culturally intelligible identities that "institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire" (23). However, the regulatory aims and limits of practice that postulates certain identities as being culturally intelligible is best revealed through the persistence and proliferation of gender identities that do not fall under that domain of cultural intelligibility (Butler 24).

Butler exemplifies the constructedness of heterosexuality, the genders it produces, and its futile claim to originality by pointing out the presence of heterosexual conventions in homosexual contexts, and the proliferation of "gay discourses of sexual difference" (41). As they state, butch and femme identities cannot be explained neither as a representation of heterosexual identities, nor as an assertion of heterosexist constructs in gay identity. Rather, since both straight and gay sexual cultures contain heterosexual constructs, their replication and repetition in both contexts may be the site of mobilization and denaturalization of gender

categories, or as Butler states: “The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy” (41).

Butler describes gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, or a natural sort of being” (43). The regulatory frame in question is the one that proscribes and defines compulsory heterosexuality as culturally intelligible and ideal by employing prohibitions in the form of the taboo against homosexuality and the incest taboo (Butler 172). Butler argues that such production of gender prompts a false stabilization of gender aimed towards the construction of reproductive heterosexuality.

The stabilization of gender means that gestures, acts, and enacted desires that make up one’s gender create “the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core” (173). These gestures, acts, and enactments, as Butler argues, are performative because they purport to express an essence or an identity that is sustained and manufactured through discursive means and corporeal signs (173). This also means that they are both a function and an effect of a social and public discourse, that is, “the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the ‘integrity’ of the subject” (173).

Finally, in framing gender as performance, Butler claims that there is no identity, core, or essence, that preexists gender, one that could gender acts be measured against. Thus, there are no true or false acts of gender. Rather, gender performance is, in Butler’s view, an implicit collective agreement to produce, sustain, and perform discrete genders, a cultural fiction that is obscured by the falsely constructed credibility of such productions (repetition equals legitimation), and the retribution against those who fail or choose not to partake in it (178).

Butler's theory about gender construction has also been frequently linked to concept of authorship. In her article "Queer Translation as Performative and Affective Un-doing", Michela Baldo states that Butler's theory challenges and scatters the concept of authorship by examining the relationship between original and translated discourse. According to Baldo, as is the case with gender performances of heterosexual constructs in homosexual contexts, translation cannot be viewed as derivative or reproductive, but rather "a copy of an original that does not exist", thus revealing authorship and originality as illusions (192).

Reframed in this way, authorship is also linked to Butler's notion of performativity, especially when it comes to translation. According to Baldo, translation is never a reproduction of an original, but rather its reinvention, "a series of re-performed acts, which change by virtue of their reiteration in new contexts" (193). At the root of the performative element of translation, as Baldo argues, is the fact that translation is as much of a performance as gender is, in that it "does or produces something" (193). Thus, translation is not a matter of what a text is but what a text does. Since both gender and translation (the regulation of translation within a literary system will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5) are regulated by a system that proscribes norms and requires adherence to proscribed norms, then the "doing" of both gender and translation offers a possibility of displacement and resistance (Baldo 193).

In the case of translation, this act of displacement and resistance can be connected to Lawrence Venuti's concept of foreignization, described in his 1995 book *The Translator's Invisibility* as a deliberate act of signaling the linguistic and cultural difference of the translated text (148). Such infusion of otherness in the target language disrupts both the target language and the source language (Baldo 193). In their 2004 work *Undoing Gender*, Butler also makes a reference to the performative and, ultimately, transformative aspect of what they call cultural translation:

> Cultural translation is a process of yielding our most fundamental categories, that is, seeing how they break up, require resignification when they encounter the limits of an available episteme: what is unknown or not yet known […] Translation will compel each language to change in order to apprehend the other, and this apprehension, at the limit of what is familiar, parochial, and already known, will be the occasion for both an ethical and social transformation. (39)

4.2 The Cultural Turn

Butler's notion of cultural translation bears resemblance to Sherry Simon's take on translation in her 1996 work *Gender in Translation*. Simon argues that, under the present conditions of a globalized culture, translation acts as a means of cultural creation through which cultural identities are destabilized (128). This, as Simon suggests, represents a shift from defining translation as a site of struggle to a site of production.

The cultural shift in translation, brought about by cultural studies, requires the understanding of the complex processes by which cultural identities are constructed. Cultural studies, according to Simon, allow us to situate translation within various contexts that inform today's reality: poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism (129). The first stresses the role of language in constructing rather than merely reflecting reality, the second emphasizes the power relations that govern contemporary cultural exchange, and the third highlights the fact that cultural activity, in great part, includes recycling of existing material (Simon 129).

These three perspectives, as Simon argues, "emphasize the multiplicity of languages circulating in the world today, the competition between local and global expression, the reactualizations of cultural forms", giving translation heightened prominence as an act of cultural exchange and a means of cultural production (129). In this sense, translation is uniquely able to expose pathways that enable the movement of esthetic forms and ideas and map out

linguistic and intellectual contact points between different cultures, exposing political pressures that trigger them (Simon 129). As Simon argues, total equivalence between different cultural systems does not exist and the alignment between target and source text is inevitably skewed, therefore, translation draws attention to "language as a force through which experience is shaped" (129). The gaps between cultures, then, necessitate intervention, as well as interrogation, revaluation of translation.

According to Simon, these contact points are the source of incomplete translations that are an essential component of cultural creation (153). As a process of meaning creation, incomplete translation yields "translation effects", which make language opaquer and more suggestive, blurring the borders between cultures, nations, and languages (Simon 157). In this context, translation becomes representative of the dividedness of identity or "incompleteness of cultural belonging" (Simon 157).

An approach to translation that precedes translation as meaning/culture creation is based on universality, framing translation as a linear transmission of meaning. However, Simon argues that such models of universality are no longer ideal since universal has been equated with values of the European, white, and middle-class men (157). What made such models universal, then, was the exclusion of differences. As Simon argues, universality is more and more being exchanged for new logics of communication, which configure commonality in different ways (157).

Feminist translations, as Simon states, "have served to highlight the fact that cultural transmission is undertaken from *partial* (and not universal) perspectives, from constantly evolving cultural *positions*" (158). Gender and sexual identity are essential to the definition and creation of such positions and feminist translations have made it a site of transformation, especially that of textual authority (Simon 158). Moreover, centering gender/sexual identity in

translation reflects the way in which ideas are exchanged between evolving communities and how translation both elicits and blurs “the link between self and community” (Simon 158).

5 Sexuality and Translation

In his article "Sexuality and Translation as Intimate Partners?", José Santaemilia explores the complex relationship between sexuality and translation. The inclusion of sexuality in translation studies as an important point of analysis occurred in the 1990s. Since then, sexuality has been defined as a "field that is notoriously difficult to translate for reasons of cultural and generational differences" (Santaemilia 12). As Santaemilia argues, analyzing sexuality in translation is important for two reasons: it permeates our daily reality, our texts and symbolic projections, and, on the other hand, the translation of sexuality yields certain translation effects, which has unpredictable consequences (12).

The translation effect in question was first defined by Luise von Flotow in her 1997 book *Translation and Gender*, as an interplay between gender awareness and translation that imposes a reconsideration of translators' invisible role in the translation. As Flotow argues, with the rise of a queer approach to translation, "translators have begun asserting their identity and justifying the subjective aspects of their work" (3). In this way, translation becomes a political act that bears important ideological and rhetorical implications, revealing the translator's position regarding existing conceptualizations of human sexual behavior, gender/sexual identities, and moral norms (Santaemilia 12). As such, translation in combination with sexuality forms a powerful interdisciplinary study "uniquely capable of unveiling the most intimate textualizations of our identities and desires for queering translation" (Santaemilia 13).

Queer studies have been especially prolific in revealing these intimate textualizations as fictitious, contingent and performative by questioning conventional perceptions of sexuality and the systems that sustain them (Santaemilia 13). This is what Santaemilia refers to as a "queer turn in translation studies" – a shift in the approach towards translation studies that illuminates textualization of identities and desires and offers analytical tools for understanding said textualizations (Santaemilia 13).

5.1 The Sanitization of Translation

Especially interesting is Santaemilia's take on erotic literature, which he deems important due to its status as "the most ancient and sustained manifestation of sexuality in language" (13). Erotic literature can be defined as "works in which sexuality and/or sexual desire has a dominant presence" (Brulotte and Phillips qtd in Santaemilia 13).

Santaemilia largely focuses on the role of translation in, what he calls, sanitizing "sexually explicit language in the works of 'canonical' authors" (14). Analyzing the English translation of an excerpt from Almudena Grandes' book *Las edades de Lulú* (The Ages of Lulu, 1989), Santaemilia points to inconsistencies and the intricate process that is at play when translating explicit sexuality. The sentence from the original is "Estaba encoñado con Marcelo por lo visto..." (138), and the English translation is "Seemed he was quite taken with Marcelo..." (99). Santaemilia centers his analysis around the Spanish word *encoñad*o, a highly sexualized and highly idiomatic term that, as it is argued, "requires an explanation in order to inscribe it within the context of Spanish cultural prejudices and taboos" (15).

The complexity of the term lies in three separate layers of its meaning. First, the word is derived from the Spanish equivalent of the word *cunt*, that is *coño*; second, it signifies a traditional association between a woman's sexual organ and a passing infatuation; and finally, it refers to a gay man (Santaemilia 15). The word *encoñad*o, then, is indicative of the way that sexuality and women's bodies are positioned as "main sources of verbal hostility and abuse" in Spanish language (Santaemilia (15).

However, as Santaemilia argues, all this is lost in the English translation, which further proves that analysis of the translation of sexually explicit language can be crucial for revealing and understanding the mismatches between cultures, cultural taboos, different levels of cultural sensitivity, and gender stereotypes (15).

5.2 Censorship in Translation

Another topic that is important when it comes to translation of gender and sexuality is the topic of censorship, as well as self-censorship. Santaemilia defines censorship as "an external constraint on what we can publish or (re)write", while self-censorship refers to an ethical or moral struggle that plays out between the society and the individual (16). As it has been argued, translation is not produced in a vacuum, thus the tendency for translators to censor themselves, involuntary or voluntary, and produce socially and personally acceptable rewritings is as old as the act of translation itself (Santaemilia 16).

Flotow outlines an interesting example of deletion as censorship in the English translation of the "feminist bible", Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work published in 1949, *Le deuxieme sexe* (49). *The Second Sex* was translated by American zoologist Howard Parshley and published in 1952. Soon after its publication, the New York Times bestseller solidified itself as a breakthrough text in feminist philosophy. However, translation also drew considerable criticism as many considered the English translation to be diluted and softened. Flotow argues the following:

> Criticisms of the translation are primarily based on unmarked deletions of more than ten per cent of the original material. Large sections of text recounting the names and achievements of women in history have been cut from the English version […] Similarly, the translation deletes references to cultural taboos such as lesbian relationships, and to unwelcome realities such as the tedium of women's everyday lives. (50)

Though critics of the translation agree that Beauvoir's text does contain repetitive parts, most argue that such deletions, as significant interventions in the original text, should be marked and explained (Flotow 50). Later insight into the situation revealed that Parshley, the translator, was pestered to simplify, eliminate, or condense the content of the book to "lighten the burden for

the American reader" (Knopf qtd in Flotow 50). However, such heavy interventions have, in certain places, disrupted or even distorted Beauvoir's argumentation in the book, making her come off as a "confused, incoherent thinker" (Flotow 50). Consequently, it invited criticism of Beauvoir's ideas from anglophone feminists who accused her of upholding patriarchal stereotypes when it came to female sexuality (Flotow 51). And while many have assumed that the misrepresentation of Beauvoir's work through censorship was conducted by her (male) translator, it would be naïve to disregard other actors that might have participated in the production of the translation and their motivations.

5.3 Lefevere's Patronage

In his 1982 article "Mother Courage's Cucumbers", André Lefevere makes an interesting point about, what he calls, "misunderstandings and misconceptions" through which a work of literature achieves exposure and gains influence (234). Lefevere refers to these "misunderstandings" as refractions, or "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work" ("Mother Courage" 235). In their fullest sense, refractions are seen as a negotiation process between two systems, making them valuable indicators of chief constraints in these systems.

The systems in question, or a system, is a literary one, and according to polysystems theory described by Itamar Even-Zohar, it is one that is inseparable from its social and cultural environment (Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting* 11). Zohar argues that translation plays a significant role in shaping the literary system. Depending on its position within the literary system, central or peripheral, translation can either introduce new ideas or be a source of conservatism when translators conform to norms that have been rejected by the literary center (Bassnett 22). He expands on systems in which translation occupies the central position, arguing that translation exerts most influence in literatures that are developing, marginal, or amid major

change (22). Thus, he emphasizes the importance of investigating how texts and which texts get selected for translation and what their impact is on the target literature.

In this context, Lefevere states that the literary system is a contrived one, that is, it consists of texts and people that write, refract, distribute and read those texts, and it is in constant interaction with other systems within the polysistem (Lefevere, "Mother Courage" 235). Therefore, it "acts as a series of 'constraints,' in the fullest sense of the word, on the reader, writer, and rewriter (Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting* 13). There are two factors that control that the literary system does not deviate too much from other subsystems of the society, e.g., social, political, ideological, etc. The first factor are professionals – critics, teachers, reviewers, translators – who operate from inside the system and who either repress literary works that greatly oppose the prevailing idea of what literature/society should be, or, more frequently, rewrite literary works until they are considered acceptable (Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting* 14).

The other factor, the literary system's regulatory body, as Lefevere calls it, is patronage and it operates from outside the system ("Mother Courage" 239). The term patronage encompasses all persons and institutions, e.g., publishers, religious authorities, political parties, media, etc., that "regulate the relationship between the literary system and the other systems, which, together, make up a society, a culture (Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting* 15). There are three basic components of patronage: an ideological component (the choice and the production of texts), an economic component (ensuring writer's or rewriter's livelihood), and lastly, a status component (social status that the writer/rewriter will achieve) (Lefevere, "Mother Courage" 236). What also needs to be mentioned is that patrons will rarely influence the system directly, rather they do it via the first control factor – persons and institutions that regulate the system from within (Lefevere, "Mother Courage" 236).

It is argued that all rewritings are a reflection of a certain poetics/ideology, and as such they manipulate literature to make it function in a certain way in a certain society (*Translation, Rewriting* 8). Lefevere's concepts of patronage and refractions, which make up his theory of translation as rewriting, are especially important in analyzing the translation of queer literature. Through translation, such queer texts can achieve visibility and influence, serving as the catalyst of innovation by introducing new literary devices, ideas, or genres. On the other hand, however, Lefevere states that rewriting can, at worst, repress, contain and distort innovation. For whatever reason – ideological or economic – queer works of literature are at a greater risk of being dismissed or manipulated due to their subversive nature, especially in systems in which translation occupies the central position.

5.3.1 The Case of Mima Simić and Dalkey Archive's *Best European Fiction 2011*

Founded in 1984, Dalkey Archive Press is an American publisher of poetry, fiction, and literary criticism with an emphasis on writers that often go unnoticed by the mainstream literary establishment. This means that a significant portion of their authors are non-American, and as their website suggests, over 50% of their publications are translations. As a part of their progressive literary agenda, Dalkey Archive Press publishes an annual anthology of short stories by distinguished European authors titled *Best European Fiction*.

For the 2011 edition, Croatian author, translator, and an LGBTQ+ activist, Mima Simić, was chosen as the Croatian representative with her short story "My Girlfriend", which she translated herself for the purpose of the publication in the anthology. However, once published, the story was drastically different than the one Simić wrote. Since then, Simić has published an essay condemning Dalkey Archive's intervention in her story titled "The Facts Behind One Story in Dalkey Archive's Best European Fiction for 2011". As Simić argues, this anthology was "an opportunity to reach the vast English-speaking market, as writing in so-called small

languages can be quite a limitation to one's literary ambitions" ("The Facts"). Moreover, Dalkey is known as "trailblazer of translated fiction in the English-speaking world" and, among other things, has conducted and published a research of best translation practices, and a guide to editing translations (Simić, "The Facts").

The most serious intervention in the original is concerned with the gender/sex or the narrator. The story is told by a narrator whose gender/sex is ambiguous and who, throughout the story, recalls intimate and everyday moments from the relationship with their girlfriend. However, a Dalkey editor decided to rewrite the narrator as a man. Of this, Simić writes the following:

> As this gender/sex ambiguity is one of the thematic pillars of my story, this benevolent editorial intervention (which made the narrator a man and the relationship heterosexual!) completely changed my story, its aims and effects. ("The Facts")

Simić describes this "editorial gender-(re)assignment surgery" as a great ideological insult, a transgression against her identity as a writer, a lesbian, and ultimately, a gender theorist ("The Facts"). Simić never received an explanation from Dalkey regarding their intervention in the text. To make the matter more confusing, in an interview published in the "About" section of Dalkey's website, the founder John O'Brien states that the books that Dalkey is interested in are the ones that "work against what is expected", those that "challenge received notions", whether social, literary, or political ("An Interview").

Therefore, if Dalkey is interested in subversive authors, why was Simić's story "straightened"? If we assume that this was a case of the end-product being "refracted" through editor's unconscious, heteronormative assumption of the narrator's gender, then this is simply a case of an editor doing their job irresponsibly and poorly. However, Dalkey publishes English language translations, which means it operates within a large and an established literary system. In such a system, according to Zohar, translated literature occupies a peripheral position and

thus, is more liable to refractions that intend to make it more appealing to the center. Additionally, in *What Is World Literature*, David Damrosch makes a compelling argument that is relevant for Simić's position as a writer from a small literary system. Damrosch argues that the processes of literary exchange are governed by two factors: literary history and cultural power (24). This means that in translation, classics and non-canonical works do not receive equal treatment. While classics enjoy a certain amount of protection due to their cultural prestige, non-canonical works are often subject to manipulation in translation. As Damrosch states: "Works by non-Western authors or by provincial or subordinate Western writers are always particularly liable to be assimilated to the immediate interests and agendas of those who edit, translate, and interpret them" (24). With no cultural prestige that protects works of other, more established literatures, it is more likely that Dalkey performed a conscious rewrite of Simić's gender-neutral narrator with the aim of generating wider appeal by producing a story that conforms to dominant representations of sexuality.

6 Constructing Queer in Translation

Aside from the issues of rewriting and censorship, which will also be briefly discussed in this chapter, the translation of queer literature is perhaps most complex in relation to concepts of identity and community. In his 1998 article "Gay Community, Gay Identity and the Translated text", Keith Harvey argues that translation of texts that deal with homosexuality is critical in revealing complex issues when it comes to the notions of gay identity and gay community, and vice versa ("Gay Community" 137).

In the late 20th century, gay people across the US and Britain have started fostering a communal identity as a way of resisting oppression and forming different socio-cultural values. Consequently, gay authors have increasingly started exploring the political and personal consequences of homosexuality in their writing, which often blurred the dividing line between fiction and autobiography (Harvey, "Gay Community" 138). As Harvey argues, such writing "not only *emerges from* gay community-building, it also actively *contributes towards* its elaboration ("Gay Community" 138).

In this context, it is important to stress the role of translation and how the translation of gay literature affects the formation of a gay community in the receiving, that is, foreign culture. An example of this is laid out by Lawrence Venuti in his 1998 book *The Scandals of Translation.* Venuti describes a "literary hoax" contrived by Pierre Louÿs, a French writer who published his collection *Les Chansons de Bilitis* in 1895 and presented it as a French translation of Greek poet Bilitis (35). The collection is saturated with depictions of Bilitis' sexual experiences, and more specifically, her sexuality and her lesbian relationships. Aside from drawing attention to important issues of authorship, originality, and historiography, his pseudo-translation, as Venuti argues, has introduced novelties into the French literature (44). Moreover, the frank depiction of Bilitis' homosexuality inspired the lesbian writings by Renée Vivien and

Natalie Clifford Barney, and ultimately facilitated the "construction of the lesbian author" in French literature (45).

However, there is also an alternative scenario to this one. As Harvey argues, in cultures where gay writing is not established, translation can "suffer repression or more subtle forms of censorship", in which case it's contribution to the formation of a gay community in the target culture will be significantly reduced ("Gay Community" 139).

The articulation and elaboration of community in target and source texts cannot be fully examined without addressing issues that pertain to the notion of identity. As Harvey argues, community and identity are notions "which can be best understood in relation to each other" since they are mutually supporting ("Gay Community" 139). To claim an identity position is to suggest that there are others "with whom one can 'identify' or from who one is able to dissociate" (Harvey, "Gay Community" 140). As is the case with the notion of community, identity can also be seen in two ways: "as a textual product as well as a category that feeds into the elaboration of texts" ("Gay Community" 140). Thus, if we are to view gay writing as a literary genre, then its primary aim is to, through the exploration of the gay experience/identity and its perimeters, validate that same experience/identity and create a space for the articulation and the reception of gay writing (Harvey, "Gay Community" 140). In this case, as Harvey argues, translation employs textual elaborations of gay experience/identity in order to introduce them as an inventive device in the target culture, to challenge the existing notions, or it modifies them due to target cultural pressures ("Gay Community" 140).

Translation is also crucial with regards to the relationship between two types of identity formation; internal and external, and the two components of a community; imagined and concrete. Harvey defines internal identity formation as a process of developing a consciousness about one's own identity through reflection, which inevitably includes an imagined community with which one can associate. In such case, texts that depict such a community, through

translation, introduce into the target culture "representations of selfhood and community organization that have not been articulated or, alternatively, that have been proscribed in the receiving culture" (Harvey, "Gay Community" 147).

On the other hand, the external process of identity formation refers to those aspects of self-presentation that include gesture, behaviour, and language. Harvey defines this as the "semiotics of identification", a crucial part of gay culture due to the "hidden nature of sexual desire [which] requires that subjects develop fluency in and attentiveness to coded behaviour" ("Gay Community" 146). The external process of identity formation is directly linked with a community's concrete components: its spaces and interactions, which include behaviour, language, and self-presentation (Harvey, "Gay Community" 147). Translation, in this context, is concerned with the degree to which such codes are translatable from one culture to another, that is, with the process through which a gay text is reproduced as gay in another language.

As Harvey argues, this is especially interesting in the case of camp; a verbal style or, as defined by Susan Sontag in her 1964 essay "Notes on Camp", "the sensibility of failed seriousness, of the theatricalization of experience" (533). In his article "Translating Camp Talk", on two examples from two different languages, Harvey describes a common feature of camp and its signification (300). The first example is the use of French in English, which, as Harvey argues, is "a humorous nod to sophistication and cosmopolitanism, French language and culture being saturated for the Anglo-Saxon world with the qualities of style and urbanity" ("Translating Camp" 300).

The second example is the use of English phrases and words in French, in which case the use of English "points (perhaps with equal ironic distance) to the spread of English-language popular culture" (Harvey, "Translating Camp" 301). Therefore, the use of English words and phrases in French camp is not only a linguistic sign, but also a cultural one. As Harver argues, such language play points to critical semiotic awareness, which is especially pronounced in gay

people due to their "long exclusion from mainstream signifying practices" ("Translating Camp" 301). It can also signal a subversive attitude toward cultural norms. According to Harvey, by employing tools of aestheticism, irony, theatricality, and humour, gay people show "in their ironic games with the dominant culture that something in them is ultimately immune to its control" ("Translating Camp" 301).

This is especially obvious in the ironic reversal of gender-specific terms, for example using "female" pronouns or names when referring to a man. In this case, camp signals "the speaker's critical distance from the processes that produce and naturalize categories of identity" (Harvey, "Translating Camp" 299). As Harvey argues, the critical mechanisms of camp are developed to dodge, mock and deconstruct "the multiple binarisms in our society that stem from the postulation of the categories natural/unnatural" ("Translating Camp" 304).

Therefore, when it comes to expressions of camp in literary works, it represents a specifically developed textual encoding of "gay communal signs", which, due to their culturally specific ways of signaling and articulating gay identities, inevitably undergo transformation in the translation process (Harvey 153, "Gay"). The translation, thus, can either heighten the presence of those signs, or diminish their specificity.

7 Dino Pešut, *Daddy's Boy* – Translation of Selected Chapters

Born in 1990, Dino Pešut is a Croatian playwright and novelist often described by the critics as the voice of his generation. His debut novel *Poderana koljena* (Scraped Knees) was published in 2018 and, as a coming-of-age story of a young gay millennial's migration to Berlin in search of a better life, is a stand-out in the Croatian literary scene. The same goes for his second novel *Tatin sin* (Daddy's Boy), which was published by Fraktura in 2020. On the one hand, the novel offers a candid portrayal of a relationship between a gay son and his father, while on the other, it provides great insight into the struggles of navigating through the harsh socio-political landscape of post-war Croatia, especially in relation to the issues of queer identity, class, and class inequality. As a writer whose works are saturated with queer characters, Pešut's novel can offer insight into the complex relationship between queer and class identity and its elaboration within the confines of the Balkan milieu.

Translating texts such as *Daddy's Boy* is important due to their potential to introduce novelty in the receiving culture, especially when it comes to representations of queer identity and experience that are rendered invisible. In this way, translation can not only create space for reception of queer literature, but it can also further the reception of the original work in the home culture, as exemplified by David Damrosch's concept of literature that gains in translation. In *What Is World* Literature, Damrosch describes how Peter Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe* was initially dubbed a failure in its home culture, yet with its translation into English: "the book's reception abroad set the stage for its subsequent revival at home" (32).

Due to Croatia's cultural homogeneity, queer works of literature are at a greater risk of being dismissed or marginalized. However, it can be argued that such works can greatly benefit from translation – or any other form of rewriting. By reaching new audiences and gaining authority outside the borders of its native system, translated works can influence the reception of the original back at home, consequently pushing the literary boundaries beyond what is

deemed desirable, profitable, or good. Even in much larger and much more established literary systems, queer works of literature must rely on different forms of rewriting to gain exposure and break into new spaces. Such is the case of Andre Aciman's *Call Me by You Name*, an American novel which was published in 2007 yet did not achieve any substantial presence until ten years later, when Luca Guadagnino's film adaptation was released. Thus, it can be argued that works of queer literature depend upon translation, or every other kind of rewriting, to achieve visibility and influence and consequently, create a larger space for reception of queer literature. However, transposing queer across cultural boundaries also requires awareness of strategies by which queer is constructed in different cultures.

According to Marc Démont and his article *On Three Models of Translating Queer Literary Texts*, the central focus of translating a queer text should be preserving and respecting its queer meaning potential (166). This includes identifying the disruptive content of the text, together with all its connotative associations and ambiguities, and recreating it in the target language. This is especially relevant with regards to previously discussed semiotics of identification, that is, signs and symbols whose meanings are often oblique since they came about in queer spaces and their circulation in mainstream culture is limited. As a writer of a small literary system, the construction of queer identities in Pešut's *Daddy's Boy* is inevitably affected by anglophone influences. Besides the most obvious element that makes Pešut's text queer – the topic of same-sex attraction – it is also queer-coded in ways that might go unnoticed, such as the use of camp and gay slang terms. In chapter six, for example, the main character Luka meets Antun, who is, in the original text, referred to as a twink:

> "I'd like to introduce you to my *partner*," Goran says. A flamboyant twink enters the apartment. Antun is twenty-one and he studies comparative literature and art history, but he'll probably drop art history because it's really outdated and it's just not it, you

> know, he's not feeling it anymore, but he's almost done, so he might finish it and then maybe do something else for his master's, film probably, experimental film.

As a gay slang term, twink denotes a slim, young, white gay man, stereotypically effeminate in behaviour, which is often used pejoratively to imply shallowness. Here, the use of the word twink reveals Luka's derisive attitude towards Antun. This is expressed with a shift in the narrative voice and rhythm, changing from the previously elaborate, introspective style to conversational upon introducing Antun's character, seemingly to mimic his speech style and stress his naivety and young age. In the original, this is conveyed using discourse markers, which are recreated in translation, for example: "really", "so", "probably", "you know", and ungrammatical, slang expressions "it's not it", "not feeling it". Such terms contribute to the sarcastic and parodic tone conveyed in the original, while playing into the construction of a stereotypical image of a twink as a certain type of a gay man.

Moreover, there is a frequent use of English words and phrases throughout the original text. As previously mentioned, French is often used in English camp as a humorous reference to sophistication and cosmopolitanism. In the same way, it can be argued that the use of English is characteristic to Croatian camp, both as a queer communal sign and a nod to western urbanity. This can pose a difficulty in translation with regards to recreating campiness of the original in the target language. In the following excerpt, camp is recreated by translating the word "threesome" from the original text as "ménage à trois". Aside from French language bearing connotations of sophistication, French people are stereotypically framed as being sexually deviant. Here, the overtly sexual tone in combination with the French expression points to critical and ironic awareness of a cultural stereotype, which is typical of camp:

> Shame tastes like stomach acid. All families are invasive, even the ones we choose. Fuck. It's certainly ménage à trois I would've never seen coming. The two of them will fuck with my head and come all over my fucked-up ego.

However, since camp has many different expressions, there is no single translation strategy when it comes to translating it. For example, in chapter thirteen, in a conversation between Luka and Vanja, a young, business prodigy, there are several elements that make Vanja a queer coded character, and one of them is the use of camp:

> And I was like, she's right, I'm blocking myself. So, I took on more work. Bam. Bam. Bam. And then even more, another two clients. Not to mention, half of the office was on sick leave. And me, thinking I'm freaking Miranda Presley, serving business realness. I lost fifteen pounds. And I still though I was fine.

Vanja refers to himself as Miranda Priestly, a character from 2008 film The Devil Wears Prada that achieved cult popularity among gay viewership. As mentioned before, Harvey argues that re-gendering is a tool of camp that subverts traditional conceptions and productions of gender. In this context, camp "opens up disjunctures between appearance and reality […] to undermine the schemata with which the addressee is operating" ("Translating Camp" 299). Moreover, the phrase "business realness" appears in the original text. In the context of the story, both the phrase and the reference to Miranda Priestly are queer signifiers as they reinforce solidarity between the two characters: "to understand the slang or catch on to the allusion is to feel that one belongs to the community" (Harvey, "Translating Camp" 300). In case of "business realness", it would not make much sense to use French as a marker of English camp. The term traces back to 1970s and New York's ballroom culture and has been popularized, in recent, years by TV shows like RuPaul's *Drag Rac*e. It denotes the ability to pass as male or female through portraying characteristics stereotypically associated with the two genders. In this case, it refers to the ability to perform an idea of a straight businesswoman. Thus, even though the use of the English phrase in the original is camp, because it points to the consumption of western (queer) media, such expressions circulate mostly in queer spaces and they enter other languages as loan words or phrases, so translating them would strip them of their queer connotations.

Moreover, due to their unique linguistic practices, such expressions are subversive even in their native systems, so it is essential to preserve them in translation as they push the boundaries of language and what is deemed normative.

However, camp is not only signaled by obvious lexical devices, such as names and phrases. The entire chapter is centered around Vanja as he recalls experiencing a nervous breakdown due to work. Camp is deployed through the humorous tone, which is based on the incongruous juxtaposition between the serious subject matter of Vanja's story and his detached delivery expressed through digressions, the use of hyperbole, and fixation on trivial details. These devices are recreated in translation as they build into the dramatic, rambling tone of Vanja's talk and contribute to camp's construction of theatricalized femininity, exposing the constructed nature of categories that frame gender as natural. Therefore, in translating a queer text, it is paramount to recognize such intertextualities, which might go unnoticed, and to recreate them in the target language in a way that preserves the text's queerness. Misrecognizing or altering them risks potential erasure of queer content and, consequently, its subversive potential.

Chapter One

I receive the news of my father's serious illness with near complete indifference. If anything, it's slightly irritating, like roadworks, the news that an old neighbour has finally passed, or a rumour that a dysfunctional couple you know is actually expecting a baby. I'm starting to realize a gap, a growing chasm between that what I should feel and that what I truly feel. Or to be more precise, that what I don't feel. He's just phoned to hear me; he will not bother me.

"I'm at work," I say and hang up the phone.

In front of me is an indifferent hotel lobby. Pleasantly air-conditioned. I stare at a pair of pale legs, until they cross, one over the other. I close my eyes. I breathe in the smell of disinfectant. Or roasted meat, it's something in between.

The news of my father's serious illness makes me upset for all the wrong reasons. I feel resentment, it's a flashback to puberty; all my plans for the weekend have just been ruined. With resentment comes discomfort. My father's, could-be, terminal illness makes me pout.

I've arranged my life to be incredibly simple, because there was a time when the needs and the problems of those around me were making it awfully complicated and chaotic. And I've done everything to make sure I don't have to do the things that I don't want to do – all except my job. I'm not basking in potential, I'm not vibrating with positive energy, and I retain my right to having a job that doesn't fulfil me. I hate lying to myself.

My father's illness makes me uncomfortable because I'll have to talk to him, and I don't want to do that. We tried talking, several times, we tried hanging out, getting to know each other a bit better, but it didn't work out. As if we both decided it was better to talk once a month about the weather and our shitty government. Sometimes I'd allow him to surmise that my employment, despite my college education, is a clear sign that there is no hope for young people in Croatia. I work at the front desk in a decent hotel because I have degree in comparative literature and English language. I had no other talents or interests as a young, pretentious gay

boy, so it seemed like an obvious choice. But with time, I realized I was never going to get a job in the cultural sector because it is the only space where even the left finds nepotism comfortable and necessary. The lack of privilege must be offset by an incredible talent, which I don't possess. It's fine though; I like people more than I like concepts anyway. My job is not demanding, often it's dull, but it keeps my curiosity alive. I love working nights, figuring out who is fucking with whom. I also get to read a lot and write poetry in secret. My scant opus is hidden inside a black binder with *Hotel Goodbye* written on it. I don't complain about my job. And I rarely ever complain about my life.

Still, the news of my father's serious illness awakens the urge to pity myself.

Chapter Two

"Fuck, we'll get through this, I swear! You need to enjoy life, you know. Be happy. Nothing else fucking matters, you know. That's a lesson I learned in life. You need to fuck around, live like you don't give a shit about anything. Look at me, I don't give a shit about any of this. It's too late to cry and think about what I could or couldn't have done, what used to be, and all that bullshit. You know? It's too late for that. I don't give a shit about any of that, and so what? So what? Even if I die, fuck it. My life wasn't bad. I had you. And when I look at you, I know I've done at least one fucking thing right. I know it. You turned out great, you work hard. Screw the government, it is what it is, and your job, it is what it is, but no job is fucking perfect. They all fucking suck. But you need a job to make money, so you can build a life for yourself, fuck everything else. It doesn't have to be much and what the fuck not. Having your own place is enough. Now I feel like shit because we didn't buy you an apartment. It'll have to wait, for now. Shit, life somehow turns out this way, and there's nothing you can do about it. It was our priority. To get you settled down. So that you'd always have a place to go. But all right, whatever, you'll get everything when I die anyway. And then you can sell it all and buy

something else. Get a mortgage, do you hear me? Are you listening to me? Are you okay? The only thing that matters to me is that you're okay. That's all. Hearing you're happy and everything's going well. I'm sorry you don't write anymore. You're a good writer. I don't know shit about it, but I know that you're good. You should start writing again. It doesn't matter if you sweep the streets when you have something that's yours. That's important, having something that's yours, everything else goes to shit anyway. Everything. Friends go to shit, governments, politicians, schools… Everything goes to fucking shit. Except for what's yours. I mean, marriages go to shit, so the kids must go. You did. It's important to have something that's only yours; it'll keep you sane when things turn to shit. I don't think I have something that's only mine. I don't know. You're not mine anymore. Shit, you're a grown man. You're smart, you finished college, got a degree. I didn't study. I didn't like it. But my life was good, it was nice. It really was. Listen, I won't bother you anymore. You have stuff to do. But fuck, you could really give me a call sometime. I won't bother you. Really, there's no reason for me to call and ask you if you've eaten, taken a dump, fucked anyone. That's none of my business. You're an adult, but please give me a call. Or come over, we could hang out. We could go somewhere. I don't know. I know you have to work and all that but think about it. I'll be home. We could hang out, fuck around. Alright, that's all. So, like, call me. Sometime. Alright, I love you. I love you so much."

And then he hangs up. Logorrhoea occurred only recently, after years of silence. The torrent of words, the fear he might hear my indifference. And the realization that I'm as silent as he is. The flood of words now swamps the call until it ends. He doesn't stop, not even to take a breath. He keeps answering his own questions like he's afraid that I might, if he stops for a second, ask *who is this?* I feel his fear.

My father doesn't know anyone like me. I believe I'm the only homosexual person he has met in his whole life. Surely, the only one who lives openly. He doesn't know anyone who

writes or used to write. He knows a few women who work as English professors because he took a couple of free courses. He speaks three languages. Clumsily, but with confidence. Slowly, but with precision. My father, before he had me, didn't know there were people who watch three-hour movies and attend art openings. He had never been around a man who called himself a feminist. He didn't know there were boys who didn't want to drive cars. None of my father's friends were cynical; none of them rolled their eyes and shrieked as I did during puberty. My father didn't know there were people who read to fend off the world. And he didn't know boys could get along so well with girls. He never judged me for these things. That, much like everything else in our relationship, I had to infer myself. My father had always been short for words. He rarely talked to mom. And mom would usually talk to him through me.

Tell him we're like strangers living under the same roof – she used to say, like in some telenovela. Then she would cry. Only later did I learn that tears weren't supposed to smell of vodka.

Chapter Three

I drink my coffee at an overpriced café downtown. The coffee is sour, the serving is small, and the temperature is always wrong. The coffee is *fair trade*, though I often wonder if I ever fully understood the term. I started drinking fancy coffee when I quit smoking nearly two years ago. I also thought the waiter there was attractive. I gave up my last vice, my pleasure, only to stare at some, very likely, straight waiter, for twice as much money. And to no purpose, because I always take off before a chance to start a conversation can arise. I'm now drinking coffee, thinking about my father's illness. I should call him and tell him everything is going to be okay. Only that. It's a quite small lie, a consolation, which I'm going to put off for a little longer. My mom, her sadness and her loneliness, always stood between my father and me. I worked through that in therapy, in who knows how many sessions. And, even though I managed to detach myself

from her, my father was always a few steps too far, always restrained, sensitive, as if he were made of feathers, always on the verge of tears, made of ice and glass. My father and I have never had a fight. He didn't show me how to shake my dick after pissing. I don't know his mother's maiden name. I don't know what his grandparents were like. I had never met his father. I don't know how many women he has slept with. I don't know if he loved any of them. Or if he ever loved my mother, his wife. I know more about my parent's marriage than I know about my father. He delegated parental duties to mom, and she to me. We are two grown men who share a significant portion of the DNA, who never got the chance to get to know each other, and who are in fear of each other.

I don't know my father's phone number by heart. My memories of him seem distant, muddled. Desperate, I dig into them to try and induce the feeling of longing, an emotion that would make me want to call him. He was almost never around. And even when he was, he would only stay long enough to meet the minimum; one family meal, one episode of a TV show before bedtime. He was there to create an awkward silence after the question: *Do you really have nothing to say for yourself?* When I was younger, I thought my father had hidden away inside the white landline telephone through which he would warn me that mom was sensitive, that I must be nice to her. I couldn't understand what he meant since she would tell me I was the only one who understood her, that my love was the only reason she was alive. She kept saying he was making her miserable. Back then, I couldn't have known that some people were miserable for no reason at all. That was something I learned a decade later. I was raised by two frightened kids.

My father started calling me more frequently in the past few years. More and more often, a shy missed call would appear imprinted on my phone. I pretended not to notice it at first, and then I started blaming his age. Every phone call would leave me with a flicker of guilt. It's the

same remorse that I'm feeling now because I cannot call him and ask him how he's doing. I'm a bad son to a bad father.

A slender arm with a toned biceps interrupts my stream of consciousness and takes the coffee cup off the table. A feeling of loneliness floods over me.

"This one's on me. You're all scrunched up like an IKEA catalogue," you say.

Chapter Four

My life is surprisingly lonely and oddly fulfilling for someone my age. Most of my friends have left Croatia. Many of my gay acquaintances started planning their departure after that homophobic referendum. They are now scattered across great economic centres of power, earning big bucks, buying apartments, and going on ten-day sailing trips. Hipsters, gay and straight, began fanning out with the end of the recession, gravitating mainly toward Berlin. I lived there for half a year. But after six months, I realized: as long as I was poor and unhappy, it did not matter where I was. So, I moved back to Zagreb, where my frustration was more comfortable, my commute shorter, rent more affordable, and the language – Croatian. I realized growing up was, first and foremost, a matter of class. Only those who must grow up end up growing up. My friends are still the same carefree boys and girls, in denial, stuck on the playground of the lost children whose parents, no matter how reluctant, still pay the rent at month's end. I'm not jealous anymore. My independence might come with a price and compromise, but it's mine. There's no family fortune I must accumulate, no testament that can be held over my head.

I live in a studio flat downtown. There's almost no mould, and the rent is still cheap. My landlord, Mrs Slavica, is very old. I've met her through Iris, her granddaughter. The grizzled Zagreb lady knocks on the door. She's wearing a hat and there's always only a tiny smudge of lipstick on her teeth. A smell of musk escorts her into the room. I tutor Mrs Slavica in English

whenever she comes to collect rent. We're translating a letter for her great-granddaughter. With excitement, Mrs Slavica repeats the words: *cat*, *cute*, *come*, *Copenhagen*. By now, she has already learned to write the beginning: *My dearest little*, and then she adds a noun, an animal usually. Her granddaughter Iris is a modern European woman, her husband is German, and they live in Denmark. So, for years, the kid had been bombarded with four languages: Croatian, English, German, and Danish. Naturally, each of the four must be associated with one person. However, in the life of young Rain, only three people matter: her mom, dad, and her teacher. It made Rain confused; she would talk to each of them in a different language, and eventually she grew frustrated and fell silent. The modern parents had to eliminate one of the languages. They decided on Croatian because everyone speaks English anyway, except the well off and resilient great-grandma, Mrs Slavica. Once we finish the letter, we drink coffee and gaze out the window. It's summer. The smell of urine, from cats and tourists, fills the air.

"This is a singles' flat. People quickly fall in in this place. I lived here, let's see, maybe a year or so before I fell in love. And so will you. So will you. Ah, you have no idea what I'd give to have been born a queer. I'd never have married. I'd only fall in love, over and over again. Back then, you had to marry, it's how it was, you know. So, you'd tie the knot as soon as you fell in love, so you wouldn't screw it up. Oh, if only I had been a queer back then. And if the world had been the same as now. I'd never have married. I'd only fall in love. But it is what it is, I do it now in my old age."

Mrs Slavica is a real coquette in the nursing home. She doesn't fancy anyone there. But since she's not getting any younger, she withholds from being too picky. She still likes to fool around, and by that, she means fuck.

Mrs Slavica always leaves at 11.15. She was a teacher, so her internal clock is set to 45 minutes, and then she is off. She doesn't care about the heat. The smell of her Chanel No. 5

lingers after she departs; it seeps into the old cabinets, the table, and the door. Sometimes, it seems as though the whole apartment is made of timber.

"Whenever I'm Left Alone" starts playing on the radio. I grab a booklet of Auden's love poems, take a sip of cold coffee, and start reading out loud by the open window. It's an exercise against cynicism.

Chapter Five

Silence. The slurping of the soup. Having a tumour is like holding a bomb under the kitchen table, except everyone can hear it ticking. So, the genre is thriller, though it feels like a horror.

The dam collapsed under an onslaught of guilt. I came to visit him. This is what my Saturdays, my only day off, will look like from now on. I'll get on a train and watch my father languish. I'll pour guilt into shame because I am not hurting more. I'll feel sorry because we didn't have a different relationship, one in which he'd be present, and I would try harder to keep it that way. Every Saturday, my paranoia will kick in, reminding me that I'm turning into him. Every Saturday, I'll negotiate with my own guilt over how much of my life I'll have to forgo to witness my father's decline. Every Saturday, the two of us will hold a reproaching competition. Every Saturday, I'll make a list of everything my father has done for me, and we'll both forget that being a father is, if nothing, a legal duty.

My father is staring at his soup so he wouldn't have to look at me. The slurping of the soup.

When I was younger, our family lunch would often end in mom's tears. She'd go hide in the other room. I usually went after her, and even though I didn't understand why, I'd be angry with my father.

Mommy. Then, she'd hug me. And often, she'd say, *I wish I'd gotten a divorce*. Or *he doesn't understand me*. I'd hug her back. *Don't cry, mommy. Don't cry*. And still that hug, that solace,

firmly stands between my father and me. I resent him for it. He got to choose his wife; I didn't get to choose my mother. Instead of taking responsibility for his actions, being a grown man, he let a five-year-old boy, an emotionally manipulated kid, stand in his place. As far as he was concerned, his job was done as soon as he came. We could stay silent for hours. The slurping of the soup. Only a commonplace, fascism on the rise or the corruption of political elites could break the silence. But there hadn't been a scandal in months, not one we could use to compensate for the lack of intimacy between us. And the slurping of the soup. The scratching of the fork against the bottom of the plate; it's the soundscape of despair.

An iceberg stands between us.

My attention wanders over the socialist raster of the apartment. The walls are empty; there are no pictures, the benchmarks of good taste. We're sitting at a table in the corner of the kitchen. The curtains flutter in the light breeze. We're not afraid of catching the cold. The central part of the room is a TV that's always on. Even now, the puffy face of a politician is watching the drama between us unfold. Around the TV, there are armchairs and couches, a furniture set that exceeds the number of occupants. There are photographs around the TV, a small exhibition of my childhood. There's one with Mom next to a stroller. The stroller and her jacket are the same colour. There's one of those triple frames with a photo of Mom, then a blank in the middle, and then a photo of me. It's as if we're divided by the blank. It's hard to find a photo of my father and me, standing in the same frame, the same shot, long enough to be captured by a camera. My eyes rest on one of the newer photos, a small emotional trap. It's a black-and-white photo of my father holding me in his hands. I'm a baby. The photograph was taken the same day my mother and I were discharged from the hospital. I know the story, the anecdote. A local professional photographer was waiting for us in the apartment. My father is standing in the middle, he's around my age. He's awkwardly holding the baby as if he's trying to get away from it. The smile on his face is unconvincing, indifferent, and uncertain. The hands

holding the baby seem like they belong to a different person. It's as if the torso, the head, the hands, and the baby are not the part of the same coordination, the same task of the body. Is this the only photo of my father and me? I've never seen it before. Though, admittedly, I haven't looked for it either. My father and I, at the very beginning. And now, very likely, at the very end of our relationship. The photo shows a father offering his son as a sacrifice to his marriage, trading him in exchange for his own freedom, putting him in place of partner responsibility. I see a young man whose body arches when it holds the baby, triggering a reflex to get away. I see a man who's afraid of the baby, afraid he'll screw it up the same way he might have been screwed up, afraid of the responsibilities that come with it. Maybe I'm projecting, inscribing all of it. Maybe he was truly happy, convinced it was the start of a new life for him too. There was no war yet, the future seemed bright, and there was plenty of room for delusion.

For the first time in my life, I recognize myself in my father. In his face, his smile, his fear, and his desire to get away.

Chapter Six

My long-term, but now also ex, fuck buddy is fifty plus. We fucked rarely, but properly. No unnecessary acrobatics. I can't say I miss him. We had known each other for years, eight, to be precise. And in all that time, we knew that love between the two of us was impossible. So, we worked with what we had, phenomenal food and unspectacular sex, more of a formal gesture than an act of passion. Goran is a successful lawyer, a real estate investor and an art collector. Every year since I've met him, his body had gotten a little softer, a little more rounded, and a couple of new hairs had sprung up on his shoulders. Every year, life would catch up to him a little more. He'd sink, every year, a little deeper into nostalgia, into grief over a life he didn't have. Things might have gone south for him from the very beginning. He was born into a bourgeois family, the kind of provincial elite that can emerge only in Zagreb. He grew up in a

family that allowed only two careers, law school or medical school. If a child was creative, they would become a lawyer. If, however, the child was too creative, they would become a priest. Goran might be an artist. The hints are hidden in the way he matches his ties, his shirts, and his socks. He makes a ton of money. Like any good lawyer, he thrives on working overtime. He never separated from his parents, never bit through the cord, the noose, and said the obvious out loud. Never have the words fag, gay, homosexual broken through the salon of the family home in Tuškanac. He never had the courage to drop the truth bomb in the house that hid the Ustasha, several dead Jews, a few suicides, abusers, and pregnant maids. He carried on the family curse and the curse of his class: the avoidance of the obvious truth. And so, nostalgia slowly dampened the walls, the shoes, the underwear, the Egyptian cotton, and photographs from his travels. Goran could have afforded himself to be free, but he didn't have the guts. Men closed in the closet of that size have little choice when it comes to choosing a potential partner. He must go for men who, just as mistresses, thrive in secret and shame. Goran is a gifted communicator, a lucid eccentric, and a terrific cook. But he's a poor lover. He's the perfect husband-material for someone whose *daddy issues* take form of a sexual fetish that dips into the realm of class. Goran is jealous of my life, and he'd give up all his apartments and a good portion of his art collection only to live in my world for a single weekend, or a week. He'd love not having to travel to a different city and pay for a sense of freedom in a vacation package. He'd love to go downtown and dance in a trashy gay bar or take his boyfriend to opera with his mom. Goran thinks I'm too dry, negative, cynical, and ungrateful. He's the only person allowed to read my poetry. He usually comes to me with notes, pointing out a better word, a small anastrophe, a better rhyme. He always finds a way to obscure the subject a little further, to uncover the lust a little more, and to bring out the humour. He doesn't make value judgments, nor does he talk about quality or *where the verse transported him*. He opens a bottle of wine that's way too expensive for my palate. Someone rings the doorbell.

"I'd like to introduce you to my *partner*," Goran says. A flamboyant twink enters the apartment. Antun is twenty-one and he studies comparative literature and art history, but he'll probably drop art history because it's really outdated and it's just not it, you know, he's not feeling it anymore, but he's almost done, so he might finish it and then maybe do something else for his master's, film probably, experimental film. It is not rare for men like Goran, at such an age and in such crisis, no matter straight or gay, to try and turn back time by choosing a partner that symbolizes a point in their life when they got stuck, when the demands of their class, their mothers, their family businesses took over their life. In Goran's case, it appears, this happened at the very beginning. Antun doesn't look a day over sixteen. He sits down next to me, takes a sip of my wine, and takes me by the hand. My anxiety kicks in because it feels as if I'm being lured into a three-way.

"Goran showed me your poems. Well, he didn't actually show them to me, I found them and read them. I couldn't stop. They're so beautiful. I've never read anything like it. And I really… I don't know. I hate poetry, I don't understand it at all. But it… I don't know. I think more people should read it. I don't know."

My heart is pounding, my mouth is dry. Shame is strangling me, wrapping itself around me.

"No, I'm being serious. I think more people should read it."

"I don't get it. I really don't get it. How did he find them? I gave them to…"

"Easy! Calm the fuck down," Goran warns me.

"I'm doing an internship at Fraktura … They assigned me to find new literary voices… The new generation or whatever. There's an open call for new writers. That's really hip now, like everywhere. Still not here though. Anyway, we need to scout new writers. I think you should apply. I really do. I'm sorry I read the poems… But they're so beautiful. And as a gay person…"

Shame tastes like stomach acid. All families are invasive, even the ones we choose. Fuck. It's certainly ménage à trois I would've never seen coming. The two of them will fuck with my head and come all over my fucked-up ego.

Chapter Seven

It is so rare that I get mail, so I was not in the least concerned when I lost my mailbox key. I pull out an occasional flyer with my finger. Today, however, a nice-looking envelope is inside. I tug it out, causing minor crumpling and damage. A wedding invitation. Fuck. I don't have the money for perfect gay weddings. I run down to my ground-floor studio, what a romantic name for a basement. I grab my phone, running my finger over the gaudy typography. I call Zoja, my best friend.

Zoja had a baby a couple of years ago. The baby came into being the way most of us did. The relationship was in crisis, and instead of breaking up, being lonely, and independent, instead of facing reality – a baby arrived. The little baby boy now soaks up all the neurosis of the unstable couple. Zoja, of course, doesn't like being a mother; it makes her paranoid and thoroughly hopeless. The pregnancy calmed her down for a while, and then the anxiety kicked in again. A baby is a sense of permanency. I told her early on that it was stupid, what she was doing, and that I no longer felt like watching her be miserable. Then our relationship cooled off. Now we started seeing each other again, as of recently – occasionally. The kid is cute, he likes me, but I feel awkward whenever I'm around him because I had advocated his abortion with so much passion.

The friendship between Zoja and me thrives on gossiping, commenting, and belittling, cynical hissing, and mocking the lives of people we used to be friends with. The words gently drip, saturating our conversations just so we wouldn't have to discuss, confess, or tell each other how we feel. Our friendship is a great diversion, an effort to stay off-topic. That's why it ended

as soon as one simple truth came out. That's why we don't talk about ourselves anymore. Only about other people – always about other people.

Janko is our friend who now lives in London, who somehow became successful and even richer than before. All that's left of our friendship is a relatively active group chat, where we occasionally exchange a few jokes, memes, and selfies. Janko, Zoja, and I were inseparable, a trio from the moment we met. We spent the first two years of college waiting for Janko to come out. In that time, he managed to lose his virginity to Zoja. When he came out, Zoja declared herself the queen of faggots. The two of them paid for my therapy after my mom's accident. Their parents furnished empty rooms in their houses with beds when we realized I shouldn't be alone. We were a trio from the moment we met, at every party, on every trip, during every exam week. We would split every ecstasy, gram of speed, every secret into thirds. And it was an urban family we were all longing for. Zoja found brothers who weren't skinheads, Janko found fleeting freedom from the expectations of his nearly aristocratic parents, and I was given access to Zagreb, a new city.

Then, one night, Janko got beaten up because he was making out with a boy out in the street. The boy escaped. Janko got away with a broken nose, cracked front tooth, and two fractured ribs. A feeling of discomfort spread among us. Reality shattered our hipster world. Zoja never admitted how scared she was. I never admitted how terrified I've been ever since. All minorities walk the streets, knowing there's a chance they might die. Greater or lesser chance, depending on the time. Greater or lesser chance, depending on the place. Janko was getting better. But he decided he was leaving. He told us: "Keep fooling yourselves. But I don't stand a chance here, not me, not you. And one day you'll wake up and realize you're making compromises, settling for less. With each day, less and less. Yes. It'll happen. With each day there'll be less hope and more shit."

It was his frustration talking, and his privilege. The fact is that he could afford to live and continue his studies in London. For the two of us, that was impossible. And he couldn't comprehend that it wasn't a matter of compromises, but defaults of life. His parents were also more comfortable this way, with their gay son living abroad, they didn't have to talk about him during family gatherings anymore. There was no doubt Janko would succeed, work as a connoisseur or some such fancy job, find a gorgeous fiancé, a fellow Croatian fleeing the *barbarism*, and he'd elegantly decorate their first shared real estate. If he read something in the newspaper, he'd call, worried, and ask what the hell was going on in Croatia, and when did we plan on waking up. He usually comes during the summer, and then we must listen about how terrible Croatia is, and how both Zoja and I aren't aware of the corruption, chauvinism, hate, unemployment, the weak democratic system, and the cultural corrosion, as if we're not the ones living it. Right after, we listen about how beautiful Croatia is, and about every restaurant he and his beau dined in.

Now, Janko is getting ready to be the groom, the bride. Zoja and I had started mentally preparing for his perfect gay wedding before it was even legalized.

Neither of us is exactly in the position to make fun of them. Zoja because she has a baby. And I because I fear relationships so much so that a second date is a reason enough to give me a panic attack.

We would love to make fun of them. But instead, we quiz each other. Do we have enough money for a gift and, if he asks for one, a bachelor party? Zoja is trying to remember if somebody owes her money; I'm checking my scant savings. Her baby is crying in the background.

This is not how I imagined adulthood, maturity.

Chapter Eight

I should shower, maybe even jerk off. I watch my body in the mirror. I should start working out. The genes have started doing their thing. I watch the wrinkles etch when I smile, a proof I was not always this fucked up, that I once had a sense of humour. I'm not sure when I gave up on life, when the frustration took over me. Maybe when Janko got beat up or when others started leaving as well. At one point, everyone had a plan, except for me. It's as if all my friends were chasing their dreams. Some to become successful artists, others to sleep with five thousand hunks, some to never fear for their life again, Zoja to stop the agony of adulthood. At one point, everyone I know, or used to know, seems to have started realizing their potential, decoding the messages of the great universe, except for me. I was the only one who saw the future as white noise. The only thing, it seems, that will remain of my twenties is a river of possible lives I've missed, given up on, or was late for. I stand naked and defer, both the shower and the masturbation. And I just watch myself in the mirror, my body, it's just another unrealized potential. It's always been like this. I'm lazy, with no work ethic, no self-esteem; unreliable and pessimistic. In the end, everyone was right, my old man, Janko, our professors. The world became efficient in one day. Everyone became masters of their own fate. In the world of crisis, everyone became their own small business, a temple, and an amusement park. All of a sudden, everyone started consulting tarot masters and astrologers, gurus and coaches, personal year numbers and numerology, practicing autogenic training, buying minerals and crystals, often filled with *energy*, discovering twenty-two past lives, drinking spirulina, then turmeric, then black cumin, swapping regular smokes with healthier, technologically-advanced e-cigarettes, micro-dosing LSD and macro-dosing everything else, drinks became thick and green, fruits overripe, and bread was suddenly full of nuts, vacations were being spent in detox, everything was cleansed of negative energy, places and thoughts, and especially people. Except for me. My energy is still blocked, I vibrate at a lower frequency, I didn't seize the power of now, my

goals are unclear, and my daily affirmations are missing. At the same time, I was too poor for all that, the courses, the workshops, the therapists, Berlins, Londons, and different, more practical MAs. I couldn't explain it to my friends. The number of possibilities the future holds is not the same for every class. The fear, obesity, cynicism, frustration, pessimism, they now belong to the poor. I've tried and failed. Fate is an economic unit. And mine caught up with me. Failure means guilt to the poor, and a motivational social media post to the rich.

Frustration and mild desperation flood the bathroom. In my hand, a soft, semi-erection. In the mirror, a portrait of my father. As the years go by, his face rolls down my cheeks more and more, like a ghost. He was right. I became everything he had warned me about. Things don't just happen; they don't simply take off for people like us. We have no one to help us. We must do everything on our own. As such, we have our limit, our ceiling. That's what he told me when I got into college. He told me he would't be able to help me, while everyone out there would have someone to help them. And he was right. He told me Croatia was not a country for someone like me, it was cruel and enraged, and the people here were bloodthirsty. And he told me to leave. But I stayed, in a country where the tiniest display of affection in public could earn me a fractured skull, cost me my collarbone, or my life. He was right. I have turned into every one of my father's warnings. I became everything I rolled my eyes at, everything I blocked out and ignored for years. All alone, unambitious, unrealized, and a cynical fag.

I calm down after a weak orgasm.

Chapter Nine

After four missed calls, I pick up the fifth. My father says my name.

"For fuck's sake, I really don't get it, I don't get it that you can't pick up the phone and call me. I don't get it, I don't, what's so fucking hard about it. You know I won't call you or ask questions and bother you. I mean, you don't even fucking remember to ask me how I'm doing

once every few weeks. I could be in a coffin, in the ground, and you wouldn't have a fucking clue".

He says my name again.

"What the fuck is that all about. I really don't expect anything from you. You don't have to go to the doctor with me. I don't expect you to wipe my ass if everything goes to shit. I've taken care of that. I'll have nursing care. But, for fuck's sake, you can't even call me to ask if I'm okay, if I'm okay! I don't get it. Maybe I'm stupid. What do I know? Maybe I'm stupid and I don't understand, but I don't get it."

He says my name again.

"You know what, I don't give a fuck. Really. You don't have to call me. If it's not important to you, if you don't care. Who gives a fuck? You don't have to call me. I didn't call my old man when he was dying. But let me tell you something. Listen to me."

He says my name again.

"You'll be sorry. If I die and we don't talk it out, you'll be sorry. Do you think I don't feel bad? But I can't force you. And I won't, I don't give a fuck. If you don't want to do it, I don't want it either. I have someone to talk to. But you…"

He says my name again, a little softer.

"You have your own life. I get it. And your own routine. And your job. Everything. This is your time to fuck around. I get it… But, for fuck's sake, life turns to crap so easy. And I wish we didn't have to talk like this. It's forced. Anyways… Did you start writing again? You should do that. Yes."

He says my name again. We're both finally silent. Just like old times.

He says my name again.

“Look. I won’t call you anymore. I really won’t. Just come home when you can. If you want to. I’m sorry I yelled. I’d love to spend time with you. And talk to you. Just the two of us. That’s it…

“I don’t know. I really hope that you’re okay. And that things are going well, fuck everything else. I really think you could do better than that hotel job. But I’ll stay out of it. I couldn’t fucking stand it when people tried telling me what to do. But I’d love to see you fuck around. And have fun. And see that you don’t giving a fuck about anything. That you’re enjoying life. I’d love that. I think that’s…”

“Fuck off, dad.”

I quickly hang up. Guilt grips my throat. Cutting my breath short. I’ve spat out the remainder of puberty that has been on my chest for years. In two words, I coughed out the rage, which I nearly forgot was in me. It’s at least fifteen years too late. My father had already escaped every responsibility that bears a fertilized and unaborted egg cell. My father was always somewhere else, out of country, out of town, or just out of the apartment. He expected me to fill in the gap he had left in the apartment and his marriage. To have understanding for his wife, my mother. It’s a *fuck off* for every time he told me I must understand her, that she was sensitive. It's a *fuck off* for every time he called, instructing me how to fill his shoes. My father demanded the truth but didn’t understand that truth requires a relationship, one of trust. It’s an avoiding tactic he probably learned from his father. The same one he passed on to me.

Whenever you need something, come to me. That’s how he would convince himself he was there for me, and at the same time, that I would leave him alone. Since, as I’ve realized much later, a child cannot know when and why they need an adult. It’s up to their parents to know that. And that requires talking. Memories with my father are made of long silences in the car.

It's a *fuck off* to his fear of responsibility, to his disappearing, sneaking out of the apartment. And most of all, it's a *fuck off* to signing away the guilt, almost as a part of his will.

It's a *fuck off* that makes the body shiver.

Chapter Ten

I open drawers, cabinets, kneeling. I'm groping one thing after another as if I'm playing Helen Keller in a B movie. I'm flicking through the pages, opening binders, as the administrative evidence of my life falls out. I know what I'm looking for.

Two years ago, I tried living in Berlin. But things weren't exactly going my way. I had an even worse job than here. And I wasn't earning enough to slip into the *leisure class*. My paycheck didn't give me access to unending weekends, organic brunches, and tight asses. But I had an acquaintance for whom I babysat every now and then. She was the most liberal person I've ever met. When I was preparing to leave, she stuck a red binder in my hands. She said my name with a funny accent.

"Look, this is the post-recession world now. A job can be anything you can think of. Everything else will disappear. You have your own world. Hear me out. You must find a way to work less and earn more. So, you can focus on yourself and your writing. You're too gentle for a corporate job. My best friend came up with this. I told her I'd give it to you. One day, when things get rough, read this, memorize it, and sell it to companies. The world is only getting dumber. You're sensible enough for this. And you'll make enough money. There's so much money in the world, but it's going down the drain. There you go, it's my gift to you. And for everything… I'm really glad I've gotten a chance to know you."

As with every other person I've met in Berlin, I never saw her again. I have the red binder in my hands, it's slightly damp; a gift of the ground-floor apartment. The inside of the file says *I love you*, written in big letters. There are about fifty sheets of paper, mostly slides.

This is gold – I think to myself. I skim through the materials. It is a training program for corporate employees, a mix of New Age, self-help, terribly naïve psychological tests, and some psychodrama. One of the instructions says it's essential that the employee feels happy with their self-evaluation. Another, to always remember how lonely those people are. The last set of exercises, based mostly on hugging, examines trust and intimacy. Once I slept with a freshman who studied acting, so I'm familiar with some of the exercises.

My first and last name, consultant, corporate trainer, growth for business wo/men. A surge of adrenalin, excitement comes over me, as if I've just snorted two fat lines of coke. Building a business out of yourself has never been easier. You need a website, filled with *content*, less words and more images; everything else is in the practical template. Not so long ago, all my friends were amateur and professional photographers. A proof of that is hidden in a folder on my desktop titled PORTRAITS. In the folder, besides my professional and slightly retouched portraits, there are a few dick pics I refuse to delete.

All the words are already there, I just need to translate them. Fingers glide over the keyboard, coating corporate jargon in New Age, then in popular psychology, and then cooking, deep-frying all of it in oil made of unhealthy ambition. We live in a time when everyone can redefine, invent, and brand themselves. So, that's what I'll do. I'll finally take this life by the balls. I'll prove everyone I'm more than a whiny, wimpy fag and a poet. No longer will I be lost in time and space. I will not be cynical. I'll believe in myself, in my message, and my mission. I'll not put myself down anymore; I'll believe in my own worth. That is how it'll be. I'll no longer live in a ground-floor apartment and settle for less. I'll become a part of this world, wear CK briefs, open a profile on Instagram, and upload a display of wealth, men's cosmetics, a fresh set of abs, and my Gucci pillow. I'll work my ass off, rest after I hit forty, buy an apartment, leap over class and my own shadow, bury my father, find a husband, and the list

goes on and on until it's cut short by a stubborn template. Kruno will finish it, I decide. He owes me a favour anyway, for something I translated for him.

I look at the table. It looks as if the red binder threw up all those papers, exploded its potential. The black binder, with a shyly written *The Hotel Goodbye* on it, rests tidy, unopened, hidden beneath the exciting business idea that will be, I'm certain, my new beginning.

Chapter Eleven

Hana's visit took me by surprise. I haven't talked to her in over a year, not even asked if she was coming home for Christmas or Easter – the usual courtesy question. Hana and I shared a childhood. I cannot remember a day spent without her. We went to kindergarten together, then elementary school, and finally high school. I know the smell of her apartment and the sharp voice of her mother; they're a part of my childhood, my growing up. We would go to Hana's whenever things got complicated over at my place. Hana and I don't have to talk. It's the only privilege of knowing someone as a child. I might not know the new Hana, the way she lives her life, but I know her every mechanism, the history of her character. We don't even have to talk about the news that she's a lesbian. She has always been one, but now she finally lives with a woman. It makes sense. I shrug my shoulders. She and her wife are successful and rich, and they have just bought their first house, with a very small mortgage. They're thinking about getting a cat or a baby. A pause. She hangs out with Janko, but not too much. Hana is not much of a talker, and she almost never gossips. She notes Janko and his fiancé have a nice apartment, in the hipster part of a hipster neighbourhood. Janko has changed jobs, so now he has more free time. He and his fiancé are thinking about getting a dog or a baby. London is cruel, she remarks, but it's easy to get your priorities straight. You work yourself to the bone until you can get a beautiful house, then you settle down and spend the second half of your life resting. She recites it like a definition, one I'm excluded from.

I work here and there, I'm renting a ground-floor apartment, I'm single, and well-rested in the first half of my life.

"I didn't mean it like that. You're an artist," she tries to explain herself poorly.

"I'm a receptionist."

I'm trying to sell her on Zagreb. My offer includes an expensive breakfast, this new restaurant that has three types of avocado toast on the menu; I take her to the street crowded with tourists. In the past two years, the city seems to have lost its identity completely in trying to accommodate the tourism supply of central Europe. It's the same hamburgers, the same thick ice cream, the same authenticity, and the same drunk tourists. Local kids must cram into two small cafés and one nightclub. We live in a time when cities had been transformed into studio backdrops.

Hana is going away to visit her parents in our hometown.

"Why don't you come along?"

And the excuses start flowing, up my throat, and down my tongue. The first, then the second, then the third. I don't owe him anything, I keep repeating. Why would I change my life, I ask myself. What has he ever done for me? The question is rhetorical. Hana is just listening, that's the nature of our relationship; I ramble, and she listens.

"I was just asking. I think you could do with a little responsibility in your life."

I roll my eyes. There are no hugs or kisses. We just stand there, at the train station. The trains are not moving.

"Have you ever thought of being a father?"

No. No. *Fuck. Fuck.* No. No. *Fuck.*

"No," I lie. "Maybe."

"It crossed my mind…"

"Hana… Take it easy."

"Look… I'll be home… When you figure things out… I'd love to have a little heart-to-heart with you."

No. No. *Fuck. Fuck.* No. No. *Fuck.*

She enters the new, low-floor train. The car is air-conditioned, and the temperature is pleasant. The new ones have Wi-Fi and electrical sockets. A one-hour ride now takes only 50 minutes. That cuts twenty minutes off the ride to my dying father. It's a chance to live in my hometown again, to use that time to talk and connect with him, to get to know the man who has always been a lingering shadow in my life. It would be possible. I would live in a big, airy apartment, on the third floor, with a balcony, with no roaches and mice, and with multiple rooms.

The train takes off, disappearing over the horizon, over the vibrant ground.

I push through the flock of backpacks and greasy heads.

Time slows down in the summer, and so do thoughts.

Chapter Twelve

Back at work, people are disappearing like it is 1991. They usually scatter during the summer because they find higher-paying jobs. But now, they simply disappear to Ireland or Germany, always right as the frustration spills over the brim. My favourite co-worker didn't show up. He sent in an email saying he was moving to Ireland and that we could all suck his dick. He'd rather shovel shit than put up with all the bullshit here. He wrote the email in response to the flagrant and rapid advancement of our twenty-four-year-old colleague, the son of a local right-wing politician, naturally. That's my guess. A long night of idling is ahead of me, filled with similar thoughts. The city streets are nearly empty. The liveliest time is always between midnight and two. Afterward, the tourists slowly start giving up, and they finally make peace with the fact that Zagreb is a dull city and the internet had them fooled. That's when dating apps

start bearing fruit, and local boys and girls become a part of the authentic city attractions. Even the cheaters come out, after midnight, they're less conspicuous after the streets clear out. At night, I usually write, play, count syllables, squeeze rhymes, grapple with the sonnet, allegedly. A poem is merely a thought that takes shape. It helps me with anxiety, gives me a purpose; writing is a small victory over shame. But tonight, it's a losing battle. Discomfort saturates the paper; the pen leaks out of my hand. I feel uncomfortable. I think I might throw up.

Excuses.

That's what I would name my biography. Cynicism was an excuse. Nostalgia pays me a visit at the front desk of this decent hotel. I miss egomania and narcissism. I miss the ease with which I could make fun of someone, spit out a one-liner, a tiny insult, and watch it roll, like spit, down someone's face. Your twenties take that lack of empathy away, life from a single point of view, the unwarranted conviction. With each new year, life seems to become a little more inert, I become heavier, time turns slower.

Excuses.

If only I had the guts. I watch a flustered boy searching for the elevator. He is going to the fourth floor. To visit an American businessman. I look him in the eye, letting the adrenalin do its thing. And right as he reaches the elevator, I give him a wink.

Excuses.

The word won't leave me. It's taking up space. My house is made of excuses. I could write endless lists of excuses, for my father, for Berlin, Zagreb, for my career, for loneliness, for giving up, for getting a D in math, for each failed relationship, and each unpublished poem. I have an excuse for every day of the week. I have enough excuses to last me a lifetime.

Fear and shame, fear and shame, fear and shame. My two companions. Fear and shame lie at the bottom of everything. And now the shame has erupted, spilling over the brim.

A group of tipsy tourists, a laughing pack of hyenas, enters the hotel.

Excuses – says a word written on a, usually blank, sheet of paper.

I get an email. My friend Kruno, a designer who helped me launch my website, recommended me to his friend. And there it is, my first *coaching* inquiry. I recognize the name. He's a scrawny city boy turned serious businessman. He runs a small marketing company and a restaurant on one of the islands. I briefly Google him. Whoa, he's kind of ripped; he's wearing white socks pulled straight up, and his hair is buzz-cut short. My stomach tightens up. Should I start a company? What should I charge? Is my bullshitting game good enough?

No more cynicism.

I respond with a yes.

No more excuses.

Chapter Thirteen

Vanja.

Vanja is an ultramodern guy. It seems we've already met, downtown, during a night out. I pretend I've recognized him too. Vanja is more cute than hot. He paired a white tee with white pants, and I am sure he has a tattoo somewhere on his thigh. Vanja looks like he had a glow-up after he turned twenty-seven, which is when most hipsters usually wither, go bald and under. Vanja is enthusiastic. And right off the bat, he explains everything to me. He tells me a little about himself. I can barely listen to him. He's cute. I'm trying not to smile.

Vanja had a huge company, which took off straight away, well, not straight away, but pretty quickly, he was twenty-three when he started it, and it went into orbit when Croatia entered the EU. Everything was in his hands; it was his vision entirely. And he just worked, twenty-four hours a day, nothing but work, and his business just grew bigger and bigger, and he thought he could rest later, that he'd go on vacations, but he wouldn't end up resting at all, he'd always go to a new place, a new continent, he travelled all around the world, and there was

so much he wanted to see, to discover, to photograph so he could share it with other people, my god was he overwhelmed, and the company just grew more and more, and the business was snowballing, and he was one of the first people to recognize the importance of all the digital, online stuff, especially in business.

He felt he was becoming miserable, but no person is happy in business. Thank god, he didn't drink, and he hates drugs. They instantly knock him out. I mean, look at him. His personality is a gram of coke. He felt other symptoms too, but that was just how things were, twelve hours a day, work and work only. Every morning, it became harder to get out of bed. And now and then, he'd cry a little. But nothing to worry about. He thought he was just being sensitive. Then, he took on courses to, like, work it out. It was a mistake. It nearly cost him his head. It was this New Age shit, with machines. It cost me a fortune; he explains. It was based on nothing but suppression. Fuck, I was suppressing every single thought. Everything. I became addicted to that hag. I'd call her every day. And then she'd tell me to meditate, to plug into the fucking universe. And before I'd even start thinking, I'd already be plugged in, suppressing.

I want to kill myself. A thought would come to me, and I'd immediately call Mrs Milica, and then we'd plug in. Into the universe, right? We did that every single day, every two hours. Every thought, I'd plug in immediately. My hands were shaky, I'd get rash outbreaks, and I'd start crying.

But I had to work more and more. And go through more and more séances with Mrs Milica. I'd tell her, I work too much, I'll crack up. And she'd say, it's a transfer from the Universe, the Creator, it's an exchange. You're blocking yourself up.

"And I was like, she's right, I'm blocking myself. So, I took on more work. Bam. Bam. Bam. And then even more, another two clients. Not to mention, half of the office was on sick leave. And me, thinking I'm freaking Miranda Presley, serving business realness. I lost fifteen

pounds. And I still though I was fine. And I kept receiving memos about burnouts. And you know what's the craziest thing in all that?"

I shrug my shoulders. I secretly adjust my penis.

"I was sure that those people… I'm not sure how to put this. You must think I'm a total jerk. But I was sure they were all disconnected from the universe. And fuck it. I'm not sure why I'm telling you all this. I talk a lot when I'm nervous," he concludes.

Great, the exact opposite of me.

"Anyhow, one day I went to the store to get Skyr. Skyr is an Icelandic low-fat yoghurt and also my only meal. I went into the store, and there were five thousand yoghurts. The whole wall, nothing but yoghurt. And I started walking, and walking, and waking, and walking. But there was no fucking Skyr yoghurt. It just wasn't there. And even though I stood by the fridge, I was burning, on the inside, my skin was burning. I started crying. The last thing I could remember was some random old lady. Not a single fucking Skyr yoghurt. And it pushed me over the edge. I couldn't breathe. I felt like I was trapped in a fire, burning at the stake. Like, burning and suffocating. I thought this was it. And that was the last time I plugged in. I woke up in the hospital. Burned out, crusty as a Salem witch, my thyroid all fucked up. I wrecked myself completely. I don't know. Then I had a nice little chat with Mrs Milica over the phone, and I told her she could go fuck herself, and I started going to therapy. I completely transformed the company so that everyone was happy. I kept almost all my employees, but the constant growth wasn't good. And then I turned things around. I opened a restaurant on Vis. I work less, and delegate more. And I'm finally happy."

And he looks happy, tanned, and healthy. I could grab a handful of his hair, wrap one arm around his neck, kiss him, listen to his breath, bite his neck, his fingers, pull him by his waist, melt into his shoulders. Stop, I warn myself. You'll have to get up from the table at one point.

Instead, I blurt out a price, some random number. Judging by his face, the price I said was too low. That's without the tax, I add. It's the peak of my business knowledge. We schedule the first séance. And then we'll see how it goes.

Chapter Fourteen

We're silent.

I came to the hospital, in my hometown, as soon as I could. As soon as I received the call that he got sick, that it was bad, and that he wasn't responding to the treatment. It was what the nurse told me. He's silent. I'm sitting next to him. I'm sleepy. I realize he has gotten older. Suddenly, I can see his wrinkles, his dentures. I can see the thirty years standing between us. The treatment took his contours away, his cheeks, and the edges of his face. Or maybe the illness sunk them. I want to cry, but I feel more like throwing up. We're not talking, even though we should. Death stands between us, like a therapist. It might be saying: *It's now or never, boys*.

"How have you been"?

A long pause, too long.

"Like a wet sack of shit."

I often forget my father is funny. Annoying, but funny. I shrug my shoulders. I cannot tell him he'll get better. I don't know that, and it doesn't actually mean anything. And so, the shame joins the death. I should take care of him. And be there for him. He's not asking me to do that, and I'm not offering. I know people who left everything to come home and wait for their fathers to die. Years went by, and their fathers were still alive. But the sons grew old. The fathers would warn them. And when the sons finally gave up on themselves, on their lives, the fathers decided to give up on death. My father is not asking for that.

"Like a wet sack of shit," he insists and coughs a little.

I'd love to tell him about myself. Tell him what's new in my life. But he doesn't even know the old. He never bothered. He neither asked nor insisted. I guess that's why I don't owe him anything now. Maybe he feels like he doesn't have a right to ask. We've never talked about love, or sex. I don't know if he has been in love, if he at least fucked someone, since mom died. He probably did. I felt it in nurse's voice, the one who called me. My father is a charmer. We probably flirt in the same way. Make them laugh, and then buy them a drink. And since we're, indeed, boring – a small propulsion of humour works like a charm. And so it goes, back and forth. I'd maybe tell him that I liked Vanja. We could talk about that, but we cannot. Bone in the throat. Both of us, for different reasons, are on the verge of throwing up.

I'd tell him about my job, but he might ask me if I had been writing. And then I'd have to lie again and say I had given it up. He feels guilty. Whenever we talked about me, he'd always say: "I'm not the right father for you."

It's easier to say I don't write, I don't work, I don't have any plans, I don't know what I'm going to do, I don't go anywhere, I don't have anyone, I'm not interested in anything, and I haven't seen anything. Less questions, less words.

He can talk about the weather, and fascism, local and international, everything that is outside. Though with time, not much has left, neither topics nor words.

The smell of death is cold.

He says: "You know, I just remembered the bed. How it took you ten minutes to put it together. You know, that's when I realized you grew up. And that I was old. My back was stiff, do you remember? And you got it done in ten minutes. It was clear to me then and there. You grew up. And you didn't need me. Maybe you never needed me. I realized, fuck, he could do everything by himself. It's too late. I don't know. "

After mom's death, my father insisted the double bed was too big for him, that it takes up too much space. I was hoping the bed was his excuse to spend time with me, a cry for help.

He got frustrated reading the instructions, and then his back got stiff. He was lying on the couch while I assembled it. When I was finally done, thanks to a YouTube tutorial, I made peace with the thought that we couldn't have a conversation, or at least, don't know how to. I realized the bed was his way of saying he wanted to be alone. The next morning, I promised myself I would never be like him. And I accepted Zoja and Janko's help.

"I always thought… I'd do the heavy work. So, you can go to college and learn. I sucked at school. But you're different. With your writing and all that shit. I thought, I'd make it possible for you. I wouldn't meddle. I couldn't help you with the guys. I'd… make myself so useful, so I wouldn't fuck up. Because I didn't know anything about those things. And then I realized, you could do everything by yourself. You work in that hotel; you live on your own. And yeah. You've built a life for yourself. I guess you like it that way. I don't know. But why the fuck aren't you doing what you love anymore? The literature and the writing… I'll never get that. Never. "

He's right. But I won't tell him that.

"I started something new," I change the subject.

I start explaining *coaching* to him, I tell him I'm really into it and that the money is good and that I might start a company. My father falls asleep. He leaves me with my mouth dry, slightly worried if he's still alive.

A nurse his age comes in. I can tell by her voice she was the one who called me. If my father survives, the two of them will have sex. And that thought, for a moment, gives me comfort and joy.

8 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to describe the emergence of queer theory, its impact on translation studies, and the process of translation queer works of literature. As it has been argued, queer theory emerged at the height of AIDS crisis, in the aftermath of a longstanding struggle between essentialism and constructivism, two opposing perspectives that dominated the political and cultural realm of the gay community, as well as the increasing homogenization and whitewashing tendency among queer movements of the time. Thus, although notorious for its lack of definition, it asserted itself as a critical perspective that seeks to resist and expose the constructed nature of dominant systems of power – particularly those that produce categories of gender, sex, and identity. Among theorists whose work greatly contributed to queer theory is Judith Butler who subjected the concepts of gender, sex, and identity to radical deconstruction and reevaluation in her seminal text *Gender Trouble*.

The expansion of queer theory overlapped with a cultural shift in translation studies, largely associated with the works of Lawrence Venuti, André Lefevere, and Sherry Simon, among others. Focusing on the role of culture, power, and ideology in translation, and centering varying subjective positions of translators, the cultural shift marked a step forward to understanding translation as a means of cultural production that can destabilize cultural identities. It prompted a divorce from the universalizing models of translation which erase the multiplicity of cultural differences and center dominant systems of power exclusively. Instead, the new outlook on translation activity put the emphasis on translator's agency, the partial and evolving perspectives that shape translation and that are, in the case of feminist and queer translations, greatly affected by sex and gender. Translators, especially feminists, began asserting their identity, disclosing their subjective positions with regards to their work, prompting a reconsideration of translator's invisibility and transforming translation into a political act. Thus, a new approach to translation emerged, one that includes radical awareness

of the constructed nature of cultural identities and their role in the reproduction of dominant ideologies.

Developed out of cultural translation, queer translation emerged at the intersection of queer theory and translation studies. Centering queer identities and experiences, and their cultural representations, it analyzes how concepts that relate to sexuality travel across cultural boundaries. Since translation is a part of a literary system that interacts and depends on several other systems, i.e., social, political, ideological, economic, this process of transmission, as it turns out, is not an unproblematic one. The literary system is regulated by bodies and institutions that extend patronage to it and influence its means of production and exchange, e.g., the choice of texts, the translation process, its goals, etc. In this sense, Lefevere argues that translation is a form of rewriting because it is a process of repurposing the original performed under certain constraints, with the aim of gaining influence and exposure. This is especially relevant for queer texts, which are often rendered invisible because they subvert the dominant representations of gender and sexuality. Through rewriting, they can move out of peripheral positions both in the home culture and the receiving culture.

However, this also makes queer texts in translation liable to altercations in the form of censorship, misrecognition or dilution of queer meanings, which result in rewrites that conform to the dominant ideas of gender and sexual identity. Translating queer texts and preserving their queerness is a necessary political act against such processes of erasure. It is also an act that disrupts the dominant culture's expectations of what literature should be, creating a larger space for reception of queer stories. Queerness is by no means universal, so finding and translating diverse queer texts and queer authors is essential for a deeper understanding of social and political reality of queer experience across different cultures.

A rarity in Croatian literary ecosystem, Dino Pešut's *Daddy's Boy* depicts complexities and struggles that arise at the intersection of queer and class identity in Croatia. To Luka, the

main protagonist, his lack of privilege proves to be both constraining and liberating. He is able to live openly as a gay man, unburdened by anyone's expectations, yet the same liberty his social background brings him bears problems of its own; the inability to pursue his interests, financial struggles, etc. The text is queer not only in its content but also its form. The novel is branded as fiction, but its narrative devices, the superficial similarity between the protagonist and the author (both are openly gay writers), and references to real-life events such as the 2013 gay marriage ban, often confuse the line between reality and fiction, consequently queering the genre itself.

Translating works such as *Daddy's Boy* can provide critical insight into strategies and meanings by which texts are constructed as queer and, subsequently, transformed in translation. Moving them across boundaries can introduce underrepresented cultural identities into dominant, homogenized systems of cultural production. Therefore, translating queer texts is necessary not only for their potential to diversify the literary offer, but also because they are able to disrupt the most basic, culturally ingrained notions of human experience, and as such can be instrumental to social change.

9 Works Cited

Baer, Brian James, and Klaus Kaindl. *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer: Theory, Practice, Activism.* Routledge, 2018.

Baldo, Michela. "Queer Translation as Performative and Affective Un-doing: Translating Butler's Undoing Gender into Italian." *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer*, edited by Brian James Baer and Klaus Kaindl. Routledge, 2018.

Bassnett, Susan. *Translation*. Routledge, 2013.

Brookes, Les. *Gay Male Fiction Since Stonewall: Ideology, Conflict, and Aesthetics.* Routledge, 2008.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 2002.

---. *Undoing Gender*. Psychology Press, 2004.

Damrosch, David. *What is World Literature.* Princeton University Press, 2018.

Dean, Tim, and Steven Ruszczycky. "AIDS Literatures." *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature.* Cambridge University Press, 2014.

D'Emilio, John. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities.* University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Faderman, Lillian. *Surpassing the Love of Men.* Women's Press, 1981.

Grandes, Almudena. *Las edades de Lulú.* Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, 1989.

Grandes, Almudena. *The Ages of Lulu*. Translated by Sonia Soto. Abacus, 1992.

Harvey, Keith. "Gay Community, Gay Identity and the Translated Text." TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction 13.1. 2000: 137-165.

---. "Translating Camp Talk: Gay Identities and Cultural Transfer." *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti. Routledge, 2000.

Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer theory: An Introduction*. NYU Press, 1996.

Lefevere, André. “Mother Courage’s Cucumbers: Text, System and Refraction in a Theory of Literature.” *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti. Routledge, 2000.

---. *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Routledge, 2016.

Marinucci, Mimi. *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection between Queer and Feminist Theory.* Zed Books, 2016.

McIntosh, Mary. “The Homosexual Role.” *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy*, edited by Edward Stein. Routledge, 1992.

Santaemilia, José. “Sexuality and Translation as Intimate Partners? Toward a Queer Turn in Rewriting Identities and Desires.” *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer*, edited by Brian James Baer and Klaus Kaindl. Routledge, 2018.

Simić, Mima. “The Facts Behind One Story in Dalkey Archive’s Best European Fiction for 2011.” *Three Percent*, http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/2011/02/02/the-facts-behind-one-story-in-dalkey-archives-best-european-fiction-for-2011/. Accessed 20 August 2021.

Simon, Sherry. *Gender in translation*. Routledge, 2003.

Sontag, Susan. “Notes on Camp.” *Against Interpretation*. Picador, 2001.

Stein, Edward. *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy*. Routledge, 2013.

Summers, Claude J. “Gay Voices, Gay Genealogies.” American Literary History 5.1. 1993: 147-158.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference.* Routledge, 2002.

---. *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Routledge, 2017.

Von Flotow, Luise. *Translation and Gender: Translating in the Era of Feminism.* Routledge, 2016.

10 TRANSLATING QUEER: DINO PEŠUT'S *DADDY'S BOY*:

Summary and Key Words

This thesis examines the process by which queer emerged as a critical theory, its contribution to translation studies, and implications of translating queer works of literature. The transformation of identity politics marked by the longstanding debate between essentialism and constructivism culminated in radical deconstruction of dominant systems of knowledge, especially those that relate to concepts of gender, sex, and identity. Parallel to the expansion of queer theory, a cultural turn occured in translation studies, proposing the view of translation as a process of negotiation between various cultural contexts and their literary, political, and ideological constraints. Due to its subversive nature, queer texts such as *Daddy's Boy* are especially liable to manipulation when crossing cultural boundaries. Therefore, this thesis examines the construction of queer, its transformation, and the the political potential of translation that makes queer visible and thus challenges ideas and values of the dominant culture.

Key words: queer theory, literary translation, translation as rewriting, gender as performance, identity

11 PREVOĐENJE QUEERA: DINO PEŠUT I *TATIN SIN*:

Sažetak i ključne riječi

Ovaj se rad bavi procesom razvoja queera kao kritičke teorije, njegova značaja za teoriju prevođenja, kao i samim procesom te implikacijama prevođenja djela queer književnosti. Transformacija politike identiteta kojoj je temelj sukob esencijalizma i konstruktivizma, dosegla je svoj vrhunac razvojem queer teorije te potaknula radikalnu dekonstrukciju dominantnih društvenih vrijednosti, posebice onih koje se odnose na koncepte roda, spola i identiteta. Paralelno s razvojem queer teorije, znanost o prevođenju doživjela je kulturološki zaokret kojim se prevođenje redefiniralo kao dijalog između različitih kulturnih konteksta te njihovih političkih i ideoloških prinuda. Uzimajući u obzir njihov subverzivni potencijal, queer djela poput *Tatinog sina* čine prevoditeljski proces problematičnim; od samog odabira tekstova do "prerade" onih značenja koja nisu u skladu s normativnim konceptima seksualnosti. Ovim se radom tako razmatra konstrukcija queera, njegova transformacija, te politički potencijal prijevoda koji queer čini "vidljivim" i time destabilizira dominantnu kulturu.

Ključne riječi: queer teorija, književno prevođenje, prevođenje kao prerada, rod kao performans, identitet