



**Erica Johnson Debeljak**

## Gained in translation

With the current state of book sales in the US, it is virtually impossible for translated works to make it to the bestseller lists. And, even if translations do end up gaining popularity, the translators themselves see little of the profits. Erica Johnson Debeljak looks at various views of translation and of the translator, and finds the outcome — a path leading people from different places who speak different languages toward the original work — to be the true benefit of translation.

In the early morning hours of an April day in 1992, I had a rendezvous with my long-distance lover, Ales, at the Piazza Navona in Rome. I had traveled on a transatlantic flight from New York's JFK Airport, and he had traveled by train from Slovenia, Italy's newly-minted neighbor to the northeast. Sitting on a bench beneath Bernini's Fontana dei Fiumi waiting for him to appear, I opened the book that I had started on the plane the night before: *Immortality* by Milan Kundera. While it may be difficult to become absorbed in a tale of fictional lovers while waiting at the center of an empty piazza for a real lover to appear, Kundera's narrative sweep and originality were such that they drew me in. I had finished one chapter — the one that ends with Paul racing to Agnes' hospital bed desperate for one last kiss — and was turning the page to embark upon another, when I sensed someone beside me on the cool stone bench and felt the touch of a hand at the small of my back. I looked round to see the face of my lover, long-distance no more, looking into my own.

In that instant, Kundera's Paul and Agnes vanished into the bright sunlit square. Ales, unknowingly taking up Paul's fictional impulse, leaned in to kiss me. The urban cacophony of workaday Rome seemed to rise an octave or two, the scent of a thousand espressos wafted through the morning air, the rivers of Bernini's fountain — the Danube, Nile, Ganges and Rio della Planta from the four corners of the earth — spewed ecstatic jets of cool water above our heads. But just as his lips reached mine, he stopped and let out a cry of surprise.

"Wait", he said and gestured toward the book that he had spotted on my lap.

He bent over to reach into the duffel bag that he had placed on the ground next to him. After rummaging in it for a few seconds, he pulled out his own book.

"Look", he said triumphantly.

His was a paperback whereas mine was a hardcover and had a different cover design, but the coincidence was unmistakable. The book Ales held up toward me was entitled *Nesmrtnost* and was written by none other than Milan Kundera. Laying his volume down on top of mine, Ales took my face between his two hands and gazed at me with his melancholy central European eyes.

"We're reading the same book", he whispered.

His face was so close to mine that I could feel the heat of his words on my skin, and of all the many things I might have said at that moment, of all the phrases I might of murmured or sighed or moaned, this was my response:

"Only you're reading in translation."

Ales pulled sharply away from me. "We're both reading in translation", he corrected, reconsidering whether he wanted to kiss me after all. A distinct coldness had entered his voice, and it seemed possible, that after the long months of waiting the affair was going to end then and there.

"I *know* that, I *knew* that", I thought mournfully to myself: "Of course, we're both reading in translation. Kundera's a Czech. That was why I was reading him in the first place... to get closer to you and your world."

But it was too late. The awful, ignorant, arrogant words were out, and I couldn't take them back. I closed my eyes. Euphoria followed by this plunge into despair, the sleepless night of travel beginning to catch up with me, the wounding brightness of the morning: it all seemed too much to bear.

But happily, this self-inflicted state of misery came to a rapid end. For it was not long after I closed my eyes — only a second or two — that I felt kisses falling on their shuttered lids, and knew that my lapse had been forgiven. Perhaps in anticipation of the carnal pleasures of the coming week, or perhaps in unspoken tribute to the nocturnal hours spent in separate yet somehow shared reading, not only did Ales deign to kiss the cultural imperialist on that distant day in April, but he actually married her a little over a year later, and moved her across the ocean from a tiny apartment in New York City to a tiny apartment in Ljubljana. The crowning irony of the story is that after several years living in a foreign land, she — that is me — became a translator from Slovenian into English. Now more than a decade later, when I pick up a novel or a book of poetry in a bookstore, I flip first to the copyright page to see if it has been translated and then to the back pages to find the translator's bio note. I suppose it goes without saying that there have been countless occasions during the intervening years — at dinner parties and various international social events — when the conversation has turned, as it so often does, to the subject of America's cultural dominance. I can always sense the precise point in the conversation when Ales can barely resist relating the now immortal anecdote about his American wife and Milan Kundera's *Immortality*. Usually, I poke him under the table or send a pleading look his way in order to prevent my public embarrassment. But lately, I have been more willing to let the story be told, perhaps because I have come to realize that my *faux-pas* was not entirely a case of individual ignorance, but in fact that I had been influenced by the national and literary traditions in which I had been raised, and by a number of largely unexamined assumptions about translators and translations.

It is, of course, hardly surprising that a country that enjoys the unquestioned cultural and strategic domination that the United States does at the beginning of the twenty-first century would have an ambivalent attitude toward the modest art of translation. After all, translation, whatever else it may be, is above all the act of making the foreign comprehensible and as such is inescapably political. The translation practices of a country as powerful and insular as the United States are bound to reflect the nation's relationship toward the foreign "other". Especially in recent years, this relationship has become

increasingly fraught, even with America's traditional cultural and political allies on the European continent. In any event, the general disregard with which translators and translations, and by inference foreign literature, are held in the United States is reflected in virtually every aspect of the publishing industry: the number of translated works appearing on the market each year, the sales figures for non-American literary works that actually do reach the shelves of the nation's bookstores, the remuneration and copyrights granted to translators, the way translated works are reviewed, and finally the underlying assumptions that affect the very craft of translation.

Lawrence Venuti, in the first chapter of his survey book *The Translator's Invisibility: A history of translation*, puts forth a compendium of publishing statistics, contract conditions, and excerpts from book reviews to make a case about the dire state of translation on the American book market. The single most damning statistic is that translated works generally account for somewhere between 2 per cent and 4 per cent of total books published in the United States each year, an astonishingly low number that has changed little over the last several decades. The figures for Great Britain are similarly anemic, suggesting that an indifference to foreign literature may arise not only from political and military superiority, but also from language superiority. English is undeniably the world's lingua franca; indeed, it is said that today more people speak English as a second language than do as a first. But what cannot be denied is that the countries whose people speak English as their mother tongue and produce the bulk of original English language texts are, as Venuti puts it, "aggressively monolingual".<sup>1</sup> By way of contrast, the output of translated works in major western European countries tends to vacillate between about 7 per cent and 14 per cent of total published works, with roughly half of the foreign books published being translations from English. Adding financial injury to insult, Venuti draws on American PEN surveys to prove that American translators cannot command subsistence wages, even if fully employed, and that all but the most renowned are typically engaged under "work-for-hire" contracts and enjoy little or no copyright protection. In other words, in the unlikely event that a translated work does become a runaway bestseller, the translator will probably not reap the benefit.

Of course, with few exceptions (such as those of Milan Kundera, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and the odd foreign work to have been selected by Oprah's reading club — Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* comes to mind), books in translation rarely do hit the American bestseller lists. Indeed, foreign authors generally don't cross the radar screen of even the more sophisticated American readership until they have won a prestigious international award, and preferably the most prestigious international award: the Nobel Prize for literature. Sometimes, though, even that momentous achievement doesn't do the trick. When Imre Kertesz, a Hungarian author, won the Nobel in 2002 it was discovered that only two of his books had been published in English translation, and that the more successful of the two, *Fateless* (Northwestern University Press), had sold a mere 3 500 copies. Northwestern University Press went on to sell 40 000 copies of the book yet, despite this modest success, it recently reduced its literature in translation program. Donna Shear, director of the press, gave a blunt explanation for the downsizing in a recent New York Times article: "It's expensive, and the sales aren't there."<sup>2</sup>

Publishers across the board provide a number of reasons for their increasing reluctance to take a risk on unknown foreign authors. At the top of the list is the concentration of ownership in the book industry by a few profit-minded conglomerates. Publishers also note that most American houses employ few if

any editors who speak foreign languages and are hesitant to count on the advice of outsiders as to what foreign books might capture the American imagination. As for the elusive American imagination, it is characterized as preferring story and action over atmosphere and philosophizing (both more common traits in non-American literary works than in homegrown ones). In addition, American readers have become accustomed to literature that is tailored to their specific situation. Very few contemporary American works are written with a truly international perspective any more. Even those that are placed in an international setting — such as *Prague* by Arthur Phillips and sequences of *The Corrections* by Jonathan Franzen that were set in Lithuania — rarely transcend the domestic mental framework. In the same New York Times article, Esther Allen, chairwoman of the PEN translation committee, discussed the ramifications that such parochial publishing trends have beyond America's borders: "Since English is the lingua franca, translating a book into English puts it in a position to be translated into many different languages. We're the clogged artery that prevents authors from reaching readers anywhere outside their own country."<sup>3</sup>

Yet however tempting it may be to make a simple causal connection between imperial cultural swagger and a disregard for foreign literature and its translators, many other factors enter the mix and to a great degree it is the very nature of translation that dictates more universal attitudes toward translation as a literary activity. I would venture to say that in no culture, however open-minded or cosmopolitan, does a translated work of literature have an equal stature as an original work, or does the translator occupy the same exalted role as the author. Even in a small country like Slovenia with a population of barely two million, a country that actively promotes and subsidizes the translation of its literature into other world languages and vice versa, the translator hardly sits upon a literary pedestal. My sister-in-law who is a nursery school teacher recently related to me the apocryphal story of a little boy who proudly announced one day that he planned to be a bricklayer when he grew up. When she asked him if his father was a bricklayer, the boy's pride turned to embarrassment.

"Nah", he muttered under his breath: "He's a translator."

The boy is far from alone in his scorn for the tedious and largely invisible role of the literary translator. If the translator's job is well done, as was the case with Peter Kussi's translation of *Immortality*, his intervention all but disappears on the page. The work of author and the work of translator meld into one smooth artistic utterance for which the author is given the lion's share of credit. If, on the other hand, obvious errors or infelicities enter the translation, the translator is pilloried. In either case, from the perspective of his nursery school age son, he is destined to appear a meek and unimpressive figure.

What's worse, even those who should know better — book lovers, writers, even the maligned translators themselves — hold the translator in contempt. Vladimir Nabokov, who translated Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* from Russian into English and took the unusual position that only literal word-for-word transpositions count as valid translations, dismissed the work of modern commercial translators with the following quip: "...a school boy's boner would be less of a mockery in regard to the original masterpiece..."<sup>4</sup> In an essay entitled *Pleasures and Problems of Translation*, Donald Frame, the translator of the complete works of Michel de Montaigne, expressed essentially the same opinion, though with a little more politesse than Nabokov: "Clearly [translation] belongs far below good literary creation, and below good literary

analysis."<sup>5</sup> Good literary analysis! Alas, is that what the discerning reader is expected to read on transatlantic flights these days? But what stings the most in Frame's remark is the complacency of the adverb "clearly", which rejects even the possibility of disagreement.

Why do translators get such a bad rap? After all, Frame, in the same essay, admits that translation "demands much of the same sensitivity" as both literary creation and literary analysis. The chief practical problem that besets translators — and certainly affects the reputation of the craft — is the utopian nature of the task: the avowed impossibility of producing a perfect, unassailable and irreplaceable translation. Though extremely difficult, it is, of course, possible to create a perfect and singular work of literature — that is, after all, what great writers do. But it is never possible, even for the most accomplished of translators, to create a perfect and singular translation for all time. Nabokov's claim that the only legitimate translation is one in which the translator's style would in no way impede upon the style of the original author (in other words, a completely neutral, word-for-word transliteration) is just another way of saying that translation is not a legitimate enterprise, the reason being that a neutral, absolutely transparent style does not exist. The elusive "styleless" style can no more be achieved by translators, than it can by authors of original works of literature. Complicating the act of translation even further, not only authors and translators, but individual languages and the historical eras during which languages are spoken and written also have their own particular style. Each language has its own internal form, its own grammatical contingencies, its own specific vocabulary with unique cultural connotations.

We have all heard that languages spoken by Eskimos have umpteen expressions for snow, but we have rarely contemplated the difficulties that would pose for the attentive translator of Inuit literature. How could the translator convey the subtleties of those many synonyms with the single word "snow"? Still less have we contemplated how those difficulties might change over the course of time as the languages and cultures in question evolve. Jose Ortega y Gasset, in an essay called *The Misery and Splendor of Translation*, gives an example from European languages: "Since languages are formed in different landscapes, through different experiences, their incongruity is natural. It is false, for example, to suppose the thing the Spaniard calls a *bosque* [forest] the German calls a *Wald*, yet the dictionary tells us that *Wald* means *bosque*."<sup>6</sup> Ortega is addressing the deep experiential dissonance between cultural realities. Of course, this particular example would, on a practical level, give the translator little difficulty. Undeterred by incongruities in cultural realities, he would simply plug in the noun and, thankful for the seeming lack of ambiguity in its meaning, charge on.

But, in fact, there are relatively few expressions that do not present the translator with the dilemma alluded to by Ortega y Gasset. The translator must constantly not only understand, but choose among a vast array of words and phrases each carrying its own cultural implication. When should he choose an archaic expression over a contemporary one? When should he choose a marginal expression over a mainstream one, a slangy utterance over a bookish one, a highfalutin word over a commonplace one: perchance versus maybe, cops versus police, gaze versus look? Should the translator of a poetic work strive to retain meaning above all, or should he sacrifice meaning to serve the demands of form and rhyme, assonance and alliteration? The choices are endless, and no two paths will lead to the same result.

The challenges posed by translation have given rise to a number of adages and truisms about the craft. One is the at-first counterintuitive notion that every great work of literature should be translated at least once a generation. Dante's *Inferno*, by way of example, has been translated into English at least nine times in the last three decades alone. Some of these versions strive to emulate Dante's complex *terza rima* (Robert Pinsky, 1994), others use an unlinked *tercet* form (John Ciardi, 1982) and others resort to prose (Charles Singleton, 1970) to bring the great fourteenth century poem to a new generation of readers. Needless to say, each of these renditions is as dissimilar from each other as it is from the original work. Hence the more pessimistic adage offered in the language that produced Dante — *traduttore, traditore* (translator, betrayer) — implying that since any attempt to translate from one language to another is inevitably a betrayal of the original masterpiece, one translation — let alone nine — may be one translation too many. It is perhaps no coincidence that a lesser-known saying also contains the metaphor of fidelity. This one addresses not only the meaning and the linguistic-historical context of the original text, but its aesthetic qualities as well. "Translation", the saying goes: "is like a woman: if she is faithful she is not beautiful, and if she is beautiful she is not faithful."

If the principal pragmatic problem faced by the translator resides in the utopian nature of his task, the main reason he is denied literary respectability arises from a purely epistemological issue: the issue of originality. True, the translator must possess a great armory of tools: literary sensitivity, writerly techniques, fluency and mastery not only of the language and culture of the original text, but also of the language and culture into which the text is being translated. But what he and his translation will always lack, regardless of the intuition and skills brought to bear, is artistic originality: unmediated contact with the mind and pen of the original creator. Unfortunately for the translator, originality is a currency held in extremely high esteem by Western civilization. If it is discovered, for example, that a much loved work attributed to Rembrandt was painted not by the master himself, but by a member of his studio, then that specific painting — whatever its artistic merits — drops a notch or two in estimation. The downfall of Jerzy Kosinsky, the author of *The Painted Bird* and other works, offers a cautionary tale from the annals of literature. When it came out that editors and assistants (those who "translated" Kosinsky's work from his broken Polish English into polished English) may have had a hand in the original composition of the works, the reputation of the novels and of the author experienced a sharp decline.

While on one level understandable, the glorification of originality tends to obscure other aspects of the creation of art and literature and its long-term significance in the evolution of civilizations: namely, that culture and art represent much more than just a series of discreet original works produced by great creators. Just as importantly, it represents an ongoing conversation among and between different historical eras and civilizations. This conversation *is*, in fact, nothing more and nothing less than the history of civilization and, thanks in large part to translation, it has managed to transcend temporal, geographical and cultural boundaries and become accessible to even the most "aggressively monolingual" of peoples. Ezra Pound, a controversial figure in twentieth-century modernism, also played a controversial (though less widely-recognized) role in twentieth-century translation. He spurned the practices of Victorian translators who put the ancients into pretty versified meter, and urged translators above all to: "make it new!" Pound's translations, though criticized by critics for being too "free", brought vigor and energy to a host of figures whose voices had been all but lost to this conversation among

civilizations — to the sixth-century Chinese poet, Li Po, to the Renaissance Italian poet, Guido Cavalcanti, to the French Provençal troubadours, Daniel Arnaut and Bertran de Born.

Throughout the course of his long career, Pound never lost sight of the importance of tradition and translation — the carrying over of great works of literature from one culture to another. In his essay *How to Read*, he points to the importance of translation in the history of English literature: "...English literature lives on translation, it is fed by translation; every new exuberance, every new heave is stimulated by translation, every great age is an age of translations, beginning with Geoffrey Chaucer, Le Grand Translateur..."<sup>7</sup> And in a passing remark in the same essay, he reveals that the strange ambivalence (or obliviousness) of the Anglo-American literary culture to translation preceded the emergence of English as the lingua franca, let alone the emergence of America as the sole global superpower: "Curiously enough, the histories of Spanish and Italian literature always take account of translators. Histories of English literature always slide over translation — I suppose it is inferiority complex — yet some of the best books in English are translations."<sup>8</sup>

Because of Pound's larger-than-life persona and the privileged position he gave to translation in his own oeuvre, he almost managed to dislodge the limp stereotype of the translator: to overturn the notion of translator as eunuch in the harem of literature. He inspired a generation of so-called modernist translators — Louis Zukofsky and Paul Blackburn among others — who strived to bring forward the works of ancient Latin and Provençal poets in fresh, thoroughly modern, sometimes controversial ways and thus to stir the passion of new readers. All the same, the Poundian influence is little present in contemporary Anglo-American translations, which now, rather than imitating the Victorian stylistic techniques that Pound so loathed, adopt a sort of transparent discourse or authoritative plain style. In any event, the dominant translation methods (dominant at least on the market, if not in the university) tend toward the domestication of the foreign text, toward rendering it so smoothly that the English speaking reader often fails to realize that the work is a translation at all. Any regular reader of reviews of translated works of literature will note the propensity to praise smoothness, fluency and eloquence and to condemn signs of "translatorese": that is disconcerting syntax, word choice, or archaic vocabulary that retain traces of the foreign quality of the original.

Nevertheless, in part because of Pound's legacy and in part because of the prevalence of postmodern discourse in the academy today, the main conflict in translation studies persists between these two poles: that is, between the domesticating and so-called "foreignizing" modes of translating. Though deconstructionists have taken this issue up with a new and predictably political fervor, it is hardly a new concern. The theologian, Frederick Schleiermacher, included in his 1813 essay entitled *On the Different Methods of Translation* a single sentence that encapsulates the fundamental choice faced by every translator then and now: "Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader."<sup>9</sup> Moving the text to the reader in a translation indicates domestication of the foreign text — the elimination of its essentially foreign element. Moving the reader toward the original represents what is called by some theorists "foreignization" — that is carrying over the element of cultural "otherness" that characterizes the foreign text.

This debate recalls an episode that took place during the early months of my residence in Slovenia when I had yet to learn the language. It has to do with one of the great bugbears of translators and language students alike: the existence in European languages of the formal, as opposed to the informal, address, a conversational convention that provides essential social cues in both written and spoken dialog. The practice is commonly believed to be untranslatable into English, and this episode would seem to confirm that point of view. I was sitting in a Ljubljana café with a friend who introduced me to a very pleasant acquaintance of his who spoke impeccable English. After we shook hands, the young man sat down opposite me and looked earnestly into my face. "May I call you 'you'?" he inquired politely. Not wanting to disconcert him, I demurely consented to his suggestion and, with this effort at what might be called extreme domestication behind us, the conversation continued unhindered.

Yet how should the translator deal with this particular problem when he encounters it, as most inevitably will, in a work of literature? Should he strain to find an English alternative for the familiar form (something along the lines of "hey buddy"), or should he resort to the archaic "thee" or "thou"? A simple and elegant example of "foreignization" in a similar case can be found in the translation of *Blindness* by Jose Saramago, the Portuguese author who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1998. Saramago's translator, Giovanni Pontiero, when confronted with an explicit reference to the formal versus informal address, simply left the pronoun in the original Portuguese: "You must call me 'tu'", an older woman says to a younger one at a pivotal and moving moment in their relationship.<sup>10</sup> The word and its connotation are understood by all but the most obtuse of readers. But more significantly, the translator makes no effort to create the illusion that the story takes place in, say, Cleveland, Ohio. He makes no effort, in other words, to create the illusion that the work is not a translation. The reader, in this example, is moved quite gracefully and effectively to the foreign text.

Many of the hottest polemical issues dividing translations theorists could at least be partially resolved if translation were considered a separate genre from original literature. This is not such an outlandish suggestion. It would make room for the many different approaches to translation: from Nabokov's churlish literalism to bilingual publications to Pound's freer improvisations on the original. Pound himself made the distinction between "interpretive translation" and "the other sort". By "the other sort", Pound wrote: "I mean in cases where the 'translator' is definitely making a new poem, [which] falls simply in the domain of original writing, or if it does not it must be censured according to equal standards..."<sup>11</sup> After all, some foreign texts (those that are deemed easily "translatable") are more amenable to the literal touch, while others (the less "translatable" sort) call for more creative solutions, and some undoubtedly gain new life under a strong authorial pen such as Pound's. A broader definition of translation, and one that makes a clear distinction from original composition could embrace them all. Defining translation as a wholly different genre — and indeed shelving translations in a separate section from original literature as is routinely done in Slovenia's bookstores — would eliminate the confusion that overcame me in the Piazza Navona. No longer would the original work of Jack Kerouac be shelved between translations of Kafka and Kundera, and the scales would fall from our eyes.

Yet while a change in definition might solve certain problems of translation in the Anglo-American literary market, it won't solve the main one: the decreasing absolute number of foreign works being translated at all these days.

Just as the dilemma between domestication and foreignization in translation long predated postmodernism and even modernism, so too does the more troubling issue of using foreign literature and translation as a method of extending (or denying) cultural influence. Not surprisingly, the practice has been around for as long as cultural empires and translations have been around. The Roman Empire, to which America is sometimes compared these days, spawned Western civilization's first crop of literary translators who tended to be far more highhanded than the current batch of cultural imperialists. The Romans not only domesticated the works of the ancient Greeks, they thoroughly assimilated them: pressing the Greek syntax into the service of Latin, even exchanging place names from antiquity with newly-minted Latin names. Sometimes, in a reverse of today's publishing practices that tend toward diminishing the role of the translator, the author of the original Greek work would be relegated to the back page and the Roman translator would get top billing. "In those days", remarked Nietzsche, "...to translate meant to conquer."<sup>12</sup>

Today it is Hollywood that makes ample use of the old Roman methods, taking good films such as *La Femme Nikita* and masterpieces such as Godard's *Breathless* and transforming them into bland American fare that bears little resemblance to the originals. The publishing industry, on the other hand, has adopted a more insidious model. By not even bothering to translate, much less assimilate, foreign works, American cultural interests conquer foreign literature simply by ignoring it. A steep price is paid on both sides of this cultural equation. Smaller cultures suffer because their literature does not circulate, but ironically the conqueror may pay the even higher price: stuffiness and parochialism in the sphere of domestic literary creation, and the deprivation of the potential stimulus needed to trigger a great age of literature. All of the squabbles in academia about good and bad translations, faithful and beautiful translations, domesticating and foreignizing translations are interesting, but in the current cultural battle, they are finally beside the point. It is rather like the old saying that the only thing worse than bad publicity is no publicity at all. Likewise, the only thing worse than bad translation is no translation at all.

Certainly some would dispute this point. Yet so much has been said about what is lost in translation (Robert Frost famously remarked that it is precisely the poetry that is lost in translation) that we often overlook the enormous gains. A whole school of purists and radical translation theorists might argue that Ales and I, back in April of 1992, were not even reading the same work of literature as we traveled through the night toward our shared destination. And, from a certain perspective, they're right. Ortega y Gasset (a brilliant thinker who like more than half of the luminaries quoted in this essay are quoted in translation) put it this way: "The simple fact is that the translation is not the work, but a path toward the work."<sup>13</sup>

Let us marvel for a moment at that most modest of words: path. For without paths, both real and metaphorical, we are each stuck in our own place, incapable of motion, incapable of communication or understanding, unable to transcend our own local situation. Ales's path — his translation of *Immortality*, if you will — had taken him through a newborn country, across the Po River basin, over the Apennines mountain range and finally to Rome. My path, my quite different translation, had carried me up in the air, across a vast ocean, from one great continental mass to another. Yet despite our distant points of origins, our diverse itineraries, the fact that the vehicles transporting us were so different from one another — his a land-bound train, mine a ferocious jet

engine passing 30 000 feet over the surface of the earth — we both arrived in the same place: a cool stone bench in a nearly empty Piazza Navona. Or, more accurately, we arrived in a place as close to the same place as two human beings can ever hope to be.

That is what is gained in translation.

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- <sup>1</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A history of translation*, New York: Routledge 1995.
  - <sup>2</sup> Steven Kinzer, "America Yawns at Foreign Fiction", *New York Times*, 26 July 2003, <http://transcript-review.org/section.cfm>.
  - <sup>3</sup> Kinzer.
  - <sup>4</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, "Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English", in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (eds.), *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992.
  - <sup>5</sup> Donald Frame, "Pleasures and Problems of Translation", in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (eds.), *The Craft of Translation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1989.
  - <sup>6</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and Splendor of Translation", in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (eds.), *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992.
  - <sup>7</sup> Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, New York: New Directions 1934.
  - <sup>8</sup> Pound.
  - <sup>9</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, "On the Different Methods of Translating", in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (eds.), *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992.
  - <sup>10</sup> Jose Saramago, *Blindness*, London: The Harvill Press 1998.
  - <sup>11</sup> Pound.
  - <sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Problems of Translation", in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (eds.), *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992.
  - <sup>13</sup> Ortega y Gasset.

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