

When poets translate poetry

Authorship, ownership, and translatorship

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This chapter discusses the interplay between translation and writing in the work of poets who also translate poetry. First, I present the Scandinavian term gjendiktning for the creative rewriting of poetry. I then discuss the role of the author and translator with reference to Michel Foucault's essay "What Is an Author?" and the task of the poet-translator in relation to theories by Antoine Berman and Barbara Folkart. I then outline four areas of investigation relevant for examining the work of the poet-translator: (1) inclusion, (2) experimentation and renewal, (3) contextualization and positioning, and (4) friendship and community. Finally, I discuss the poet-translators Robert Bly, Tomas Tranströmer, and especially Jan Erik Vold to demonstrate the relevance of this approach.

Keywords: translation pact, translator function, rewriting, *gjendiktning*,

Berman, Folkart, Vold, Tranströmer, Bly, poetry

1. Introduction

In Norway, prose translation is called *oversettelse* ('translation'), while the translation of poetry is usually called *gjendiktning*, a word whose literal meaning, 're-poetizing', indicates that the translation is of an especially creative kind. To translate poetry in the sense of *gjendiktning* requires most of the creative efforts normally attributed to the original author, but it is still thought of as a special kind of translation (Greenall 2015a:40). There is no English equivalent for *gjendiktning*, but it is often claimed that a poem has to be written anew or recreated. As Francis R. Jones writes, citing Andrew Chesterman,

Most recent Western poetry translation seems recreative in intent, apparently reflecting a wider ethic that translations should have "relevant similarity" to their source, whilst performing a receptor-language function – in this case, being a poem. (Jones 2011:202)

Some claim that the translator should be a poet in order to succeed.¹ While it is often considered especially difficult to translate poetry, this is not due to the language material as such, as already pointed out by Henri Meschonnic (1973). Translatability and untranslatability are historic qualities, depending on which formal aspects that are seen as particularly meaningful. If we consider formal features of prose to be equally meaningful as in poetry

(syntax, rhythm, assonance, alliteration, variation, etc.), it would not be any easier to translate prose than poetry. Institutional and discursive factors are thus crucial in defining *gjendiktning* as a specialized activity requiring certain skills.

What, then, characterizes the creative tension between authorship and translatorship in translated poetry? How can these activities best be studied as engaging in a mutually performative praxis? To shed light on these questions, and to contribute to what I shall call a positive translation criticism, I will first discuss the distinction between authorship and translatorship on a theoretical level, before presenting a map of four areas relevant for examining the interplay between these activities in the work of *poet-translators*, that is, poets who also translate poetry. Finally, I will discuss the work of Robert Bly, the Nobel laureate Tomas Tranströmer, and not least Jan Erik Vold, Norway's most famous contemporary poet-translator, to demonstrate the relevance of this approach.

The most influential theoretical article on the status of the author in contemporary literary theory is probably Michel Foucault's ([1977] 1980) "What Is an Author?," originally published in French in 1969. The article serves as a good introduction to Foucault's theory of how discourses work in modern society. For Foucault the status of the author can neither be wholly explained empirically, by pointing to what real authors do, nor theoretically, by defining an ahistorical author function that explains once and for all the relationship between authors and their creations. Instead, the

author function, which ascribes ownership and consistency and stabilizes the enormous potential for meaning production, is historically and culturally changing. The use and circulation of authors' names gives an indication of such changes. If we want to explore how the author function works, we should therefore look at how authors' names are used, with which implications, and in which contexts. I would argue that the same applies to the translator and the translator's name. It would not be far-fetched to speak of a *translator function* in the spirit of Foucault. A brief historical glance shows that highly dissimilar activities have been called "translation" and that complex social mechanisms regulate whether a translation is marked as a translation, whether the translator's name is at all mentioned, and what significance this name is given. This is highly relevant for assessing what we might call the *author-ity* of the text presented to the reader.

Foucault not only problematized the construction of the author function in romantic and modern culture, asking questions about when a person gains the authority of an author and when he or she is merely considered a person who writes documents, letters, articles, and so forth. He also questioned the consistency of the *work*: what is considered part of the author's work, what is excluded, and which mechanisms are at play in defining the limits of the work (Foucault and Bouchard [1977] 1980:128)? How we draw the lines affects how we understand and interpret the literary work within a wider cultural and political context. Foucault does not write explicitly about the translator, but also on this point his presentation of the

author function is relevant for discussing the role of the translator: to which extent could (or should) translations be seen as an integral part of the writings of a poet-translator?

2. The translator's name

Even a cursory review of library databases or publishers' catalogues shows that translations are usually not classified according to the translator's name. Still, when the translator is a famous author, the translations might be published under the name of the translator. The *translation pact* (Alvstad 2014, see the introduction to this volume), which makes readers read translated literatures as if the author was talking to the reader directly, is thus weakened or even eliminated. For example, *Cathay* is classified under the name of Ezra Pound, even though it consists of translations (or "re-poetizing") of Chinese poetry. There are countless other examples of poets who have included their translations in their collected works. Such classificatory choices not only indicate that some translations are considered aesthetically strong, worthy of being included in the poet-translator's work. He or she has managed to make the text *his or her own*, or the understanding of the writer's own work would seem incomplete if the translations were not taken into consideration. This is the case with for example Pound's *Cathay*

or with Mallarmé's translation of Poe's "The Raven" as "Le Corbeau." The translator's voice is here clearly manifest, both contextually and textually.

Questions regarding authorship have been thoroughly discussed within translation theory, but often in a manner that does not take sufficient account of the nuances between different author and/or translator functions. It is not difficult to identify similarities between the act of writing an original poem and the act of translating, but common sense usually concludes there is a clear difference between publishing a text in your own name (and hence taking responsibility for its content) and translating a text that another writer is responsible for. Anthony Pym (2011) has argued that the problem of authorship should be examined not only in relation to the question of originality or aesthetic quality, but also from an ethical viewpoint considering the question of ownership. The question is then not what creative efforts lay behind the translation, but who takes responsibility for it. Drawing on the formal pragmatics of Jürgen Habermas and the social philosophy of Erwin Goffman, Pym concludes that there is an essential difference between taking responsibility for a text as an author and presenting it as a translator. The translator may say, "Don't shoot me – I'm only the translator!" Pym is of course aware that the translator's defense is not always sufficient, and that translators of the Bible, Salman Rushdie, and many others have actually been persecuted (Pym 2011:36).

The case of *Cathay* is illustrative of another problem. There is a general agreement that Pound's re-poetizations (*gjendiktninger*) of

translations from Chinese by the American orientalist Ernest Fenolosa belong to Pound's oeuvre, and that the meaning of the texts is partly Pound's responsibility and not only that of Rihaku and the other poets he presents in *Cathay*. Still, most critics would agree to call these texts translations. Since Pound did not know Chinese at the time he re-created the poems, he was more of an adaptor of an already translated text, and it is problematic to hold Li Bai from the eighth-century Tang dynasty responsible for the content of Pound's book released in 1915. Without going into a detailed discussion, this case shows that it is not always easy to define responsibility for the meanings of a translated text. This is the case both with multiple translatorship, as in the case of *Cathay*, and in cases where there is one translator (and several implied translator agents).

In short, questions of responsibility – as important as they are – are difficult to settle once and for all on a theoretical level. Writing, whether translations or originals, involves risks of being held responsible. The complexities in these relations are also reflected on the legal level. In most countries, translators do not obtain copyright, while in others, like Norway, they often do. Formalizing ownership through contracts and regulations is a means for establishing guidelines in a confusing field. The law strives for justice, but cannot, from an ethical perspective, be seen as its fulfillment.

Confronted with such complexities, what are the tasks of theory? One strategy is to critically discuss the dominant premises of rules and regulations concerning the status of authorship, as Pym does, so as to arrive

at a better overall understanding. Another strategy, which I will follow here, is to investigate the gray zones where authorship and translatorship seem particularly close or where one activity seems to influence the other (see, e.g., Walkowitz 2015). The first strategy aims at defining responsibility in regard to classificatory, ethical, and legal matters; the second aims at understanding the creative dynamic between original and translational writing. I see these strategies rather as complementary than conflicting.

3. A writerly translation criticism

In order to develop a better understanding of the dynamics between translation, original writing, and “re-poetization” (*gjendiktning*), I will start by commenting on Barbara Folkart’s *Second Finding: A Poetics of Translation* (2007), an ambitious attempt at arguing for a *writerly* perspective on poetry translation, focusing on the translator’s subjective responsibility as a writer (for contributions touching on similar issues, see also Bassnett and Bush 2007 and Buffagni et al. 2011). Folkart argues that the most fundamental strategy for reactivating poems should be faithfulness to the letter as it is practiced in the translated corpus, not necessarily word by word but *as a whole* (Folkart 2007:47). She appeals to classical virtues like *competence* and *taste*, claiming that attempts to formalize concerns and establish a translational methodology lead our attention away from what is

most important: that poetry, whether as original writing or in translation, is “what takes the top of your head off” (Folkart: 2007:36, quoting Emily Dickinson). She is overtly polemic, at times unjustly so, against a translator scholar like Lawrence Venuti, arguing that a distinction like *domestication/foreignization* is useless, and indeed, Folkart’s approach points in a different direction than most other recent studies of poetry translation.²

Many of Folkart’s examples of first-rate translators are already celebrated as the greatest poets of the twentieth century, such as Marianne Moore, Pierre Leyris, Ted Hughes, and Robert Lowell, whose greatness, according to Folkart, rested on their perspicacity and vim:

Whether translating or writing, these poets know how to force their way through to the real of the poem, to engage directly with it at a physical, gut level: theirs, in a word, is the ability to *take charge, see-in and flesh-out*. (Folkart 2007:383, emphasis in original)

Folkart (2007:445) argues that “poetry is a reinventing, a second finding that sunders the real from what we think we know of it.” If the translation shall succeed in its own right, not as second best but as such a second finding, it is necessary for the translator to take responsibility, to demonstrate *ownership* of the translated text. Ownership is defined on three different levels (Folkart 2007:349): ownership of the real (the translator must know

the reality that is described); ownership of the means of production (ownership of the source and target languages); and ownership of the impulsion driving the text. It is the concept of ownership that makes Folkart's perspective relevant for my purposes here: first, because it problematizes a clear-cut distinction between authorship and translatorship, and second, because it implies a positive evaluation of the performative, creative aspect of translation. A theory of ownership is a theory of how something new comes into being both in the dynamic relationship to the original and in the relationship between poets. I will not go into how Folkart's hermeneutic and poetological project builds on the outlines for a positive study of poetry translation that Antoine Berman set out to develop more than twenty years ago, just before he died, in *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne* (1995). But on one point the influence from Berman is relevant for my purposes. Martine Broda (1999:48) has pointed out that Berman's theory favors the perspective not only of the hermeneutic meeting between two historical horizons but also of the *kairos* of the translator, that is, the *timing* of his or her act. As the rhetorical orator seeks to know exactly when to speak (in a specific way), the translator must coordinate style, historical awareness, and timing. In Berman's *traductologie* the translation critic should pay close attention to this. In Folkart's appeal to "make it new," she also highlights the *kairos* of the translator, a perspective that is often ignored in Translation Studies but that I will show the relevance of in the last part of this chapter. The question of

kairos concerns the actuality both of the translation's ownership and of the poet-translator's *ethos*.

4. Ownership: translations and original work

A translation might shed new light on the original, and when an accomplished poet does the translation, the act also changes the original oeuvre of the poet-translator. In the following I will discuss how this happens by singling out four mutually overlapping areas for investigating the relationship between authorship and translatorship: (1) inclusion, (2) experimentation and renewal, (3) contextualization and positioning, and (4) friendship and community. I stress that this is a general framework and that further studies in these areas could enrich the understanding of the relationship between authorship and translatorship.

4.1 Inclusion

The question of inclusion, already presented in the introduction, can be posed as either a simple, empirical question or as a more complex question about the qualitative status of the translation in question. One often finds translations included in the collected works of a particular author, as I have already mentioned with Ezra Pound, or as when Paul Celan's translations of

Valéry's *Junge Parze*, Rimbaud's *Trunkenes Schiff*, and Jules Supervielle are included in his own *Gesammelte Werke*. The stronger the author, the more one is inclined to (re)publish all of the author's publications, including translations. But the question of inclusion also concerns how much the poet-translator has invested of his or her own lyric voice and persona in the translation, and how this has been received by the public.³ Some writers include translations in their own collections of poetry, or they publish collections of translations under their own name, as Robert Lowell's *Imitations* (1961), or the Norwegian poet Olav H. Hauge's *Dikt i umsetjing* (Poems in translation, 1982) and *Frå Rimbaud til Celan* (From Rimbaud to Celan, 1991). They thus invest their own name in a more binding manner than if they were assigned as translators of texts published under the name of the original author.

But the manner in which the relationship between author and translator authority is perceived by critics and other readers varies greatly. At times the critics see the translation as an opportunity to present the original writer, without stressing the effort of the translator; at other times it is the poet-translator's engagement with the translated text that attracts interest (for similar tendencies concerning singer-songwriter translations, see Greenall in this volume). For example, when the prominent Swedish poet Ann Jäderlund published a collection of poems by Emily Dickinson (2012), entitled *Gång på gång är skogarna rosa* (Time after time the woods are pink), several critics commented on the translator's "myopic" translation

practice. Some described the relationship between Dickinson and Jäderlund as an “elective affinity” (Ström 2012; Van Reis 2012) and stressed that the publication was not only a translation but also a new book by Jäderlund. The critics tended to comment more on how the translation represented a meeting between two great poets than on how Jäderlund’s versions could be evaluated in relation to earlier translations. A more detailed critical study of such an “elective affinity” would require specialist knowledge both in understanding the dynamic between original writing and translation and in understanding the various means of obtaining and marking ownership.

4.2 Experimentation and renewal

Translation is a means of experimenting with new forms, and in many cases one can trace clear lines from certain translations to later original poems. This has not been studied in sufficient detail (see, however, Bassnett 2006). One reason could be the expectation that translations tend to be less innovative than original writing. Even if this seems true from a statistical point of view (Even-Zohar 1990), it should not obscure the fact that many translations have been highly inventive, as evinced by classic Roman translations and imitations from Greek (McElduff 2013). Here I will restrict myself to mentioning only a few examples from the European Renaissance as well as a modern example. It is well known that when Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, translated Petrarch’s sonnets together with Sir Thomas

Wyatt, they invented the conventions of the sonnet that Shakespeare later used. And when Howard translated Virgil's *Aeneid*, he invented a new and flexible verse form, the unrhymed iambic pentameter that we know as "blank verse," which became the dominant verse form in Shakespeare's plays. When Pound published the aforementioned *Cathay*, in 1915, he set the tone for modernist poetry. Pound is also an interesting case for reasons already noted. His development as a writer is intimately linked to his development as a translator, and he did not separate the two activities. In his introduction to *The Translations of Ezra Pound*, Hugh Kenner has pointed out that whether Pound was translating or writing in his own name, he wrote "as if to meet a test [. . .] in a spirit of utter fidelity to his material, whether a document or an intuition." In both cases he was wrestling "to subdue his own language to the vision" (Kenner 1953:10). For Pound, then, translation as a creative endeavor was not essentially different from writing, according to Kenner, even if it was usually easier. Pound, like many other poets, self-consciously used translation as a means to renew himself. As Kenneth Rexroth (1987:190) points out, "translation saves you from your contemporaries." Through translating old texts, Pound developed a poetic language for the twentieth century, as could also be argued concerning the Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney (see, e.g., Parker 2012). Below I will discuss how such renewal is also an important aspect of Jan Erik Vold's activity as a translator.

4.3 Contextualization and positioning

Many poets have described an experience of being marginalized, of not being taken seriously or understood. Translations can create intertextual resonance for the poet-translator's original work. Through translation a poet may demonstrate that his or her writing is engaged in a wider literary dialogue. Norwegian literature provides several good examples of how poet-translators manage to create a relevant context for their own work. Jan Erik Vold was active as a literary critic when he published his first translation of the Swiss author Peter Bichsel's short prose in 1964, one year before his first poetry collection in 1965 launched his career as a major literary figure in Norway. In the 1960s Vold claimed that certain parts of international modernism had not been properly introduced in Norway. High modernists like Pound and Eliot were well known (both introduced and translated by the highly influential Norwegian critic and poet-translator Paal Brekke), but Vold missed the more playful poetry influenced by beat culture, pop lyrics, and what in Sweden and Norway has been termed *nyenkelhet*, or "new simplicity" (Karlsen 2010). It is crucial to understand this in order to see the element of *kairos* as Vold set about translating several modern and contemporary American poets, beginning with W. C. Williams; he subsequently translated an array of American and European poets, including Robert Creeley, Bob Dylan, Frank O'Hara, Samuel Beckett, Tomas Tranströmer, Richard Brautigan, and Wallace Stevens. Kaja Schjerven

Mollerin has shown how Vold at times seems to describe his own poetic project when presenting other poets, as when he in the afterword in his translation of William Carlos Williams's *Love* (1969) stresses how Williams worked with collage, dialogues, letters, and historical documents in *Paterson* in order to develop a poetics close to everyday experiences. When Vold stresses that Williams's procedure represents an attempt at developing an alternative to the abstract symbolism of high modernism, it is as if Vold describes his own poetic project in *Mor Godhjertas glade versjon. Ja* from 1968 (Schjerven Mollerin 2009). Vold's "re-poetizing" of Bob Dylan is another example of the closeness between his translations and his own poetry. The translations establish a freakish, poetic slang in Norwegian that is more Vold than Dylan (who rarely uses slang). With the help of Dylan, Vold points to a poetic tradition that is important for understanding the playful, unpretentious tone in much of his own writings.

4.4 Friendship and community

While contextualization and national positioning is public, community concerns more personal relationships that might potentially be made public. When evidence of such affinity or friendship is published, this becomes part of the poet-translator's contextualization as well. My main argument here, however, is to show how friendship and community are a means to obtain ownership in Folkart's sense of the term.

Literary community can take many different forms. I will first present an example of a poetic friendship based on mutual interest and love for poetry, before discussing some more generalized ideas about sympathy and identification as important aspects of the translator's attitude.

There are many accounts of friendship and community between poets. Here, I restrict myself to commenting on one case of particular relevance, the relationship between the American poet Robert Bly and the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer, as documented in the selection of their correspondence published first in a Swedish collection in 2001 and subsequently in *Airmail: The Letters of Robert Bly and Tomas Tranströmer* (Bly and Tranströmer 2013). The correspondence began in 1964 when Tranströmer wanted to translate some of the poems of the American poet Jim Wright and wrote to Bly, the editor of the journal *The Sixties Press*, where Tranströmer had read the poems. It came to an end in 1990 when Tranströmer had a stroke and began suffering from aphasia. Though their letters discuss everything from poetry and politics to personal information, translation continues to be the most consistently recurring topic. First, they seek advice from each other as to what should be translated: Which poets, books, and poems are the best? Second, they seek advice on details regarding the translation. Rarely do they discuss the tone or style in a translation. On the contrary, the vast majority of comments regard what Folkart names *the real*. The correspondence could be read as evidence that these poet-translators look at precisely the three basic sorts of ownership

Folkart singles out as crucial for the translator: the real; the source and target languages; and the impulsion driving the text. But it also shows how the translator is looking for additional information, as in this list of questions from Bly to Tranströmer in 1967:

1. Is the buljong tärning [‘bouillon cube’] a cube (as they are in the U.S.) or just a rectangle?
2. By *stark* do you wish to suggest “uncompromising”?
3. In “De myllrar i solgasset” [They swarm in the sun gas] do you want the English reader to see the *crawling action* of ants (or insects) or their *busyness*?
4. The man who “sitter på fältet och rotar” [‘sits in the field digging’] – is he sitting down on a chair? What is he doing? Raking? Or digging with a stick?
5. “Ogonblicksbild” [‘snapshot,’ lit. ‘blink-of-an-eye picture’] – that word isn’t in my dictionary! Does it refer to the shutter action of a fast camera?

Does the letter put the *speaker* in the position for a while of the *man digging* on whom the shadow of the cross falls? The image of the cross in the airfield is a *wonderful* image, but something very ominous clings to it.

Write soon!

Your old friend! (Bly and Tranströmer 2013:83)⁴

Questions 1 and 5 regard ownership of the real (is the bouillon cube really a cube, or could it be rectangular?) and the source language, respectively, while the others also include considerations about the writer's intentions or qualified opinions. They imply a wish to gain a mutual understanding through the work of poetry, and with poetry as a means of engaging in the world. Throughout the correspondence one understands increasingly better how the poets try to figure out the "impulsion" driving the other's texts. This work implies a process of friendship and community through the intense and intimate work with language. The particular beauty and relevance of the correspondence is exactly how it addresses the intersection between translation, interpretation, and friendship. Such intersections are hard to document and interpret, but *Airmail* offers a unique opportunity (for an example regarding the translation of prose, see Jansen in this volume).

Even if sympathy, mutual interest, and at times identification are often important aspects of the translation process, they do not necessarily develop into friendship, as Bly and Tranströmer's relationship did. Most translation theorists contend, however, that translation requires a sympathetic attitude, a serious attempt at understanding the author's intentions. John Dryden, for example, stresses that sympathy is a necessary precondition for the translator. Kenneth Rexroth refers to Dryden in his essay "The Poet as Translator," where sympathy is discussed as a sentiment reaching out to both previous and future generations:

All the great translations survive into our time because they were so completely of their own time. This means simply that the translator's act of identification was so complete that he spoke with the veridical force of his own utterance, conscious of communicating directly to his own audience. (Rexroth 1987:171)

Sympathy and identification are here something slightly different from just trying to understand and respect the original poet's intentions. Rather, the concepts signify a willingness to render the translated text in the translator's own voice. Sympathy and identification thus justify radical solutions and liberties taken by the translators, their means of making the text *their own*. According to Rexroth, however, sympathy, or at least projection, can carry you too far, leading to an ethnocentric translation practice.⁵ Without trying to sort out the theoretical complexities related to this, Rexroth provides a list of excellent translations where sympathy has proven to be a decisive factor.

Gayatri Spivak (2012) demonstrates a very different sympathetic attitude in her essay "The Politics of Translation." Though she discusses the possibilities of female solidarity and translations of prose (by Mahasweta Devi and others), her perspectives are also clearly relevant for the translation of poetry. Apart from pointing to the need for language skills, she adds that a translator must "surrender" to the text, as translation is the most intimate act of reading. Here, it is not so much a question of making

the translation one's own, but of relating to the source text in an act of love and respect. Spivak even claims that translation in this sense is more *erotic* than ethical. This means, among other things, that the translation should convey not only the meaning of the source text, but also its silence:

Post-structuralism has shown some of us a staging of the agent within a three-tiered notion of language (as rhetoric, logic, silence). We must attempt to enter or direct that staging, as one directs a play, as an actor interprets a script. That takes a different kind of effort from taking translation to be a matter of synonym, syntax and local colour. (Spivak 2012:314)

How do you translate silence, the unsaid? The first question to be answered is what is meant by silence in this respect. It could mean that which is communicated between the lines, which should only be hinted at. But it could also mean that which should not be formulated, as with a trauma not to be mentioned out of care for the traumatized. To know how to manage such difficulties (what should *not* be translated or explicitly stated in translation?) is perhaps the translator's most difficult task. To develop an intuitive flair for solving such challenges requires ownership in all of Folkart's senses, as well as a strong sympathetic attitude toward not only the original text but also the author. Cognitive approaches are also relevant for reflecting upon such difficulties, as Jean Boase-Beier shows in "Translating

Celan's Poetics of Silence" (2011b). Even as Spivak underscores the enormous difficulty of the task, she also points to the consequences for translators, the fact that they will not be left untouched by the act of love that a translation might be. This leads us to the central question regarding this area of investigation. How and to which extent does the act of sympathy imply a hermeneutic movement going both ways? The image of the writer is always changed by the translator, but is the translator also changed by the translation process – and if so, how?

A final point should be made concerning the translator's sympathy. In Rexroth's approach there is continuity between the notions of sympathy and identification; the one seems to lead to the other. But this is not necessarily the case. With identification there is a stronger blending not only of the lyric voice but also of the *persona* that is associated with the work. A classic but problematic example is Charles Baudelaire's identification with Edgar Allen Poe, which is problematic because Baudelaire translated Poe's prose but did not dare to translate his poems. However, Baudelaire (1968:316–368) wrote several introductions (1852, 1856, 1859) to the life and work of Poe that can be read as self-mythologization. In Baudelaire's presentations the biographies, ambitions, and dilemmas of the writer and the translator seem to overlap: Baudelaire gets an opportunity to write about himself while writing about Poe. Later, Mallarmé sets himself the task of translating Poe's "The Raven," and again one might speak of a strong identification, albeit along different lines. Whereas Baudelaire's

identification with Poe was existential, Mallarmé's identification was more related to the project of developing a writerly poetics where the word and the correspondences and collisions between words were seen as the origin of poetry. To study identification in Mallarmé's relationship to Poe would thus imply a detailed study of Mallarmé's poetics as this comes through both in his translation of Poe and in his original work (Refsum 2000:209).

5. Jan Erik Vold – poet-translator

I will demonstrate how the Norwegian poet-translator Jan Erik Vold exemplifies certain dynamic tensions at work between authorship and translatorship as related to all four areas of investigation outlined above. As noted, Vold introduced writers in Norwegian who afforded a valuable background to the understanding of his own poetry – that is, *contextualization*. But this is not all: as Kaja Schjerven Mollerin (2009:236) writes, “since many of the choices Vold makes [as a translator] are typical of him as a poet, the translations can, on an overall level, be read in the flux of his own poetical project” (my translation). A serious study of his poetics would therefore have to take his translations into consideration, which means they should be seen as part of his completed works – that is, *inclusion*. It is also clear that he has translated authors who he feels close to – that is, *friendship and community*. The translation was also for him a

means for *experimentation and renewal* of his own poetry. It is difficult to say whether Williams Carlos Williams's influence on his poetry resulted from Vold's reading or translation, but it is clear that the form that has been called "the Vold stanza" became the dominant form in his poetry in the 1970s, after his translations of Williams (Karlsen 2010:290). The stanzas look regular but do not sound regular when you read them aloud – to borrow Kenner's phrase, they are "stanzas to see" (Karlsen 2014:181). In such poems, as noted by Perloff (1985:90–91), "it is typography rather than phonemic recurrence that provides directions for the speaking voice." Karlsen provides William Carlos Williams's famous poem about plums as an example.

Williams uses many different such "stanzas to see" in his poems. Vold became increasingly fond of this form in the late 1970s with books like *S* (*S*, 1978) and *Sirkel, sirkel: Boken om prins Adrians reise* (*Circle, circle: The book about Prince Adrian's journey*, 1979), and he continued to explore the stanza in several later books. While Williams tends to make the lines equally long, Vold experiments with all the different varieties that the 3 x 4-line poem allows for. Sometimes he leaves only one word, even one syllable on one line, and fills the next with as many syllables as possible. In order to get an impression of Vold's translation practice, let us see how he translates Williams's "THIS IS JUST TO SAY":

THIS IS JUST TO SAY	<i>Elskede, det er jeg</i>	Beloved, it is I
	<i>Som har tatt</i>	Who has taken
I have eaten	<i>plommene</i>	the plums
the plums	<i>som stod i</i>	that were in
that were in	<i>kjøleskapet</i>	the refrigerator
the icebox		
	<i>og som du</i>	and that you
and which	<i>kanskje hadde</i>	perhaps had
you were probably	<i>tenkt</i>	thought
saving	<i>å ha til frokost</i>	of having for breakfast
for breakfast		
	<i>De var så</i>	They were so
Forgive me	<i>gode så søte</i>	good so sweet
They were delicious	<i>og så kalde</i>	and so cold
so sweet	<i>kan du tilgi?</i>	can you forgive?
and so cold	(Williams 1969:105,	(My back-translation)
(Williams 1986:372)	translated by Jan Erik	
	Vold)	

Vold's translation is a good example of how he claims ownership to "the impulsion driving the text" in Folkart's sense. Since this most famous poem by Williams is not regular on the phonemic level, it would not be difficult to

translate it word for word (for a discussion on specific challenges concerning this poem, see Arrojo 2005). But Vold takes huge liberties in changing the title of the poem. The original poem could easily be read as an *objet trouvé*, a message from one person to another, written down on a piece of paper, perhaps attached with a magnet to a refrigerator. Vold changes the opening “THIS IS JUST TO SAY / I have eaten” to “Beloved, it is I / Who has taken the plums.” He thus introduces the theme of love explicitly in a direct message to a specific person, the beloved, in a way that radically changes the meaning of the original. It is also striking how he changes the end of the poem. While the last stanza of the original begins with “Forgive me” and ends with “And so cold,” Vold changes the order of the lines, so that the poem ends with the question “can you forgive?” (my back-translation). The result is that the poem starts and ends with a direct address to the beloved (*elskede*), who is not even mentioned by Williams. Vold also emphasizes the communication between people who love each other when he calls the edition that includes the poem *Love* (slangily using the English word “love” rather than Norwegian *kjærlighet*). In the afterword, Vold comments upon the close relationship between Williams and his wife and speculates on the making of the plum poem. His translation of the poem thus exemplifies the function of sympathy in a way that resembles Rexroth’s remarks. On the one hand, Vold tries to understand the living conditions of Williams and his wife, their relationship to the real, but he also uses his insight to *rewrite* – that is, *gjendikte* – the poem, to change its meaning in respect for and

sympathy with the original poem. The choice is clearly motivated by Vold's sense of ownership of "the impulsion driving the text" (Folkart), his conviction that the poem is, and should be read, as an act of love. Whether the translation critic will accept this simultaneously textual and contextual translation depends on whether the critic considers the specification of the "impulsion driving the text" to be convincing.

Vold's practice with respect to such liberties varies greatly, depending on whom he translates. For example, his translations of Bob Dylan are particularly free: he changes not only the meaning of words and sentences but also the names of persons and places. A translator who is not also a recognized poet would normally not get away with such liberties, pushing his own manifest voice to the forefront. On the other hand, his later translations of for example Wallace Stevens (2009) and Henry Parland (2015) are much closer to the originals. Here his own voice is toned down, and he comes closer to respecting the translation pact.

A striking aspect concerning Vold's translations is how his authorship and translatorship seem to blend into each other. This clearly happens in his translation of Robert Creeley in the anthology *Alt er vann / om du ser lenge nok* (Everything is water / if you look long enough, 1972). In the foreword of the translation Vold explains how he developed his close relationship with Creeley. In his own collection *Kykelipi* (Kykelipi, 1969), Vold had included a translation of Creeley's poem "Oh No." Later, as he read Creeley more systematically, he realized that he had unconsciously

written a poem in *Mor Godhjertas glade versjon. Ja* (Mother Good-hearted's happy version. Yes, 1968) that he thought was his own, but that he realized was a rewriting of a poem by Creeley. Here is the original poem by Creeley:

LOVE COMES QUIETLY

Love comes quietly
finally, drops
about me, on me,
in the old ways.

What did I know
thinking myself
able to go
alone all the way.

(Cited in Vold 1976a:478)

And then the Norwegian rewriting of the poem that Vold thought was his own:

PÅ EN STUBBE, PÅ EN

STEIN

Kjærlighet kommer umerkelig

nå, har slått seg ned

her i disse trakter, på den gode,

gamle måten. Slik sitter vi og

tier

sammen, både lenge og vel.

(Hva

visste vel han, som trodde han

var

i stand til å gå

hele veien alene.)

(Vold 1976a:478)

ON A STUMP, ON A STONE

Love comes without notice

now, has settled down

here in these parts, in the good

old way. This is how we sit

quietly

together, for quite some time.

(What

did he know, thinking he was

able to go

all the way alone.)

(My back-translation)

How could Vold mistake this poem for his own, forgetting the strong influence from Creeley? When collecting his notes in order to prepare a poetry collection, Vold explains, he had forgotten where all the notes came from and that some of the notes were related to a translation; he therefore included this poem as his own in his own poetry collection. And finally, after realizing that he had unconsciously stolen much from Creeley's poem, he translated the poem as good as verbatim in 1972:

Kjærligheten kommer stille

til sist, faller
omkring meg, på meg
som i gode gamle dager.

Hva visste vel jeg
som trodde jeg var
i stand til å gå
hele veien alene.

(Cited in Vold 1976a:478)

The first Norwegian version, presented (by mistake) as an original poem, comes close to one of Vold's very free translations, while the last and proper translation is unusually close to the original. The two versions can therefore exemplify two poles in Vold's translation practice. Whether his voice is manifest or not, his translations contribute, however, directly to his authorial *persona* and *ethos*.

The examples mentioned here are sufficient to suggest the rich dynamics between authorship and translatorship in Jan Erik Vold's work. Vold, like many other poets, tends at times to let his own voice be heard in his translations. While critics would punish other translators for a similar practice, this seems more often accepted when a poet is able to claim ownership by emphasizing that the poem should be considered a re-poetizing or reinvention (Folkart) rather than a word-for-word translation. Vold's

status as a poet, as well as a sympathetic and enthusiastic critic and presenter of other poets, has most likely contributed to his ability to mark ownership and develop a writerly translation strategy and gain acceptance for his, at times, very free translation practice.

More could be said about the dynamic between Vold's authorship and translatorship. It would for example be interesting to discuss in more detail how the "Vold stanza" and the visual practice of poetry both adhere to and differ from Williams in Vold's original work. It would likewise be interesting to study how the love motif that Vold highlights in both Williams and Creeley is not only translated but also further developed in his own work. For Vold it is important to break out of the pretentious love poetry that he associated with the famous Norwegian poet Olaf Bull. In comparison, the more laid-back love poems of Williams and Creeley relate to the motif in a more everyday manner. It is in relating to this tradition that Vold succeeds in inventing a more direct and casual Norwegian love poetry. To understand this, one has to read his translations.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed some cases where authors make their own lyric voice manifest in translations of other poets. In such cases, questions of authorship and ownership are both confusing and instructive. They show

how “ownership” is a relevant, though highly problematic term for the appreciation of poetry, and they call for a better understanding of what can be meant by such ownership. Folkart’s three levels of ownership represent a fruitful beginning. She is, however, not particularly concerned with the discursive perspectives implied by ownership, in Michel Foucault’s sense. Such perspectives pertain to how translations are treated, discussed, and written about within institutions like the press, publishing companies, libraries, literary scholars, literary festivals, and so forth. They also pertain to how various agents contribute more actively to the translation process, something that has specific and often unforeseen consequences for the meaning of the work, the lives of the poet-translators, and their own authorship. The four areas of investigation mapped out in this chapter are areas where questions of ownership are negotiated. I have demonstrated how discursive, institutional, and aesthetical considerations can be fruitful in understanding crucial aspects of the work of poet-translators like Bly, Tranströmer, and Vold, as well as the dynamics between authorship and translatorship as such. More systematic studies in these four areas could contribute to a better understanding of the *productive*, *writerly*, and *performative* aspects of translation, respectively, as well as of the *kairos* of the translation act.

¹ For example, according to Raffel (1988:vii), “The translator of poetry *must* be himself a poet, and the translator of literary prose is best able to do his job properly if he is himself a writer of literary (as opposed to scholarly or critical) prose. But the translator must also be something of a scholar.”

² This is definitely true of impressive cognitive-oriented studies like Hofstadter (1997), Jones 2011, and Boase-Beier 2011a.

³ I here use the term “voice” in a conventional manner, according to what Taivalkoski-Shilov and Suchet (2013:1) call “the writing styles of authors and translators.”

⁴ There are unfortunately some curious Swedish-language spelling errors in the American edition of *Airmail*, so that Bly’s *buljong tärningen* in item 1 was incorrectly transcribed as “bulpong tarning,” and *sitter på fältet och rotar* in item 4 was incorrectly transcribed as “sitter pa faltet oah rotar.”

⁵ This dilemma is discussed thoroughly in Lawrence Venuti’s essay “*Simpatico*” (1995:286), where he describes how he as a translator gradually came to abandon a sympathetic author-oriented attitude in favor of resistance: “De Angeli’s poetry questions whether the translator can be (or should be thought of as being) in sympathy with the foreign author. It rather shows that voice in translation is irreducibly strange, never quite recognizable as the poet’s or the translator’s, never quite able to shake off its foreignness to the reader.

As I began to translate De Angeli’s poems, I became aware that the notion of *simpatico* actually mystifies what happens in the translation process.”