The (Im)possibility of Translating Poetry – Vida Sever's A Dry Place

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Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

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

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1. Introduction

"Tell me what you think of translation, and I will tell you who you are," exclaimed the German philosopher Martin Heidegger in his analysis of Friedrich Hölderlin, his fellow countryman, philosopher, and poet (63). It almost goes without saying that the history of scholarly concern with translation is complex and varied. Nonetheless, an issue that might be singled out as the one that constantly resurfaces, despite its contradictory nature, is that of (un)translatability, i.e., the fundamental (im)possibility of translation.

As pointed out by Lawrence Venuti, prominent philosophers, literary critics, and linguists have long debated whether translation has the potential to bridge the gaps between different languages and cultures (*The Translation Studies Reader* 67). Naturally, while many have claimed that the obstacles are either impossible to overcome or manage, others have simultaneously developed translation strategies and methods so as to cut the Gordian knot of (un)translatability. While viewpoints vary from philosophical skepticism to pragmatic optimism, it might just be that the "truth," whatever that may entail, resides somewhere in the middle.

Bearing this in mind, this thesis will focus on the (im)possibility of translating poetry, a craft that has been deemed by many to be "the art of the (im)possible." It is the translation of poetry that dwells in the crevasses of translation studies, both in theory and in practice, constantly being a source of both tension and fascination. However, criticism of poetry translation is nonetheless simply an extension of a more general assumption that there is no translation without "a fundamental loss" (Steiner 153). In other words, there is always an impossibility as an *al pari* to the possibility of translation.

Encouraged by this inherent contradiction, and by combining philosophical reflections with a poetic sensibility and a linguistic-oriented framework at certain times, this thesis aims to position the issue of (un)translatability as the "task of the translator." Namely, as Willis

Barnstone argues, untranslatable lines are those that represent the "fertile ground" of translation, often re-creating unique literary worlds (269). What has not been yet expressed enriches both the literature of the target language and culture, as well as world literature. Therefore, the task of the translator becomes the task of broadening the limits of translation.

However, it was as early as the tenth century BC that the Latin poet Horace, in his *Ars Poetica*, proposed that the translation of poetry is to be an act of re-creation, rather than a word-for-word re-production (Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader* 4). In such a way, translation enables the translator to re-construct her/his own poetic authorship, a poet's identity. It is this hermeneutic interplay of understanding grounded in re-creation, instead of re-production, that provides the translator with the ability to tackle the challenges of poetry translation, some of which will be analysed in this thesis. The debut collection of poems *A Dry Place* (*Suho mjesto*, 2021) by a young Croatian contemporary poet Vida Sever might be used as a case study reflecting the complexity that lies in translating poetry.

2. An ABC of (Un)translatability

The issue of (un)translatability has been essential to translation since its beginnings. Although it has been extensively studied throughout centuries, (un)translatability somehow remained a point of interest not only in translation studies but also in related scholarly disciplines, such as literary theory and philosophy of language. Boundaries of translatability are set by what Yifeng Sue interestingly describes as "the apparition of untranslatability" (101).

(Un)translatability has traditionally been discussed within the scope of Western dualistic approaches known as the universalist view and the monadist view. While the advocates of the former, for instance, Eugene Nida and Noam Chomsky, argue that translatability is possible due to linguistic universals, monadists, represented most notably by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Lee Whorf, assert that translatability is infinitely complex and virtually impossible as every language community uniquely interprets reality (Steiner 43).

However, the contrast between the two has not always been evident in translation studies. Namely, certain theorists have swung back and forth between the extremes, while others have sought to blend elements of both approaches. Moreover, a third, more recent approach has emerged: that of the Deconstructionists, most notably represented by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who challenged the idea of translation as merely the transfer of meaning (de Pedro 546).

(Un)translatability began to be recognized as a distinct issue in the nineteenth century, encouraged by the emergence of linguistics which reinforced such theoretical inquiries. Prior to this, scholars had concentrated on translation methods and principles. The evolution of theories concerning the nature of language and communication provided an impetus for analyzing whether concepts could be successfully conveyed in a language different than the one in which they were originally developed (de Pedro 546).

Until the eighteenth century, an unspoken agreement regarding the interchangeability of linguistic codes was somewhat of a standard. However, it was the German philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz whose musings on the nature of language led the discussion on another path (de Pedro 547). In 1697, Leibniz inaugurated the idea that "language is not the vehicle of thought but its determining medium" (Steiner 44). In other words, "thought is language internalized," while our opinions and feelings are guided by what our language allows us to do (Steiner 44).

As emphasized by Raquel de Pedro, in the centuries that followed, many translation theorists, as well as practitioners, would continue to support the monadist principles promoted by Leibniz's approach (547). However, the universalist stance was not at all neglected or discouraged. On the contrary, in the nineteenth century, linguists such as Alexander von Humboldt, Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Schleiermacher advocated that languages are limitless in their individuality. From the eighteenth century onwards, the concept of linguistic universals whose existence supported translatability eventually became the foundation for Noam Chomsky's generative transformational grammar. However, Chomsky himself cautioned scholars about the limitations of applying his theory to the field of translation (de Pedro 550).

Nonetheless, Chomsky's warnings were disregarded. Namely, starting in the 1960s, advocates of universal translatability began to use Chomsky's theory to provide their views with scientific credibility. Several leading twentieth-century linguists, such as Roman Jakobson, Eugene Nida, and Einar Hauge, among others, embraced the idea that anything can be conveyed in any language. Supporters of this view argue that translatability is ensured by universal semantic and syntactic categories and supported by the sheer logic of human experience. However, if a translation does not succeed in matching the quality of the source text, the reason is not in the grammatical inventory of the target language, but rather in the translator's lack of a sufficient text analysis (Wilss 49).

On the other hand, there have been scholars who did not support the theory of utter translatability. What is more, some have supposed that a fundamental division exists within untranslatability between a linguistic kind and a cultural one (Hermans 304). In other words, issues in translation stem from either differences between the source language and the target language or between the source culture and the target culture (de Pedro 551). For J.C. Catford, linguistic untranslatability entails that the target language lacks certain formal features found in the source language (94). This might refer to cases of semantic ambiguity, word plays, and polysemy. On the other hand, cultural untranslatability includes a complete absence of a situational feature in the target culture that is present in the source culture, for instance, an item of clothing such as the Japanese *yukata* (Catford 99).

Catford concludes that the dichotomy between linguistic and cultural untranslatability is an illusion since all cases of cultural untranslatability might be narrowed down to difficulties in finding an "equivalent collocation" in the target language (101). In other words, cultural untranslatability is, in fact, "collocational untranslatability" (Catford 101). Similarly, Nida and Taber claim that there is a universal possibility of conveying any message across all languages (4). However, they emphasize that this is so only if the form is not an essential part of the message. In such a way, Nida and Taber also exclude the possibility of cultural untranslatability (4).

2.1. Echoes of Derrida: Deconstruction and the Limits of Translation

In the modern era, Deconstructionism would bring about far-reaching changes in translation studies. Originating in France in the late 1960s, it has been most notably represented by Jacques Derrida, Andrew Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Paul de Man. Though Deconstructionism was originally conceived as part of Derrida's larger critique of the Western philosophical tradition grounded in metaphysics, in the 1970s, this critique began to concentrate

more on issues of language and translation. For instance, Derrida dismisses the idea of "deep structures" or "kernels," foundational for Chomsky's generative transformational grammar, as the basis of language (de Pedro 554). As a result, language claims a new identity, now not only as a vehicle for conveying meaning but also as something significant in its own right, and little by little, the idea of an autonomous and self-reflexive nature of language became crucial for postmodernism (de Pedro 554).

Moreover, Deconstructionism sowed the seeds for a different approach to translation and hence, (un)translatability (de Pedro 554). When discussing whether a text is translatable or not, one of the most important factors to be taken into account is meaning (Sue 101). As elaborated by Kathleen Davis, the main issue Deconstructionism deals with, or conveniently to say, "de-constructs," is precisely that of meaning, i.e. the nature of meaning ("Deconstruction" 74). Namely, what is being questioned are the traditional ideas that meaning has an *a priori* existence in relation to language, that meaning can exist outside language, and perhaps most importantly for translation, that meaning can be transmitted unchanged between languages (Davis, "Deconstruction" 74).

As further explained by Davis, in contrast, within the deconstructionist framework, meaning is believed to be produced by language, it is not some form of an *a priori* apparition merely present in language (*Deconstruction and Translation* 14). Therefore, it is not possible for meaning to simply be "extracted" from language and then transmitted. In other words, Deconstructionism dismantles the conception that meaning, as being beyond or before language, can be neatly "carried" from one language into another (Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation* 14). Though it may seem so, Deconstructionism does not entail utter untranslatability. Rather, it only demonstrates the failure of translation in its traditional sense, one grounded in the Western metaphysical tradition approaching meaning as having a Platonic, essentialistic nature.

When discussing the issue of translation, and consequently (un)translatability, Derrida questions the assumption that a language has its "limits" ("Des Tours de Babel" 173). According to Deconstructionism, the limits between languages are not clear-cut or absolute, but rather (re)present the volatile relationship between different languages and contexts (Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation* 21). This claim is especially important if one recalls that within the deconstructionist framework, context is fundamental to the existence of meaning.

According to Derrida, the pursuit of meaning does not consist of unearthing content that is "hidden" in language (*Positions* 26-7). Quite the opposite, since the condition of the possibility of meaning, described by Derrida with his neologism *différance*, precedes meaning itself, there is no "pure, unified, static *original*" (Davis, "Deconstruction" 75). What is more, there is no traditional hierarchy between the original and the translation. Now the translation is a means of survival for the original.

The idea of "re-writing" the source text through the translation entails that the target text is taken to influence how a source text is perceived, and in such a way, the target text is no longer considered a mere extension of the original, but rather the original becomes dependent on its translation (de Pedro 554). What was also discussed within Deconstructionism was the "worthiness" of translation. Namely, originality was traditionally considered to be a matter of chronology, i.e., which text came first. However, with the development of Deconstructionism, originality instead became a matter of quality. As a result, traditional notions of authorship were challenged, while translation came to be viewed as a dynamic process that has the potential to transform the source text (de Pedro 554).

Finally, drawing on such ideas of the nature of language and meaning, Deconstructionism entails that the very limits of language that hinder "pure" meaning and utter translatability are those that enable translatability at all as these limits assure that meaning is never fixed, final, or sealed off (Davis, "Deconstruction" 4). In such a way, the limit of a

language serves both as its boundary, as well as a "structural opening to its outside," an opening to the (un)attainable, to the (un)translatable, to the (im)possible (Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation* 10).

2.2. Translation and the Art of the (Im)possible

"All translation seems to me to be simply an attempt to solve an impossible task," von Humboldt wrote to August W. Schlegel in 1796 (qtd. in Wilss 35). In the letter, von Humbolt continues to elaborate on his view that translators are inevitably faced with one of two pitfalls: either they will be too faithful to the source text, or they will completely adapt to the target text, concluding that any "middle ground" between the two is not only difficult but rather impossible (Wilss 35).

Taking into consideration this, to say the least, challenging task of the translator, it might be that translation is best envisioned as a tightrope walk all the while navigating between various opposites, extremes, and paradoxes. Derrida claims that the act of translation entails an oath of fidelity to the source text that contains the paradox of any promise – the possibility of treason or deception, the so-called notion of *traduttore, traditore* or "translator, traitor" ("What Is a "Relevant" Translation?" 183). The question that naturally arises is: can translation, expressed as the "imaginative, intellectual and intuitive writing of the translator," be perhaps discussed as the art of the (im)possible, of the (un)translatable (Bush 127)? Is it possible for this "language of the other" to become a translatable language such that the target audience might perceive it, in a way, as its own (Derrida, "What Is a "Relevant" Translation?" 176)?

The issue of (un)translatability at first might seem unnecessary and to some senseless, considering the existing corpus of literature in translation. However, as analyzed by Steiner, the question of the (im)possibility of translation might likely be traced back to religious and psychological, even ancient dilemmas over the right of transfer between languages (151).

Namely, the claim that translation could be blasphemous stemmed from the belief that sacred texts must not be tainted by translation because their original meaning might be altered.

More recently, at least from the fifteenth century onwards, the (im)possibility of translation has been discussed from a "secular" point of view. More specifically, it has been based on the assumption that there can be no full symmetry or mirroring between different languages, whether on a formal or a pragmatic level (Steiner 152). Despite the argumentative differences, what has prevailed throughout the history of concern with translation is an agreement over its complexity. As instantiated by Steiner, even the seemingly neutral words are part of an intricate web of sociocultural norms and conventions, deepening the difficulty of the translator's task (152).

For example, even a seemingly simple question encapsulates the very complex and paradoxical nature of translation. As argued by Hermans, the question of whether anything can be translated might itself be untranslatable in certain languages as it contains two possible, and very different meanings, the former being "is it possible to translate anything at all?," and the latter being "is it permissible to translate just anything?" (300). As further explained by Hermans, whether the target language has a grammatical structure such that the aforementioned semantic ambiguity might be reproduced is a matter of sheer luck (300). However, as Jakobson argues, the absence of the grammatical device in question in the target language does not entail the impossibility of the literal translation of the whole message of the source text or conveying the message via lexical means (115). In other words, the translator's resourcefulness becomes a prerequisite for producing a target text.

Discussions on (un)translatability primarily focus on whether translation from one language into another is achievable at all, and if yes, to what degree or in what sense. Put differently, the argument against translatability does not set forth utter untranslatability, but rather questions if an "adequate" translation might be carried out, whether this adequacy entails

word-for-word or sense-for-sense translation. In other words, does the translator obey an oath of fidelity to the letter or the spirit? Moreover, since translation is a culture-bound activity, discussions on the nature of translation habitually spread into ideological and social concerns regarding what should or should not be translated, as has historically been the case with sacred texts (Hermans 300).

However, the debates always hinge on what is understood by the term "translation." Walter Benjamin defines translation as a "mode" directly in relation to the original that contains the only important translation law – its translatability which is viewed as a fundamental characteristic of certain works, with an emphasis on "certain," as works must "yield" to the intention of translation (16). On the other hand, Derrida suggests that a translation ought to be "relevant" or, in his words, simply a "good" translation that meets the given expectations and fulfills its purpose by providing the most suitable equivalent of the source text in the target language or, phrased differently, "the most *possible*" translation ("What Is a "Relevant" Translation?" 176).

3. The Trials of the (Un)translatable: From Possible to Impossible

Translatability and untranslatability, in absolute terms, might be thought of as binary oppositions or so-called "limiting concepts." According to Hermans, full translatability, when defined as a complete reproduction of a source text's meaning, may be achieved only when it comes to artificial formal languages (301). In such a way, full translatability is excluded from the field of literary translation.

On the other hand, utter untranslatability would suggest the impossibility of communication in a broader sense or even the impossibility of the meaning-making process (Hermans 301). Steiner emphasizes that linguistics, one of the roots of translation studies, reinforces whether translation, especially between various languages, is possible or not (44).

Drawing on such claims, it might be argued that stances on (un)translatability stem from radically different opinions on the nature of language and meaning.

Within the universalist paradigm, the differences across languages are only surface-like in their structure, and though these differences can cause issues in praxis for translators, translatability itself is possible because of universally shared biological features and cultural concerns (Steiner 44). In other words, our brains are structured similarly, leading to a shared human *ratio*. Additionally, existing in the same world results in a shared essence of the human experience (Hermans 301). All cognitive experience and the accompanying categories are possible to convey in any language, as Jakobson succinctly stated (115). Moreover, according to universalists, translation encompasses moving through the surface differences of languages to unearth their shared principles.

Unlike the universalists, the monadists draw on the assumption that translation is a culture-bound activity. While the former claim that the foundations of language structure are universal, the latter insist that languages, due to their dissimilar grammatical structures, contain and put forward varying representations of reality (Steiner 44). The differences in terminology regarding the color spectrum or kinship are often quoted examples of structural asymmetries between languages. Put differently, languages are an inherent part of a given cultural surroundings which, along with the aforementioned differences in "lifeworlds" and hence, "language-worlds," entail untranslatability (Hermans 303).

However, this untranslatability is not absolute but instead evokes Derrida's notion of a "quantitative measure" of translation ("What Is a "Relevant" Translation" 178). In other words, monadists do not reinforce utter untranslatability, but rather assert that it is not possible to view translation as a linear activity completely conveying another text's meaning, but rather that texts are translatable up to a certain degree, partially, approximately. In such a way, translation becomes solely a convention of various analogies acceptable only when the languages and

cultures in question are closely related, but it becomes rather misleading when it comes to distant languages and sensibilities (Steiner 44).

Finally, has the presented discussion brought us any closer to a conclusion regarding the nature of (un)translatability, and in such a way, the nature of translation or the nature of literary translation? The most likely answer is that (un)translatability as a topic will continue to serve as a point of interest and that it could best be thought of in relative rather than absolute terms, drawing on Derrida's "quantitative measure" of translation. As discussed by Hermans, there will always be present a so-called translational residue, an "untranslatable rest," whether in the form of poetic/stylistic qualities, connotations, or subtleties in the text's meaning (304). Moreover, certain texts are considered less translatable than others, for instance, poetry, leading the discussion back to the "quantitative measure" and the relative nature of (un)translatability.

3.1. The Hermeneutic Circle: Translation as a(n) (P)art of Understanding

As has already been mentioned, to a large degree, views on the nature of language and consequently, language use, influence what is believed to be the nature of translation. According to Geoffrey Kelly, translators shape their idea of what translation is or what it should be depending on the function attributed to language (4). From this function, one can infer the nature of language. Therefore, those who translate primarily to convey objective information have a different understanding of translation compared to those who view the text as having its own existence.

As pointed out by Kelly, the assumptions regarding language use have traditionally been divided into two general categories: instrumental and hermeneutic (7). While instrumentalists define language as a communication tool conveying thought and meaning that is seen as rooted either in objective reality or as derived from a linguistic context and/or pragmatic situations,

advocates of the hermeneutic stance view language as interpretation and meaning as the force that shapes reality and adapts to changes in sociocultural tendencies (Kelly 24-5).

The instrumentalist view calls for theories of translation that prioritize the communicative nature of translation, almost entirely overlooking any other functions. For instance, Steiner claims that translation is inherent to any act of communication, positioning it as such at the heart of human interaction (26). This is the case even when it is monolingual, though translation appears most fully and repeatedly when at least two languages come together. Therefore, translation might be analyzed as a process necessary in any communication.

As soon as we listen and "connect" with our experience, we decipher, i.e., we translate. Every recipient of every message, whether it is oral, written, or symbolic, must translate for herself/himself what is heard, seen, perceived. In such a way, the act or process of translation is both, if expressed in Jakobson's words, "intralingual" or "rewording" within the same language and "interlingual" or "translation proper" between different languages (114). Likewise, translation then no longer concerns only a handful of theorists or practitioners, but all people, as everyone translates something at some point.

Other than primarily a tool for communication, language, and consequently translation has been analyzed as a means of forming and defining thought and reality. For example, the hermeneutic view emphasizes creative values and their interpretation, as well as a focus on how the target text is perceived in the target language and target culture (Kelly 26-7) One of the most notable contemporary representatives of Hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, considers translation to be a model for all forms of understanding (402). More specifically, the process of translation essentially holds the key to how humans understand their lifeworld (Gadamer 574). The phenomenon of understanding, the subject matter of Hermeneutics, is an inherent part of the human experience. If understanding as a concept is taken to include the interpretation of

texts, then literature, and literature in translation become an essential part of our experience of the world.

For Gadamer, nothing is more complex than the "written word" (163). Once deciphered and (re)interpreted, the written word speaks to us of the past in our present. As pointed out by Steiner, translation guarantees that the contemporary man would not be deprived of the wisdom of the past (155). Instead, translation as a "secret art" connects the past with the present, the at-homeness with the "other," the understood with the potentially misunderstood (Gadamer 163).

However, it is when coming to an understanding is hindered that the conditions of all possible understanding come to light. In such a way, translation enlightens us that language is, in Gadamer's words, "the medium of hermeneutic experience" (401). Since the task of the translator is to convey the meaning in a way aligned with the lifeworld of the "other" reader or speaker, every translation also necessarily serves as an interpretation or even the ultimate expression of the interpretation the translator has applied to the source text or original utterance (Gadamer 402).

Finally, when considering the nature of translation from a hermeneutic point of view, it is seen not as a re-production, but rather as a "re-creation" of the source text based on the translator's interpretation of it (Gadamer 404). In other words, the translator's understanding of the source text is the guiding thread in her/his process of translation. By defining translation as an interpretation that inherently (re)shapes and changes the foreign text, the translator is tinged with a dimension of newfound responsibility (Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader* 11).

3.2. The Alchemy of Words

As far back as the nineteenth century, scholars such as Schleiermacher and Humboldt defined translation as an artistic force, with certain translation strategies having the ability to fulfill various cultural and social roles, contributing to the development of languages,

literatures, and nations (Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader* 11). Little by little, with its peak in the twentieth century, translation became a central topic for theoretical exploration and formal experimentation. A fundamental belief in this evolution of translation studies is the idea that translation has its own "life," its own autonomy. As a result, translation is seen as a text that, though fundamentally "derivative," stands independently as a meaningful work in its own right.

In this respect, what might be wreathed as a "translator's manifesto" is Walter Benjamin's essay *The Task of the Translator* (1923). Namely, although he supports the generally accepted distinction between an original and its translation, Benjamin challenges this dichotomy, as well as the accompanying oppositions of "content/form, text/context, and speech/writing" (Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation* 36). Moreover, it was Benjamin's "pure language" that had hinted, long before Deconstructionism, at the notion that language and objective reality do not necessarily have a referential relationship (de Pedro 554). As Susan Bassnett points out, an interest in Benjamin's essay was reawakened in the 1980s and has since attained the position of one of the most influential works of postmodern translation theory (*Comparative Literature* 151).

In *The Task of the Translator*, Benjamin contemplates the relationship between an original and its translation, as well as between language and art form(s). While Gadamer questions an interesting claim that any book, not just the well-known one, is both for everyone and for no one, concluding that literature, in its broadest sense, necessarily requires the existence of a reader (160), Benjamin found that the theory of reception has little, if any, connection to the theory of translation (Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation* 44). "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener" is Benjamin's provocative opening to the essay, giving impetus to his central argument that the appreciation of art does not entail extracting some sort of message (15).

On the contrary, art and communication cannot be analyzed alongside one another. Likewise, any translation that aims solely to transfer information and/or to serve its readers is deemed by Benjamin to be a "bad" translation (15). Instead, the essence of a literary work that goes far beyond mere information is the task of the translator – "the unfathomable, the mysterious, the poetic" (Benjamin 15). The question arises of what is this "mysterious" aspect of translation, what does it refer to? Likewise, what does "the task of the translator" entail?

The topic that has served as a point of interest for many translation scholars, among them post-Romantics Benjamin, Heidegger, and Steiner, is the retrieval of a lost "primordial language" (Robinson 21), a form of *Ursprache* (Steiner 35), that could be restored through a perfect, pure, mystic translation. Namely, by posing the so-called "Babel question" related to the need for and existence of thousands of spoken languages, Steiner brings to the forefront the age-old story of the Tower of Babel with its collapse into linguistic diversity and the myth of one language (35). In such a way, the mystical Tower, most often analyzed as a metaphor for barriers of and in translation, also reflects the ever-lasting quest for an otherworldly "ideal."

Benjamin rejects the idea of an "ideal recipient" since he claims art is not concerned with its audience (15). For instance, within his theory, poetry could be thought of as existing only for its own sake. However, what Benjamin does describe as "ideal" is the so-called "pure language" or *reine Sprache* (18). Namely, for Benjamin translation is not intended solely for the readers that cannot read the source language (15).

Instead, translation is deemed as a stand-alone art form that expresses the internal relationship between languages, described as "the suprahistorical kinship of languages" which entails that despite the superficial differences, all languages convey the same meaning, in such a way allowing the possibility of translation (Benjamin 18). Consequently, it is pure language, as the totality or amalgam of all languages, that represents the translator's "working language."

Finally, what might be described as the task of the translator, at least according to Benjamin, is to unearth and unleash pure language as an artistic force, a mystic potential beyond mere words (22). It is a potential worth capturing only when translation supersedes the function of communication and enters the realm of an independent art form. For Benjamin, translatability refers not only to the ability of a certain text to yield itself to translation but also to finding an adequate translator that will embark on a journey across the *terra incognita* known as translation (16).

4. (Poe)try or Translating the Untranslatable

Within an already complex field of literary translation, the translation of poetry has always been considered a special topic. Even more so, the view that poetry is impossible to translate has often been the basis of the argument for general untranslatability. Despite such claims, the practice of poetry translation has been widely accepted for over two thousand years throughout which translated poetry has not only influenced but has also formed a part of the poetic tradition of certain target languages. For instance, David Connolly singles out Edward Fitzgerald's Persian-to-English translation of *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1859) which has popularized a relatively unknown source text by turning it into a literary sensation throughout the English-speaking world (170).

Since poetry is widely translated, poetry collections are printed, and favorable or unfavorable reviews are published, virtually on a day-to-day basis, it might seem as if the issue of its (un)translatability is redundant. However, the difficulties involved in translating poetry have caused many to believe that poetry is, as Jakobson succinctly states, "by definition (…) untranslatable" or that it might only be rendered literally (118). Even more so, such a view is encouraged by poets themselves who see their work as the product of an unrepeatable moment, inextricably bound to the language in which it was created. So, they consider it untouchable,

unsusceptible to any change, adaptation, Jakobson's "creative transposition," and finally, translation (181).

On the other hand, many have considered translating poetry not only possible and desirable but have even gone one step further. For instance, Willis Barnstone writes of "the art of translating poetry" but warns the readers against any possibility of a "perfect" translation (265-6). Namely, since no two languages possess exact equivalents, achieving perfection in translation is fundamentally impossible. One might ask: what about translating poetry then?

According to Barnstone, translating poetry is possible, though it inherently requires difference, or in Derrida's terms *différance*, as the grammatical inventory of each language is different from that of another (265). As a result, the "transfer" of a poem from the source language into the target one includes altering the sound patterns, rhythmic devices, and altogether re-creating an entirely new art form (Barnstone 265). Finally, the ultimate goal or the "holy grail" of translation might be then that the target text, the translated poem in this particular case, will be read as a poem written in the target language, i.e., in the language of its "second mother" literary tradition, despite the difference in its origin (Connolly 171).

The question of whether this is the only or the most acceptable strategy when it comes to translation or not has also historically been a subject of debate. However, what is interesting to notice is that across many discussions on its nature, the term that often characterizes translation is "otherness." As defined by Wolfreys, otherness refers to "the condition of what if not-the-self" (169). Existentially and ontologically, otherness is a complex category. In terms of literature, as Barnstone notices, it is a translation that "gives us the other" (266). Even more so, he concludes, "under another name it gives us itself" (266).

At last, when it comes to the question of the (un)translatability of poetry, both affirmative and negative responses may be given. It is not true to say, for instance, that the only "complete" equivalent of an original text is the original text itself. In practice, however, as a

rule, a significant part is always translated, while another part, smaller or larger, remains untranslated. In other words, translation in general and poetry translation in particular is haunted by the so-called "untranslatable rest" (Hermans 304).

After all, though the "question above all others" or the question of (un)translatability has historically been posed for translation as a whole, given that even in prose there are interlinguistic chasms, for poetry, it is of crucial importance because it requires an answer in the style of "to be or not to be": can the essence of a poem ever be fully conveyed in translation, or is something always irretrievably lost, as Robert Frost claims in his influential description of poetry as "that which is lost in translation" (7)? Could the key issue when it comes to the (un)translatability of poetry be the word "fully," referring to the complete or absolute transfer of all elements of the original text into the poetic tradition, culture, and language of the "other"?

Traditionally, poetry translation has been considered the most challenging form of translation. What are these unique qualities of poetry so demanding to fully capture in translation, to truly convey the poet's intent in another language?

4.1. Lost (in) Translation or Why Poetic Language Defies Translation?

One of the reasons for this seeming impossibility of the task might be found in the nature of poetic language. Firstly, poetic language traditionally diverges from commonly accepted language rules in various ways, ranging from the overt to the covert. As if the issue was not complex enough, poetic language is seen as predominantly connotational which deepens the difficulty of its translation as the source text is seen as imbued with layers upon layers of various secondary meanings and implications set up by the poet as potential pitfalls for the translator.

Also, poetic language is seen as all the more distant from everyday language than even the most complex prose as poetry embodies writing at its most "compact, condensed and heightened form" (Connolly 171). As reported by Steiner, Rilke similarly claimed that each

word in a poem carries a unique semantic meaning, hence creating its own distinct context and tone, applying this to even the most banal, grammatically simple word classes (153). In such a way, poetic language becomes a world of its own, set apart from everyday language within its own vernacular (Steiner 153).

According to Leech, poetic language differs from ordinary language in a number of specific ways (42). These deviations from the norm are accomplished by taking advantage of what Leech calls "poetic licenses", meaning that poets intentionally defy standard language rules, as well as common verse, rhythm, and rhyme structures (36). More specifically, it refers to the practice of poets to go beyond the boundaries of a language to convey and explore uncommon realms of experience. Of course, Leech emphasizes that this does not encourage an "anything goes" approach, but rather that "poetic license" refers to the poets' skills of creative, yet functional improvisation (36).

For instance, lexical deviation entails that conventional rules of affixation, compounding, and word-formation are "bent" to create neologisms, such as T. S. Eliot's verb foresuffer (Leech 42). Moreover, three types of deviation related to a poet's "working lexicon" include dialectism, deviation of register, and deviation of historical period (Leech 49).

Dialectism, as used by Leech, refers to the borrowing of features of socially- or regionally-specific dialects (49). This is typical of Edmund Spenser's use of provincial words to create a sense of rustic simplicity, as well as Rudyard Kipling's and Thomas Hardy's ballads in which dialectism is employed to portray life as experienced by a specific English-speaking social group (Leech 49). On the other hand, deviation of register includes incorporating features from various registers in the same text, as in Philip Larkin's or Ezra Pound's works (Leech 50). At last, when it comes to deviation of historical period, the poet resorts to archaisms to elevate the poem's aesthetic quality, as was done by John Milton and T. S. Eliot (Leech 52).

Apart from lexical deviation and its subtypes, another form of "bending the rules" is grammatical deviation which includes the poets' disregard for syntactic rules, either when it comes to the surface structure or the deep structure (Leech 44). Surface structure violations do not necessarily alter the way a sentence is understood as they commonly include grammatical errors. On the other hand, deep structure violations entail placing a word from one class into a position meant for a different class, as in Dylan Thomas's "a grief ago" (qtd. in Leech 45).

Moreover, a subtype of surface structure violations is phonological deviation which assumes a deliberate adjustment of the sounds or pronunciation to preserve rhyme, as when the noun wind is pronounced as if it were the verb wind, or when the word is stressed in an unconventional way which is common of Alfred Tennyson's and D. G. Rossetti's works (Leech 47).

Although a different approach to pronunciation generally implies a change in written form, there are cases of graphological deviation that do not require an equivalent in speech, such as the visual arrangement of the poem, irregular margins, a disregard for capitalization rules, and/or unnecessary spacing (Leech 47). According to Leech, the graphological deviation may add ambiguity to the original meaning, which is often the reason why poets employ such a device (48).

Moreover, poetry is more often than not considered to have somewhat of an irrational character (Leech 48). For instance, W. B. Yeats believed that all exceptional poetry contains an irrational element, that it is a form of "inspired nonsense" (qtd. in Leech 48). Similarly, Jakobson situates the world of dreams and magic together with poetry as having "a high semantic import" which deepens the difficulty of the translator's task (117). It is precisely this "irrational" part of poetry that produces semantic deviations, as in William Wordsworth's "this child is father of the man" (qtd. in Leech 48).

4.2. The Gordian Knot of Metaphor in (Poe)try

Speaking of semantic deviation, an often-mentioned issue in translating in general, and especially when it comes to poetry translation, is metaphor. Historically, there have been two opposing views on the nature of metaphor. While the classical or traditional one positions it as a deviation from everyday language, as represented by Aristotle and, more contemporary, Geoffrey Leech, the cognitive approach views metaphor as essential to language, shaping how we perceive and understand the world, as was claimed by Max Black and, with certain modifications, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (Fung 21).

Metaphor is so central to poetic language that both literary critics and poets themselves have generally viewed it as the most essential element of poetry (Leech 49). Metaphor in its broadest sense, seen as the transfer of meaning, guides the reader's mind from a space of absurdity to a place of understanding. In such a way, metaphor conditions the transcendence of ordinary communication that is often found to be a defining feature of poetic language (Leech 49).

On the other hand, by emphasizing its non-deviant character, as well as its cognitive significance, Lakoff and Johnson brought about a claim for the pervasiveness of metaphor in everyday thought and action, i.e., in everyday language and life (*Metaphors We Live By* 3). In other words, the human *ratio*, by means of which we think and act, is inherently metaphorical. However, more important for the current discussion is their idea of poetic metaphor.

Namely, Lakoff and Turner used the concept of everyday metaphor to analyze the role of poetic metaphor as its extension, and in doing so, claimed, contrary to popular belief, that poetic language is not "above" or more special than everyday language (*More than Cool Reason* 53). Instead, great poets, whatever that title may entail, employ the same language "tools" as the common layman, but what sets them apart is that the former possess the talent and skill to

wield those tools with an exceptional artistic force (Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason* 11).

However, what must be taken into account when discussing poetic metaphors is the distinction between conceptual metaphors and their linguistic expressions. Namely, while the latter may be unique, the former are widely shared and common. In other words, what Lakoff and Turner describe as "basic metaphors" refers to a shared cognitive framework within a given culture (*More than Cool Reason* 26). These metaphors are conventional and unconscious, but they enable a variety of metaphorical expressions that might come to fruition in the form of a poem.

For instance, in her poem "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" (1890), Emily Dickinson portrays death as a coachman. According to Lakoff and Turner, the poet employs an extension of our basic metaphor of "death as departure," which itself stems from the broader metaphor of "life is a journey" (*More than Cool Reason* 2-3). Moreover, by using another basic metaphor of "states are locations," death is viewed as a final state, i.e., as a final location. At last, the combination of all the described metaphors puts forward an interpretation of Dickinson's carriage as being an act of dying, and the coachman as being a euphemism for death.

The aforementioned metaphors were already part of Western culture, present in everyday thinking, as well as the poetic tradition (Fung 37). Lakoff and Turner single out the journey across the river Styx in Greek mythology, the ascending to heaven or descending to hell in Christianity, as well as Alfred Lord Tennyson's and John Keats' references to death as a departure point as examples (*More Than Cool Reason* 4). However, most important for this discussion is the conclusion that it is the poet, in this particular case, Dickinson, that creatively expands and combines basic conceptual metaphors in innovative ways, which in turn contributes to the overall issue of the (un)translatability of poetry.

As already mentioned, though poets might express the same, limited number of basic conceptual metaphors in novel ways, they still employ the linguistic tools available to everyone. Otherwise, the aspect of understanding would not be present, and it is understanding that is the form of all interpretation, as Gadamer believed (402). Recalling his claim that translation is a model for all forms of understanding that also necessarily serves as an interpretation, it is interesting to position metaphor as a mode of "figurative interpretation" (Leech 147).

After all, the core of metaphor lies in interpreting and experiencing one thing through the perspective of another (Fung 43). However, this understanding being subjective as any is, the task of the translator is further complicated, especially if culture, and not the word itself, is taken as the unit of translation, and the interplay between cultural differences as the basis of the similarities and differences between basic conceptual metaphors.

At last, by taking everything into consideration, translating metaphors might be seen as one of the most challenging issues for translators, as the difficulty lies not only in identifying metaphors but also in distinguishing between metaphorical and non-metaphorical language use. What complicates the matter even further is the idea that metaphoricity does not function in absolute terms, similar to (un)translatability. More specifically, concepts as a whole are not necessarily all metaphorical or all non-metaphorical (Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason* 58). Once again, another inherent paradox within language, and hence translation rears its head.

4.3. Form, Meaning, and the Paradox of (Poe)try

Another issue often taken as the argument for the (un)translatability of poetry is the relationship between form and meaning. Jakobson claimed that everything, except poetry, can be translated because the poem is truly defined by its form, i.e., its "phonetic quality" in the source language (Lodge 18). In a similar manner, both Connolly (171) and Steiner (153) believe

that form and meaning are inseparably intertwined when it comes to poetry. This is not to say that in prose form and meaning are separable and independent, but rather that poetry is an extreme case of such a connection due to, for instance, weakened syntactic categories or a complete lack of any that results in each word having its own distinct meaning and being an indispensable element of the poem, as Rilke claimed (Steiner 153).

With special regard to poetry translation, it is interesting to point out that universalists analyze language as consisting of two layers: (1) a surface structure representing ideas and meaning created at the level of (2) the deep structure, with this two-layered concept of language putting forward the already mentioned distinction between form and meaning (Hermans 302). As has already been already indicated, while universalists claim that the form differs from language to language and is best described as visible and somewhat tangible, the meaning is invisible and can only be deduced from the form containing it (Hermans 302). Put differently, though languages pack meaning each in their own way, all languages are able to transmit all plausible meanings.

Such a relationship between form and meaning is also known as the conduit metaphor of language which guarantees translatability as it implies that meaning can be kept intact and transmitted along the conduit by simply substituting one medium for another (Reddy 170). Within this context, words have their "insides" and "outsides," while the listener, the reader, or the translator, has a task of extraction. In other words, she/he has to locate the meaning on the "inside" and transfer it onto the "outside," i.e., onto the form (Reddy 168). This is especially relevant for poetry as the creation of a poem involves the expression of the inner or emotional language of a poet through the external world, as well as vice-versa (Gallagher 45).

However, Lakoff and Johnson warn that although it is generally accepted, the conduit metaphor is not necessarily universal due to obvious differences between languages (*Metaphors We Live By* 127). Moreover, the conduit metaphor entails that meaning has a stable, invariable,

and somewhat uniform nature. On the contrary, within Deconstructionism, meaning is seen as very much subject to (re)interpretation which might be argued to lie at the heart of poetry translation. Likewise, the issue with the conduit metaphor is that translation, especially literary translation, is a far more complex activity than pure extraction and then transmission of meaning. Rather, it may be described as an act of reading, re-reading things into, and (re)writing the source text.

Naturally, (re)writing the source text entails yet another difficulty for the translator. Beyond the challenges of conveying not only the poetic language, the meaning, and the form but also the sound patterns of the original text, the translator of poetry is reckoned to be a poet who can (re)create a text that can stand as a poem in the target language without glosses, commentary or footnotes (Connolly 171). In other words, the translated text is expected to possess an intrinsic poetic value that testifies to the success of the translation, as well as that of the translator-poet. In essence, "what an English-only reader wants is a good poem in English," though such a claim could suit any given target language (Gallagher 46).

At last, what do the described challenges in translating poetry, such as the complexity of poetic language, the ever-elusive (im)possibility of accurately conveying metaphors across languages, and the philosophical conundrum of the form-meaning dichotomy, tell us about the (un)translatability of poetry? These considerable challenges, among others, have caused many, including the novelist and poet Vladimir Nabokov, to assert that poetry can only be translated literally (Connolly 171). Similarly, Robert Browning, a poet himself, claimed that translation of poetry could be nothing more than a literal rendition of the poem's meaning (qtd. in Connolly 171), while Roman Jakobson believed that only "creative transposition" is possible when it comes to poetry (181).

Bearing all this in mind, could it be that poetry, in its essence, contains a possibly unresolvable paradox? In other words, is all a translator of poetry could achieve merely a "try"

to capture the poet's intent? After all, if poetry is claimed to be untranslatable, what motivates translators to continue the challenging task of translating it, and how do they reconcile the paradox?

4.4. The Translator's Dilemma: Strategies for Translating Poetry – Friend or Foe?

The claim that poetry cannot be "fully" translated, or even translated at all but rather rendered literally, acknowledges the (im)possibility of capturing every nuance of the original text. In other words, it agrees with the existence of the "untranslatable rest" (Hermans 304). However, the recognition of the (im)possibility of the task has led scholars to a search for translation strategies aimed at "keeping" as much of the original poem as possible within the constraints of the target language, culture, and poetic tradition, given that the translator is well acquainted with the aforementioned triad.

As reported by Connolly, there are generally two main approaches to addressing the challenges of poetry translation: the pragmatic and the theoretical (171). As might be expected, the former is preferred by most working translators, while the latter, dealing with theoretical models of the underlying processes of translation, is developed by linguists. An advocate of the pragmatic approach is the American poet and translator William Stanley Merwin who claimed that no one really knows how to translate, including him (139). In fact, he went so far as to say that translation is an impossible task whose success could never be guaranteed by any method, and that it is rather a process of discovery for each particular poem (Merwin 139).

On the other hand, linguists have attempted to establish a formal foundation for poetry translation – an activity that has historically been viewed as subjective and, according to many, undoubtedly creative. For instance, Eugene Nida's diagram of the process of decoding and re-encoding a message from the source to the target language, with the transfer mechanism as the central process, has served as the basis for many models of poetry translation (164).

Another, perhaps more contemporary, approach often used by both linguists and translators is a comparative one. According to Connolly, this approach entails comparing various translations of a poem to analyze the translation strategies used (173). For example, André Lefevere singles out translations of Catullus' famous "Poem 64" and enumerates seven strategies of poetry translation employed in these target texts: (1) phonemic translation aimed at reproducing source language sound in the target language, (2) literal translation or word-for-word translation, (3) metrical translation focused on reproducing the original text's meter, (4) poetry into prose translation, (5) rhymed translation combining a focus on both meter and rhyme, (6) blank verse translation entailing regular metrical but unrhymed verses, and (7) interpretation which includes so-called "versions" of the source text that retain the meaning, but not the form of the source text, and so-called "imitations" that encompass the translator's own poem which may or may not share the title and initial vision of the source text (qtd. in Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 87).

However, as emphasized by Connolly, in the practice of translation, it is uncommon to come across any of these strategies employed exclusively (173). Even more so, by concluding that their shortcomings are a result of an overemphasis of certain elements to the detriment of the entire poem, Lefevere characterizes such translations as "unbalanced" (qtd. in Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 87). In other words, by adhering too strictly to methodological criteria of any kind, the poem as an organic whole is neglected, and the target text is necessarily not its worthy re-creation.

Taking all into account, what are translators of poetry to do since methodological yardsticks are often not of use, particularly if re-creating an independent art form via the target text is the aim? And what about the previously analyzed triad of poetic language, poetic metaphor, and the relationship between form and meaning, invariably contributing to what Ortega y Gasset calls "the misery of translation" (49)?

An alternative approach to addressing the challenges of translating poetry involves moving away from strict fidelity to the original text toward Lefevere's seventh strategy – that of interpretation, resulting in more or less adequate imitations or versions. Although certain scholars, such as Hamburger, refer to such deviations from the source text as "an admission of defeat," many others agree that there is no other way to re-create a stand-alone poem in another language (51).

If one is to recall the hermeneutic view of translation as possessing an intrinsic creative force, then the somewhat Hegelian dialectic of understanding-interpretation-creation comes to light as the "right" way of approaching the process of translating poetry. Although it is highly disputable whether the essence of a poem could ever be fully conveyed in translation or not, the creative freedom behind the described strategy allows the translator to have at least a good enough "try" at translating poetry, at "translating the poet."

5. Translating the Poet or the (Re)birth of the Author

According to Willis Barnstone, a translation might be viewed as a "friendship between poets" (266). Such a claim is particularly interesting if one approaches the complex relationship between poet-translator and translator-poet from the perspective of authorship, i.e., if one poses the question of whether or not a translator of poetry is her/himself necessarily a poet. Namely, a strong link between writing "original" poetry and translating it has always been a point at issue. Even more so, many renowned poets, as well as prose writers, have also been known to take on the role of translators, diving into the theoretical conundrums of translation as well. One of the most famous examples is the Czech émigré writer Milan Kundera notorious for his authorial control and distrust of translators.

Despite such cases of a lack of faith in their abilities and the belief that poetry translators are "secondary" or "unsuccessful" poets who rely on the work of others to gain recognition,

there is nonetheless widespread recognition that these translators possess a great deal of talent and skill. After all, if creating an original poem requires an artistic talent, then translating, i.e., re-creating it in another language necessitates at least an equal literary skillset (Connolly 175). Even more so, there are various roles that a translator takes on during the process of translation including being a reader, interpreter, literary critic, and ultimately, poet. It could be that these additional responsibilities may explain why some poet-translators, despite being accomplished poets, are not always equally accomplished translators.

As Connolly points out, the main reason for this could be that they enforce their distinctive poetic style on the target text insomuch that the final "product" seems as if it was their own writing, rather than a translation of someone else's original (175). Within the broadly taken American tradition, an example Connolly gives is that of Ezra Pound's "translations," with the quotation marks emphasizing the previously stated claim that Pound's target texts are more "original" texts than translations *per se* (175). Naturally enough, this flow of debate places the focus on the issue of "translating the poet" which, for the most part, has to do with translating an author's poetic style.

Namely, according to Jean Boase-Beier, the notion that poetry possesses unique qualities that could replicate the source text's poetic effect, if successfully captured in translation (195), is a common view implied in the analyses of poetry translation as a process of conveying, in Alexander Pope's terms, the "spirit" of the original poem (qtd. in Lefevere, *Translation / History / Culture* 64). However, one approach to re-inventing the abstract notion of capturing a poem's essence is by equating it with an author's poetic style. After all, it is the style that could be viewed as an outcome of deliberate choices made by the poet. In other words, it is "an embodiment of poetic voice" (Boase-Beier 195).

Finally, a question that naturally arises from this discussion is whether it is (im)possible for a translator to preserve an author's poetic style while "adapting" the poem to fit the norms

of the target language and target culture. What is more, to what extent does a translator's personal style and literary preferences influence the representation of another's poetic style? As if the issue was not complex enough, another question that might be posed is whether a translator's personal opinion of an author could be a factor not only in deciding who she/he will translate but also which translation strategies and models will be employed in the process.[1]

After all, as reported by Connolly, translators often emphasize that a sense of closeness with a poet and an admiration for her/his work is an element largely absent from theories of poetry translation (175). Could it be then that a deep emotional connection is what drives translators of poetry to tackle "the art of the (im)possible?" And if so, is that necessarily a positive thing?

5.1. Choose an Author as You Choose a Friend: (Not so) Simpatico?

An idea often discussed in relation to a translator's role in capturing and then preserving the poetic style and voice of an original author is that of *simpatico* (Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 273). *Simpatico* entails that an author and a translator exist in the same historical "moment in time" and, as a result, share a similar cultural understanding. With regard to translation, this is believed to be an ideal situation as it supposedly increases the accuracy of the target text in conveying the essence of the original. In other words, a translator is more effective, i.e., a "better" translator, when there is a mutual resonance or *simpatico* between her/him and an author (Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 273).

However, *simpatico* contains somewhat of a trap for translators. Namely, according to the "simpatico" within *simpatico*, as Venuti emphasizes, the translator should find the author

[1] See Valentino, Russell Scott. "Translating the Poet." *[sic] – a Journal of Literature, Culture and Literary Translation*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2011, https://www.sic-journal.org/Article/Index/138 for an interesting discussion on the issue of the possible influence of a translator's personal opinion of a poet on the selection and translation of her/his text(s).

not only likable or agreeable but there also ought to be a deep connection or "shared" identity between the two (*The Translator's Invisibility* 273). In such a way, not only does *simpatico* require that an author and a translator are "close" in generation or sensibility, but they are now "of the same mind" (Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 274).

Regarding the translation process itself, it is mistakenly seen as a mimic of the process of original writing (Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 274). More specifically, by empathetically participating in the author's emotions and thoughts, the target text is perceived as a reflection of the author's vision – nothing more, nothing less. As concluded by Venuti, the voice "heard" when reading a target text re-created on the basis of *simpatico* is always identified, s*ine qua non*, as the author's voice, never as the translator's or even as a blend of both (*The Translator's Invisibility* 274).

As Venuti argues, the *simpatico*-oriented ideas of translation have been the dominant paradigm in English-language translation from the seventeenth century at least, stemming from the Earl of Roscommon's *Essay on Translated Verse* (1684) and extending to T. S. Eliot's reflections on the relationship between a poet and a translator (Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 274-5). This longevity in the existence of *simpatico* testifies to the attempts of de-constructing the notion of the translator's authorship and, in turn, supports the Romantic notion of originality (Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 281). By identifying with the author's personality, the translator becomes utterly invisible. Is (in)visibility necessarily a positive outcome of *simpatico* or is it just the opposite? Is the "friendship model" of translation more of a foe, than a friend?

6. The World within the Poem: Translating Vida Sever's *A Dry Place*

Vida Sever is a young Croatian contemporary poet born in Varaždin in 2001. Her work has been published in edited collections *Trinaesti*, *P(o)ezitiva*, *Goranovo proljeće*, as well as in

Croatian literary journals *Tema*, *Poezija*, *Kolo*, and on various literary websites. In the full sense of the word, Sever appeared on the Croatian literary scene in 2021 when she won the prestigious *Goran for Young Poets* award for her debut collection of 39 poems titled *A Dry Place*, or in Croatian *Suho mjesto*.

Despite the collection's title, the poet deals with exactly the opposite of dry places – the sea, water, river, puddle, rain, and it could be added, tears. Of course, this is not a coincidence, but rather a strategy the poet employs, and which might be interpreted as a leitmotif of the entire collection. Although the poems are centered around several topics that initially seem incompatible, a common denominator (re)surfaces after several readings – most of the poems are self-reflexive, touch on various kinds of relationships, issues of everyday life and growing up, as well as growing older. This can be seen in the translated poems which have been chosen precisely because they are imbued with the main motifs and themes of the collection, e.g. the dry-wet opposition, the recurring motifs of water, and the issue of family relations.

Although her poetry initially seems "simple" and straightforward as the poetic language used is not complex, an important feature of Sever's poetic style is that everything is well thought-through and carefully designed. What is more, the poet combines oppositions wherever and whenever she can. For instance, her poetry is characterized by a combination of abstract metaphors and concrete sensory images. Moreover, though the poems seem as if they were hermetically sealed, they still possess a certain level of openness to the readers, allowing them to enter the poem's and the poet's world.

Another example is the already mentioned dry-wet opposition, with the dryness possibly interpreted as stability and the wetness as variability. The title poem, "a dry place" or "suho mjesto," is an excellent case study of Sever's poetic style. In addition to alternating places and voices, the movement present in the poem almost calls for that one sentence that might cure the unease of the journey. Of course, that does not and could not happen. And that is why we, as

the readers, are left to our own devices to picture this fragment, by the sea, by the road, waiting for something.

As in the other poems, these metaphors are combined with sensory images, those being tobacco smoke, the smell and taste of mint. The mother-daughter relationship leaves the impression of intimacy and falling apart, little by little, but without the unnecessary *pathos*. These emotions are presented to us in simple language, along with the dry-wet opposition as the source of the lyrical subject's (in)stability. While the lyrical subject is facing this internal change, the dry, stable place is constantly slipping away.

The poet's excessive use of metaphors and poetic imagery, along with the thematic focus on issues of family, friendship, love, childhood, dream visions, and their interpretations are arranged in five cycles, three of which were chosen to be translated for this thesis: "semi-permeability" ("polupropusnost"), "a vector in reverse" ("jedan vektor unatrag"), and "submerged spacetime" ("potopljeno prostorvrijeme").

7. *A Dry Place* – Translation of Select Chapters

7.1. trying it all by the river

a few years ago
lighting a cigarette and lying down

last week
taking a jar and catching cryptids
slipping through the fingers
purple from alcohol and the cold
and sliding into the water
then calmly

listening to the cyclists and their noise

above us

not yet joined

with the river in the viewpoint

today

dipping my toes

and finding similarities

with the monstrous

and dry childhood

when I could spit out

the water on the sidewalk

and imagine ferns a hundred meters tall

next to a stream of saliva on the asphalt

7.2. SEMI-PERMEABILITY

7.2.1. memoirs in a pool

on a floating table

don't guess

by the bumps on the cards

and the fast lakes on the cardboard

I'm five and know nothing

of associations

still, within me the sun is red

and happiness is all that floats

from the cards I can't grasp

the pairs the water foretells

bottom – warm

summer – over

I must sink at least three

or I'll cry for the privileged dryness of the cards

willingly

grandma's card sunk to the bottom

a fizzy tablet for tightening the skin

we get wrinkles on our faces
from an innocent child's tarot
(beneath the cardboard's surface
the first sadness craves its breath)

our soles touching the warm bottom
and the sodden card.
the summer is over.

7.2.2. thick

the family hair
spills over lunch
after we've become
weak and thin

my hair ends up in the plate
and pretends to be drowning
I silence it
with shyness behind my ear

the teeth are the answer
to the childish carelessness
when I splash water on the hair
bound around my waist
barely pulling my hands out
I offer them the remaining drops

with a firm poke
and the hair between their fingers
they crush the streets on the map
joking I'll surely get lost in the city
as they clutch the hair

I laugh and unravel myself

from the kitchen

through the hall

and down the staircase

never dye your hair

I won’t.

7.2.3. the self

I was the tallest woman on trams

that are now time capsules

buried in my mother's garden

says

the words that straighten up the body

grown out of a child's blackness

after her mom died

she pulled out all the furniture

cut down the pine in the backyard

and buried all the familiar shapes

and postwar photos

in an apartment with fine edges

high up and far away

from her first words

the carved bedpost

above her head

fits a whole family at odds

each member in their own slit

going stone-gray

I can't take the tram anymore,

but still no one is taller than me

says touching the relief

of the family tree

and pressing the fallen leaves

into my fist

7.2.4. transliteration

our fingernails imprint apostrophes

into the plastic tablecloth

everyone says that it’s not a word

yet something more

stuck to the back side

but the family can’t read

so it connects us with thick tendrils

if we touch each other

for a moment we know

how to separate the words correctly

7.2.5. semi-permeability

the familial tremor was passed down
silently to me

a love silenced too early
was bound and bent, without tears, like shoelaces
and I was released without a word
without an album or chronology
to paint
unfamiliar faces in a familiar kitchen
and the Slavic bitterness
under the fingernails

a tightly entangled raster
of black-and-white anecdotes
on ribs and dry death over breakfast
got stuck to the scalp
becoming an easy riddle
do we feel them today
even though we haven't looked
at each other for days

or is it the weather

7.2.6. yellow squares

tears are my exclusive response

to the opposition between full and empty

your apartment spills over

the edges of the attic

you can't imagine

how many of us there are

I can, exactly as many as

the selves my mother loses

every week

you can't imagine how

little of her

is left

after the whole calendar

that came with some magazine

is crossed off with a dry pen

we're a dinner and a half

standing up so we don't get used to

this being forever

sometimes I forget it is

so I ask

should I buy something plus one

and has he told you that he

hasn't

I’m not coming over tonight

of course, you can sleep

in any yellow square

in town

I don’t know where I usually sleep,

but the sum total of the clamor on the phone

is less important than knowing

whose feet are shuffling to the bathroom

in the middle of the night

the language has lost its quantifiers

but not its demonstrative nature

I think

I’ll choose one

yellow square from across the road

and in it dream of

that extra pair

of feet

7.3. A VECTOR IN REVERSE

7.3.1. we're laughing, the sea at our backs

I'm sorry
I really didn't know
it was going to be the last summer we were a whole
I went home earlier
the bus coming from an island faraway
what I needed was a strong vector
in reverse

the teenage girl within me
afraid of the lack of continent
and being separated from me here to me there
a cold apartment from the seventies
and pieces
of what doesn't work well
on a nice summer vacation

we slept in the same room
with no need to
split into thirds,
and the non-family hadn't made me
into a family person yet

I could float on my back

alone around eight

gargle the dirty water from the ferry

and imagine

I was crossing the tall Pelješac

with one sad step

7.3.2. a dry place

each bottle in the car

tastes of mint and tobacco

from rest stops on the way to the sea

I'm my mother's mother

I say

change lanes

I say

we're just entering the clouds

our laundry must be melting

on the balcony

a hundred or so rides away

at least nothing is on fire

if love made you leave

the stove on

ankle-deep in the sea already

I know you're driving blind

your eyes forgotten in the contact lens case

your pupils facing the bottom

so you can't see

that the other drivers on the road are

wrapped into their own Julys

and embarrassed

by the promise of close happiness

that lies ahead

elusive

like a moon that tediously orbits

I'm the mother so I choose the music

that doesn't hit us

below the belt

so we don't take the opportunity

and run off the road

just some sadness instead

a few drops on the collar

and a firm *finally* under the tongue

I'm the mother and I don't ask

why you are crying

for almost the third of the trip

where we are going

and am I the right passenger

cynical of clean cars

and oversized houses

parked

where the line of sight ends

you’re the mother only

when the sea extracts

our breathing reflex

from freshwater bottles

and the glove box

spilled out of triangles on the horizon

so you take one last breath

and with the childlike

look, the sea,

you pull into a rest stop in a trance

where there might still be

a dry place

to stretch your legs

have a smoke

and take a sip

7.3.3. canon

my handwriting

frozen back in the day I stopped growing

I spread across

the kitchen checklist:

replant fingers in a jar

close the carnivorous' eyes

cover you with a blanket

my tissue is left behind

in an artificial accident

under your green fists

(a calm counterfeit

of much better times)

whatever I read

you've drained a few times

through fabric

and soil

and still, you remind me

to breathe

mom, hide me in a jar of rice

to draw out the puddles

and little fish

7.3.4. genetic aphasia

you speak with your hands,
while I squint
spreading out on the table like a tarot
all I know the meaning of
so I call you
the much hated bumps under the fingertips
with your crude gestures
and strange dialect

pulsars
speak out from your hands
when they expand and contract
like catching
the blind fireflies from my stomach
when I can no longer wail
into my latte
and a glass and a half of water
in which your movements soften

you say
I've raised a computer
you say
you'll throw up the zeros and the ones

In Morse code

I tap the tenderness bit by bit

into your living fist.

7.3.5. ***

mom warms her soul with a heater

one with the floor and the blanket

embracing an unknown whole

I don’t know how she does it

the floor is warm

beneath her little sadness

I’m keeping myself warm

until she gets home from work

7.4. SUBMERGED SPACETIME

7.4.1. maksimirska road under water

I

it’s not a dream
in which you can barely open your eyes
and your hands are bound
with tendrils from the neighbour’s yard
or with your mom’s voice
in an empty tram to sopot
or
you can roll to your side
maksimirska is yellow with pollen
and we’re twice better
with each passing car
the lane is a lake
for soaking all that is rooted
within us
we’re floating like crumpled newspapers
without the Cold War headlines
and if you turn to your back
you won’t be paralyzed
no more split-second panic
and switching on the light
as the solstice bathes us in sunshine

on the terrace where we sunbathe

our webbed souls

no one’s in the room but you

stay on your surface

wake up dry

7.4.2. a summer talisman

our friendship bracelet
burst open
upon the very dream of swimming
and the touch of water

the air is like we're on our way to the sea,
but it's only late May
and all we can wish for
is curled up in a suitcase

we've been friends
for a few months now embracing
in your strange parents' apartment.
don't worry,
my parents also practiced the occult
before going to the sea
to protect me from drowning,
I say and melt into the embrace

all is well
as long as we're frozen summer friends
and your mom
reads a journey from our palms

so we can fall asleep faster

still, I'm not here to sleep
in this mess
next to which we can dream only of the water
soaking our mattress
and your genetics
embroidered in five of your father's scars
like a constellation on one's forearm

we are them,
I hear in my dream
as I sleepwalk to the door,
while us and them are already waiting by the car
with a closed trunk,
superstititous hands on their hips,
and a smile
from tomorrow's newspapers
that have already been read

7.4.3. II

my friends are fine today as we're
crossing the flooded maksimirska
we have new slits on our bodies
that we're flawlessly casting in concrete
what's come to be within me
is strong and
all the reeds and the russets
have swam out willingly
from the pant legs into the water
like tadpoles from a jar
the directions soddened in the pockets but
my friends know where I live
and they watch me jump
from the terrace in the water up to my neck
careful not to hit
the summer at the bottom
my friends know
this is year zero
and they don't expect being ceaseless
and smooth-faced
you survive if swimming down maksimirska
you die if you walk
my nails are finally short enough

to caress all their tenderness

as I'm no longer the cat

I haven't caught in weeks

though it licks my windows

and leaves behind parts of its dead lives

we're not pretty

with red eyes

and eyebrows slicked with the water

we're French kissing on the porch of the stilt house

we can

all the childhood diseases are behind us

and we're moving into the water

by reverse evolution

so there's no yard soil in our hair

when we lie down

purer than distillates

embraced by rough blankets

and pretending time is older

our backs are exposed

for the shivers

a leg swung over

as we feel the yellow and

won't be leaving for a while

in fact not at all

7.4.4. spacetime

lady, clean up the apartment
I know it'll be painful
for your dust-distorted consciousness
to remove Rijeka's salt from hair
and quilt,
the candy from its wrapping
the metalanguage from greetings
your codes scattered all over the kitchen
and I'm not able to talk
to you
I really love the river
where you're its island,
a statue of submissive freedom
still, take the oriental headscarves
out of your sleeves in my hands
call mom
say
don't ring the bell, I'll hear you up the stairs
and lose your hearing
please,
a liter of tea won't make a text sprout,
a poem about time
hate me and clean up the apartment

the armchairs are already sitting on you

after the tenth toke

you can jerk off to Ingmar Bergman on the wall

and still, he won't know it's you because

you go by many names

make the bed

where a life was shared

for four days

I loved you

even when you weren't relative

and transparent in motion

lady,

clean up the apartment

the river is making its way through gaps

opening used chests

and chakras

lady,

you're beautiful and monochrome

don't spill your hallucinations before me

don't keep notes

on the cons and pros

of being stuck in a mess

that keeps me from seeing

our names

and if we've ever left

7.4.5. Jung's dreamer

life has long since become a puddle,
standing water lulled into coziness
and illness

my friends left yesterday
their auras stuck in the corners
of their lips and eyes
with plummets instead of shoelaces
and my cards on the forehead
(water reaches only the chin,
it's considerate of reverse deaths)

they can read them at home

ignorance makes the trick
when you're taking
number seven – a boat to sopot

the cards can smell the dryness
and in stilt houses
speak out on their own

7.4.6. III

with my eyes closed I can

cross the flooded driveway, stairs

heal then toes

so the metal doesn’t wake up

the owner’s wet dogs

raise the leg some more

on the thirteenth

open the terrace-lobby door

without locking

because what should be here

is kept from us

I can go around the table

that I believe will

one day be of use

turn on the light

so as not to lose the blind rhythm

look around routinely

see only afterimages

feel the thinnest key

with a sharp tip

probably miss the doorhandle

and curse

press it all the way and pull it in a bit

and then push

I can

step inside

sit overwhelmed

on the carpet

and realise it’s time to move house

8. Conclusion

As an inherently paradoxical activity, translation embodies various conflicting yet complementary notions, such as faithful vs. free translation, visibility vs. invisibility, equivalence vs. difference, objective point of view vs. subjective work of art, foreign vs. domestic, and finally, translatability vs. untranslatability. As it has been presented throughout this thesis, various theories on the matter have evolved over centuries, with the divide between linguistic and cultural (un)translatability perhaps being more relevant than ever.

However, the general agreement among scholars now is that absolute untranslatability, linguistic or cultural, is nonexistent, as de Pedro points out (556). On the other hand, it is also widely accepted that an ideal translation, if defined as one that preserves all the elements of the source text, is simply impossible, particularly with literary texts. Taking all into account, a realistic approach to translation acknowledges that not all can be replicated in the target text. Rather, it requires somewhat of "a risk assessment" which losses the target text, as well as its translator, can accept.

Moreover, the presented discussion has shown that (un)translatability is then best understood as relative, not absolute, with a "translational residue" always remaining, especially in literary texts like poetry, which are considered more difficult to translate. Likewise, if translation is not viewed as merely a transfer of meaning from one language to another, but instead analyzed within approaches such as Deconstructionism and Hermeneutics, it becomes re-defined as a dynamic process shaping and influencing the source text. As a result, it re-frames the notions of authorship and originality. Little by little, the task of the translator becomes, in Benjamin's terms, capturing the poetic, mysterious essence of the work.

As it has been mentioned, the question of whether that is (im)possible or not has been extensively problematized throughout the history of translation studies. While some have claimed that translating poetry is achievable through the process of re-creating a new art form

in the target language, along with acknowledging inherent differences between languages, others have argued that poetry is impossible to fully translate. This thesis steered the discussion in the direction of poetic language, poetic metaphor, and the relationship between form and meaning as the fundamental points of contention. A theoretical deconstruction of these challenges, traditionally associated with translating poetry, revealed that although poetry perhaps inherently contains an unresolved paradox, it is the task of the translator to broaden the limits of translation. In doing so, the translator navigates the paradox of (un)translatability between the extreme of excessive fidelity on the one hand and that of a violent departure from the original on the other.

A topic especially addressed within possible approaches to translating poetry relevant for this thesis was that of *simpatico*, especially when considering the fact that the translated poet, Vida Sever, and myself as the translator are close in generational and cultural terms and hence, susceptible to the workings of *simpatico*. Likewise, an interesting point of discussion is that I have had the privilege many translators often do not, and that is one of communicating with the poet regarding certain parts of the source text that represented any kind of special challenge whilst translating.

At last, what I have learned throughout the process of translating a select of *A Dry Place* is that the process of translating is very much similar to the process of writing. Of course, not as a caricature or mimic as *simpatico* might imply, but rather that it entails reading, re-reading, and re-writing the text, all the while trying not to make the target text sound more "poetic" nor make it simpler in comparison to the original. It is precisely this voyage through the turbulences of contradictions found both in the translation of poetry in general, as well as in Sever's poetry in particular, that has led me toward finding a balance between the extremes.

Finally, posing the seemingly simple question of what translation is might at first seem redundant following such a detailed discussion. But if one were to quote Barnstone's colorful

claim that “it is good to drink Turkish coffee in the pampas of the American Midwest,” in such a way defining translation as exile, the discussion might be concluded by saying that the true dissident is always the translator, residing between two cultures, two languages, and two literary worlds. Exile as the basis of the translator’s experience is the translator’s *habitus*, positioning her/him as, in Pushkin’s words, “the courier of the human spirit” (Steiner 157).

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10. THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF TRANSLATING POETRY – VIDA SEVER'S *A DRY PLACE*: SUMMARY AND KEY WORDS

Within an already complex field of literary translation, the issue of the (im)possibility of translating poetry has always been considered a special topic within a more general discussion on (un)translatability. While combining insights from areas of study such as philosophy of language, linguistics, and translation studies, the primary objective of this thesis was to deepen the understanding of (un)translatability by analyzing challenges that arise in literary translation, with a particular focus on translating poetry. Another objective was to show that the acceptance of difficulties that lie in translating poetry is the first step toward the search for translation strategies that will enable the translator to convey the author's poetic language and style, as well as the form, meaning, and metaphors found in the source text. Finally, the topics of translator as/and author and invisibility of/in translation were analyzed with regard to *simpatico*, all the while using the debut collection of poems *A Dry Place* (*Suho mjesto*, 2021) by a young Croatian contemporary poet Vida Sever as a case study reflecting the complexity that lies in translating poetry.

Key words: translatability, untranslatability, poetry, simpatico, literary translation, translation studies

11. (NE)MOGUĆNOST PREVOĐENJA POEZIJE – *SUHO MJESTO* VIDE SEVER: SAŽETAK I KLJUČNE RIJEČI

Unutar već složenog područja književnog prevođenja, pitanje (ne)mogućnosti prevođenja poezije oduvijek se smatralo posebnom temom u okviru općenitije rasprave o (ne)prevodivosti. Služeći se spoznajama iz područja poput filozofije jezika, lingvistike i teorije prevođenja, glavni cilj ovoga rada bio je produbiti razumijevanje (ne)prevodivosti analizom izazova u književnom prevođenju, posebice u prevođenju poezije. Cilj je bio i pokazati kako je prihvaćanje poteškoća koje leže u prevođenju poezije prvi korak prema potrazi za prevoditeljskim strategijama koje će prevoditelju omogućiti da prenese autorov pjesnički jezik i stil, kao i formu, značenje i metafore prisutne u izvorniku. Naposljetku, teme prevoditelj kao autor/prevoditelj i autor te nevidljivost prijevoda/nevidljivost u prijevodu proučavane su s obzirom na *simpatico*, pritom se služeći debitantskom zbirkom pjesama *Suho mjesto* (2021.) suvremene mlade hrvatske pjesnikinje Vide Sever kao studijom slučaja koja odražava složenost u prevođenju poezije.

Ključne riječi: prevodivost, neprevodivost, poezija, simpatico, književno prevođenje, teorija prevođenja