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**Translating Culture, rather than Language: Narrating the Nation in Other Language(s);
(Examples of Chang-Rea Lee, Euny Hong and Krys Lee)³**

**Prevoditi kulturu, a ne jezik: naracija nacije na drugom jeziku (drugim jezicima);
(primjeri Chang-Rea Leeja, Euny Hong i Krys Lee)**

Sažetak

Rad istražuje tri teme. Prva je ideja globalizacije i univerzalnoga u odnosu na nacionalne kulturne i književne kanone. Druga je tema o tome kako nacionalni jezik i književnost mogu ostati autentični i univerzalni, kako se mogu cijeniti i kao razlika i kao artefakt univerzalne vrijednosti. Navedeno zahtijeva uvod u glavnu temu, a to je područje prijevoda, posebice prijevoda shvaćenog kao trans-kreacija, odnosno re-kreacija jednog književnog svijeta unutar (jednog) drugog kulturnog diskursa, ili na drugom jeziku, ili čak na novom lingua franca, koji je danas engleski jezik. To znači da se o drugoj naciji također može pripovijedati na engleskom, ali na engleskom koji koriste drugi za svoje vlastite svrhe, ponekad samo komercijalne, ali ponekad namjerno odabrane kao oruđe kontrahegemonije s vlastitom svrhom i načinima. Kako to možemo trans-kreirati u čitanju, od ključne je važnosti za interpretaciju. Na kraju rada vidjet ćemo kako se to odražava i na drugost autentične kulture (u ovoj studiji slučaja korejske) kao i na diskurs engleskoga govornog područja i engleski kao autentični jezik i alat za trans-kreaciju i širenje ideje književnosti kao globalnoga entiteta (ili/i sustava). Odabrani autori korejskih korijena (a živjeli su ili još uvijek žive u SAD-u te pišu na engleskom) Chang-Rea Lee, Euny Hong i Krys Lee istodobno pripadaju i ne pripadaju korejskoj i američkoj kulturi, a kao izmeđunici u radu se uspoređuju s drugom dvojicom korejskih autora starije i srednje generacije Hwang Sok-yonga i Kim Young-ha. Nadalje, u kontekstu prevođenja i trans-kreacije razmatra se mogućnost prilagodbe (aproprijacije) teksta drugom kulturnom okruženju i naturalizacije jednog jezičnog okruženja u drugo. Rad predlaže komparativna istraživanja u području humanističkih znanosti koja će pomoći prevoditeljima. Zaključuje se da prevođenje nije samo pitanje prijenosa iz jednoga jezika u drugi, već se različiti slojevi teksta i konotacije mogu razumjeti jedino poznavanjem druge kulture i njezinih diskurzivnih igara moći.

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To znači da je filološki postupak točnog prevođenja teksta potrebno popratiti brojnim interkulturalnim i međukulturalnim radnjama i taktikama, o čemu se govori u relativno kratkoj tradiciji interdisciplinarne znanosti o prevođenju koja prevođenje smatra vidom interpretacije. Na primjerima iz romana trojice suvremenih korejsko-američkih pisaca prikazuju se problemi aproprijacije i naturalizacije koje se istovremeno odvijaju tijekom procesa međukulturalne komunikacije (prevođenja).

1. Introduction: Ideas of “dislocated” literature, interviewing traditions and global citizenship(s)

Before we start discussing the first topic, it would be necessary to say few words about the authors chosen as examples of this complex “dislocated” situation. They are both Korean and American, they both belong and not-belong to two cultures. As Homi Bhabha (1994) wrote, they are located “in the space in between,” as it will later be discussed in connection to Chang Rea Lee who is very often considered a “typical” dislocated author who does not belong “either here” nor “there.” In this respect the examples for cases of not-belonging to either literary-nation or world-literature⁴ are one of the important characteristics of the Korean global literary corpus (system) which is both bilingual and bi-national. A number of authors belong to a couple of discursive marked traditions while always being other in relation to either language (usually American English and/or Korean) or the discursive marked space of literary transcreation (translating the text in an/other discourse, or the hegemonic order of a given system – being it the literature-system or world-system). The examples in this work will be from American-Korean literature and the authors are the above-mentioned Chang Rea Lee and Krys Lee and Euny Hung. In respect to globalizing the local paradigms of literary expression (the right to remain different in the globalized hegemonic order) two Korean authors will be mentioned and compared to their “in between” located counterparts. These are Kwang Sok-yok (b.1943), as the author who, in my opinion, liberated the space of Korean literature from the firm burden of tradition,⁵ and the next generation author Kim Young-ha (b. 1968), who used the formal and intercultural possibilities of the tradition of western cannon (Kafka, Becket, Ishiguro) to interconnect the tradition of “dark and complex” European prose with the discursive possibilities of

4 These phrases; world-literature as a system equivalent to the system of world-system in social anthropology is introduced to literary theory by Frank Moretti (2013) and literary-nation by Pascal Casanova (2004) and reaffirmed by Vladimir Biti (2016).

5 This topic is discussed elsewhere. In the article in *Književna smotra* (Literary Review, Zagreb) I discuss Hwang as an author who begins a new trend in Korean literature: write in the environment of Korean tradition, but with an emphasis on globalized and politicized issues that open new possibilities for Korean literature as a part of global literature-system. Compare with Lee (2003) and Park (2016).

the Korean hegemonic order and trans-create the possibilities of one tradition into the system of another. This is very well followed by yet another generation's author (Han Kang) in the 2010's, but this is out of the scope of this research. What is important for us here is the possibility of inclusion(s) into global trends (patterns) which simultaneously survive as a locally determined agency and a factor of the ability to change one's own discursive environment, as well as the very discursive environment itself. This means that local agency always is an important factor in the determination of Korean art, but the above-mentioned authors contributed greatly to the fact that nowadays Korean literature also contributes to global world-literature, in the same way as other artefacts and popular culture outlets build the narrative of the Korean "soft power" industry including arts, new media and popular music. In that respect the Korean "cultural miracle" is now seen as global player on the "cultural market" and a global citizenship power broker as far as the influence on others goes: in film, K-pop, soap operas and video games (see Kim Y. 2016).

At this stage the argument I would like to put forward is connected with how to locate the idea of global citizenship on a wider scale, and the inclusion of difference in this concept, especially in relation to new media and the idea of transparency. This discussion of identity being simultaneously a local and global phenomenon goes all the way back to the 1960s. In Hannah Arendt's article on global citizenship and her argument and comments on how global identification works in the modern world and in an era that actually started the age of postmodernism (Jameson 2007; see also Lyotard 1979), there is an ambivalent positioning towards this dual identity politics of twofold identification (denotation). In her article where she discusses the global citizenship concept of Karl Jaspers, this famous Jewish, German and American philosopher argues the negatives and positives of contemporary technological revolution and assigned processes that are reflected in the humanities and communication in general. The means of communications, she argues, and the export of so-called "universal" (that is European) values contributed to the fact that today we can talk about the joint, universal presence of the whole planet (Arendt 1968: 73).

She said that this fact about a shared present "state of the world" is based neither on shared history nor is the guarantor of a shared future. Arendt also claims that the very technology which connected the world can easily destroy it. When writing that article in 1968, she emphasizes the fact that the means of global communication were developed in parallel with the means of possible global destruction. In that respect, she claims, the solidarity of humanity is exclusively negative; it is based on the fear and unwillingness to change. Here, we are talking about the fact that the present time is heavily burdened by the responsibility of local governments towards the world community and the responsibility of each single individual for what our governments are doing in the name of the country. This is where global responsibility starts.

That is the position from which the topics and problems of Cross-Cultural studies depart. I will now mention three of these problems in order to establish the frame for viewing locally marked paradigms in a global environment as well as denoting local discursive practices in globally connotated narratives. Firstly, solidarity carries a burden which sometimes can be very difficult to handle and deal with. This is why many nations, many groups and local religious communities opt for isolationism and apathy, rather than for using the possibilities of global networking for communication and a better understanding of others and then, indirectly, themselves. Simultaneously, this global trend of today (from United States to Poland, from Israel to Korea) has its origin in a contemporary reading of Kant and the hegemony of the school system (especially the institution of the “university”) that changes the focus of its endeavor: instead of previously asked (philosophical) crucial questions about the self (and “us”) we now, as claimed by Peter Sloterdijk (1987: xxvi and xxix), thanks to the “cynicism of the masters,” in centre of “longing for knowledge” have the concept of power. However, parallel with this global cynicism there also should be noted the very prominent trend of (commercial?) opening towards the other; sometimes in another language (the relatively large number of Korean writers who narrate in English while exploring very Korean topics: stolen women, alienation in Korean cities, overdevelopment, struggles of a nation divided), sometimes in forms previously assigned only to *others* (K-pop, or the Korean genre of horror movies which is based on well-developed patterns from other “cultural circles”) and sometimes by intertextually participating in the diachronic order of system-values developed elsewhere (a substantial part of Korean literature which either uses or is trying to fit within the tradition, both formal and stylistic, of “the great canon”). While the above-mentioned openness simultaneously presumes a better understanding of ourselves – nations, genders, political options, local language communities, etc., the way isolationism works is that it always produces some type of neo-contra-hegemony that takes its forms through the processes of providing a particular, defined group (nation, gender or ideological/language community) with a certain type of selectively assembled information that contributes significantly to the development and continuous maintenance of a particular type of hegemony. In Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (see the 2007 edition, vol 1), the idea of hegemony is closely connected to the willingness of a particular community or society as a whole to obey a particular set of rules as natural, non-questionable, in other words “given” by some sort of “natural order.” At least, that is the narrative produced by those who hold power (knowledge?) about the world and the way in which it, in any given language and discourse of contingency, works. In an environment where “going global” and “export” local culture in the wider space of cultural interdependence (as a mapping and miming of the capitalistic order itself) it is also an opportunity to “play” as a global rather than local “player.” What remains a peculiar “reminder” in this transaction though, is the fact that locally produced “materials” (songs,

films, books, games) withhold some of its “internationality” in an attempt to naturalize various elements of canon for its own advances. This is happening on the level of a better understanding of one’s own culture and especially traumas, but also at the level of distancing local vernacular from the uniformity of the capitalist project.

The second problem is genealogical in its essence. While in the unfounded optimism of some humanities the very idea of this superficial and artificial unity was in fact yet another imperial idea of the world market and the dominating power-driven centers imposing already introduced (Western) values, they are now a so called “unity in difference,” or, as some of the most optimistic researchers put it, we are talking about “local projects” that are part of a “bigger picture.” Later we will see that some of these processes of the power-struggle for ownership in spheres of local and global paradigms will best be represented in literature, especially in the literatures of *others* who usually are aware of their position on the margin. Here, I find it important to emphasize the crucial narrative assigned in literature to global contemporaneity. This is found in the fact that the global present “state of affairs” is not built on any common past. In that respect, despite the fact that followers of unconditional globalism often emphasize the importance of local identification, in the practice of the capitalistic world both individual national pasts and traditions are (re)considered as irrelevant. Instead of depth and diachronic continuity in the development of concepts, forms and ideas, we now have a collage of pieces that cannot be assembled to mimic the three-dimensional picture of “uneven” but steady development based on some sort of consensus.⁶

The third issue which will be discussed here is closely connected to the various problems of translation(s). Over the period of the last thirty years it has become an important topic of theoretical argumentation in both linguistic and literary theory. In the context of this work it is important to emphasize that the problem is closely connected to two issues: the first one dealing with problems of handling the unevenness which results in erasing a concept of solidarity, and the second is connected to the post-modernistic phenomena of the loss of depth in order to achieve a unified surface. From these three areas of discussion the questions of a transfer of cultures, meanings, and positioning in between will arise as the most important topics. When applied to contemporary Korean literature it will give a particular point of view from the “unevenly treated” part of global discourse that is fighting for both global-capitalistic and local-traditionalistic value-preservation as well as their questioning.

6 One this type of problem, concerned with the “uneven and combined development in literature as a world-system,” see WReC (2016).

2. The global universality of the language(s)-literature-system, the local de/construction of a (maybe not) “shared” vernacular

The whole contemporary unity of the world is based on the premises that we do not only have a unified means of communication transfer (which produces truths, or is a maker of the idea of truth, depending on a postmodernist, or metaphysical approach) but also the differences that can be bridged via the translation and transcreation of different content (languages) which are simultaneously supposed to function as a mark of difference and a potential to become something else (in translation). That would mean that we, as a “unified” civilization, are also in a position of defending the “last frontier” of difference, which is the idea of one’s own language and its grammar as one of the most prolific system of both difference and connection. This connection can be seen in various forms of comparative possibilities. And these possibilities are usually agencies of the process of translation and transcreation, but they are always framed within the limits imposed on the creation. These limits (frames) are closely connected to questions of grammar. As the saying which is attributed as an “urban legend” to Michel Foucault, goes: everything else is in dis/order, we are left with grammar as a last frontier of the mirage that is called the order of things. In same tone we can mention the anecdote describing the situation when Roland Barthes was attending a meeting of the anarchistic fraction of Maoist sympathizers gathering at the University of Paris 8. When the issue of suspending all the Laws without exception was raised by the angry crowd, with all that remained of his authority but also panic in his voice, he asked in amusement: “And what are you going to do about Grammar?” And when we talk about grammar, we are talking about one of the best organized systems that is directly related to a number of similar systems and has a development that is simultaneously unique and opposed to other(s), but also shared with these same other(s), with neighboring, genealogically related language(s)-literatures-nations, and some connections can be assigned to distant language(s)-literatures-nations/worlds. At the same time there has not been discovered and introduced any better way of language/culture transfer than the process of translation. That means that there is (still) no quality communication nor the transfer of the depth of local meaning value system(s) (produced by language and related discourses) without the inclusion of the process of translation. When tackling this issue first it is necessary to distinguish between two types of translation. The first is closely connected to the transfer from one system of signs to another, with an emphasis on Grammar, as understood by Jacques Derrida, that is an emphasis on “the self-constructing” order of a particular language. But there is also the other part of the process, especially if we are talking about the idea of Cross-Cultural studies. That is the translation of a discursive whole, the possibilities of transfer from one discursive realm to the (an)other. In this context the world made from words needs to be re-created, rather than transferred. This opens the following questions: when

we talk about translation, do we necessary only talk about the transfer of semantic and linguistic values from one language to another, or are we also looking for something more? Do we translate linguistic values or discursive possibilities? How do we translate some particular discursively connoted sets of meaning into a different discursive environment and assigned set of cultural values without losing “something” in both assigned discourses? Obviously, the answers to the questions posed here are not simple ones. This is especially the case when two cultures without a similar past (such as European and Korean/East Asian cultures) are considered.

In the contemporary environment of the humanities, we rely on two methodological approaches that deal with the issues of translation and the creation of translated discursive options (see Katan 2018). The first of them allies with the tradition of philology and the school of a translation of the “set values” of sentences, phrases and textual characteristics transferred from language to language, rather than from one to another cultural discourse. Speaking in the plain language of descriptive values, this is a traditional philological approach with strict rules applied rigorously in a process of translation as (hard) linguistically denoted labour.

The second approach is still in its development phase, even though it is now more than thirty years old. It is built on the crossroads of various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and is closely connected to new developments across the humanities, but especially with theory.⁷ It strongly relies on interdisciplinarity and the inclusion of various disciplines in a process of translating culture to culture, rather than translating linguistic values into their equivalents in another language (and its system). At the speculative level, it is very closely connected to the processes of globalization and democratization in the field of literary and artistic endeavours. “Crossing the borders” became the *buzz word* of both literary (artistic) production and the industry that drives contemporary works towards a particular type of writing, where in translations “something is lost” but “something else is gained,” if not in added artistic value, then in added economic value. In the focus of such a process, opposed to scholars who are trying to locate the core problems of transcreation, is publishing and new-media industries, their marketing and possibilities to be present in another culture without the need to physically move the “product” (book). And while one process of capitalism, which is to “perpetuate change” (Jameson 2007) in its continuous pursuit for profit, is now dominating the “horizon of expectations,” marginal voices are simultaneously promoting their previously

7 Here, I am thinking of theory as it was described by Richard Rorty: it is rather a genre than a discipline, a way of writing (thinking) located at the crossroads between literary theory, anthropology, psychoanalysis, philosophy and linguistics, while at the same time not being any of them in particular (see Culler 2000).

excluded sets of values to a global audience. One should not forget to mention that same goes for the allied propaganda and ideologies that also are naturalized into a different space. The difference between depth and surface is that when describing this twofold process, one should be aware of the fact that here we are on the fragile field of metaphorical in/possibilities that theory is producing as its language of description. As Rita Felski (2015) noted in her book on the limits of critique (which actually means of theory) the metaphors of space, of its depth and surface, are important ones to consider in discussions of the penetration (yet another metaphor!) of one cultural paradigm into the space of another/others. This penetration can be just the individual attempt of presenting a particular author “to the world,” or launching an important book into another space, without a systematic plan to impose one nation’s (culture’s) “soft power” onto another space. But it can also be the systematic transfer of local world-literature (and culture in the wider sense of the word) into a wider context with the purpose of achieving some sort of advancement: as a nation, as a language, as an economy or as an ideological paradigm.

3. Transferring the local (marginal) into a global (“unevenly structured”) environment: examples of (and from) contemporary Korean literature

Here we shall provide two examples of the transfer that the local (marginal), in its “uneven” position, projects onto the idea of canon. After winning the Booker Prize for *The Vegetarian*, Han Kang, a Korean female author of the middle generation (b. 1970), became an overnight, internationally recognized literary star. However, her popularity was of limited scope. Only in the space of so-called “great traditions” (the environments of power of new and formerly dominant colonial entities), which means in the English-speaking world, all three of her books were promptly translated. In other cultures, for example in Croatian, Serbian or Hungarian, only a highly esteemed and awarded novel is translated. It is also worth mentioning that its popularity was of limited scope. Furthermore, to the majority of the so-called “small languages” (and their marginal positions) the novel was translated from English, and not from Korean. The question of limited success may also be caused by the fact that all of these translations were focused on philological aspects of meaning/language transfer, rather than on trans-creations based on an adaptation of the contextual layers of the text. They are also translated by “serial professional translators” rather than devoted writer-translators. In that respect it may be said that the position of the margin managed to marginalize an otherwise fantastic novel. On the other hand, the persistence of K-pop, or new Korean film and tv-series on the international scene (market), have different references and tactics in winning

over their audience, that they are in possession of a possibility to colonize the international cultural space, which today is very often called the global market. This goes as far as to the level where formal colonizers (Japan) now became a consumer (receiver) of “soft power” cultural colonization from the south of the Korean Peninsula (Hong 2014). In both cases there is a set of problems present, always connected with some sort of limitation, which usually is the awareness of the margin from which space the penetration into the new space (of others) is undertaken. Obviously, apart from this awareness of the position of margin there exist other limitations; of the other language, of the other culture, of a non-comparable canonized tradition that stipulates marginalization, as well as the limitation of discursive knowledge and of ideological misreading.

When we talk about these limitations and therefore the effects on the acceptance of the artefact from another culture into some sort of our space, some sort of stereotypes always come into focus. Here comes the paradox: while trying to present one culture to another space, being it on surface, or with the aim to present a deeply connoted set of values into a particular and explainable context, instead of widening the discursive possibilities and stipulating a better understanding of the other, the text from the *other culture* very often reinforces the previously held and very stereotypical view of the other culture and discursive environment which already existed before the introduction of the work of art (novel, film) into the *other space*. These stereotypes stipulate the division which was forced upon us via a school system, media, new media outlets and other types of cultural hegemony (see Gramsci 2007; WReC 2015). This is not a new problem. In his book on the relationship between literature and trauma in what is now known as the “global democracy,” Vladimir Biti searches for ideas connected with world literature, and opinions that may possibly include so-called non-European traditions into what is known and studied as *the great canon*. When researching the ideas of world literature, he traces the first attempts to include others (into the “family of the world of letters”) in the periods of Romanticism and early materialism. This is connected to the writing of Goethe and Karl Marx. In his concept of *Weltliteratur*, Goethe in 1827 claimed that the concept of a national literature is losing its importance and that the “epoch of world literature has arrived” (Biti 2016: 133). Biti pointed that only 20 year later Marx and Engels also insist on the arrival of world literature and the idea of an international market. Both Goethe and Marx are aware of the limitations of world literature concept(s), but insist that this “planetary system” should override the narrow-minded scope of a national context (and its system of exclusive values and closed evaluation).

But Goethe on one side and Marx and Engels on the other did not have the same motivation, nor similar standing points regarding the idea of world literature. For Goethe the question of world literature was connected to the possibility to overriding narrow-minded local hegemonic orders and introducing

a wider context for the acceptance of a particular work of literature in different contexts, both natural and naturalized. He simply stated that the “epoch of world literature has arrived.” At the same time his viewpoint was limited by what Jacques Derrida later named but also criticized as Eurocentric vision, or, if you want, the colonial spirit of the West. If we look into these issues from the 21st century we can see that Goethe, obviously, is thinking about French, British and German (as well as Austro-Hungarian) hegemonic paradigms. On the other side, Marx and Engels have a different motivation. According to Biti (2016) and Jameson (2007: 89), Marx insisted that what will later be considered world literature is in practice closely connected to the idea of the world market and its mechanisms. Furthermore, national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness (as quoted by Biti 2016: 133) caused that world literature, as a market-ready product and new phenomenon that was developed from selected works from various national literatures. This is the basis for all later work in the discussions on world literature as an independent world-system, and not only a subject of the comparative study of “influences.”

If we look closely at the contemporary situation in the field, it becomes obvious that there are three great advocates of the concept. They have different viewpoints, but they all agree to consider the works of Korean, Italian, Croatian or Indonesian traditions as a part of the same system, at least on the level of speculative possibility. First of these authors is Pascale Casanova with her idea of “The World Republic of Letters.” We have been talking about her concept practically were talking from the very beginning of this article, while discussing problems of transferring literature and questions of inclusion and exclusion. The second one, a conservative (traditionally positioned) and with an emphasis on the great works of the past, is the concept of The Western Canon by American critic and literary theorist Harold Bloom. Despite of his exclusion of non-European, and many non-English-speaking others, his idea of canon still represents a reference point for many writers and scholars. Here, I will only mention two of the best Korean writers in the older and middle generations, first being Hwang Sok-yong (b. 1943) and the second Kim Young-ha (b. 1968). In Kim’s novel translated into English as *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself* (1996) various western critics found (comparative) connections with Kafka, sometimes Dostoevsky and in one instance Italo Calvino. In the case of Hwang, often critics wrote about following the great tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, and the social novel of the American and British 1970s. His latest novel, which was translated into English as *At Dusk*, provides a play of narrative positionings and social hegemony critique that was also compared with Western works of the last three decades that are becoming the part of canon.

Let us now consider the third author who, during his long and far-reaching career, dedicated most of his research to tackle the important conceptual issues related to world literature. In his works during early 2000’s, Italian comparatist

Franco Moretti not only proposed a return to Goethe and Marx's vision, but also insisted on the establishment of new methodology in the study of world literature. The first task would be to secure a position from which it would be possible to consider works of various traditions, written in various languages and translated (trans-created) differently into different languages as equally important for consideration. Moretti is aware that in consideration of the world literature corpus, one cannot use the method of close reading because the task of "mastering" the "literature of the world" is not physically achievable. Biti suggests that Moretti argues that the close reading of the texts (linguistic, conceptual, critical, historicist, intertextual and stylistic) should be left to the experts in the fields of various national literatures. Instead of close reading, in the realm of world literature, he introduces the term distant reading. In its "metaphorical sense" (see Felski 2015), this concept can be read as similar to Pascale Casanova's notion of James's idea of "the pattern/figure on the carpet" (Casanova 2007). But in Casanova's interpretation of Henry James, the particular pattern or figure represents only one element of endless composition belonging to various literary worlds, which in the end becomes one mega-system. In that respect, a close reading of all the languages in which literary works are written, as well as all the works ever published and writers ever considered by critics, is impossible to even contemplate (even Borges would not dare to contemplate this type of weaving). Instead, we should rely on a network of indirect contacts: critics and scholars in various languages, publishers, translators, the network of publishing industries, magazines, web sites, promotional brochures, book clubs. This would mean that I, as a Croatian scholar, have knowledge of Han Kang because it was mediated to me via three layers of expertise: firstly by Korean critics and scholars who are experts in contemporary Korean fiction and female (feminist) literature, then by the international publication hegemonic order, and finally by the owners of grant nomination schemes, translators (first the translator from Korean into English, and then from English into Croatian, if I want to read the interpretation of *The Vegetarian* in my own language). In this context I would like to add a footnote here, directly related to this topic. I have found out that there were three contemporary Korean novels translated into Croatian over the last two years: the above-mentioned *Vegetarian*, Shin Kyung-sook's *Please, Take Care of my Mum* and *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself*. The first two novels are translated from English into Croatian, and only Kim Young-ha's novel has been translated from the Korean, which was the work of professor Kim Sang Hun from HUFS, with the help of some of his Croatian colleagues. This means that "distant reading" sometimes goes to even more than two languages and three procedural layers.

From what has been said until now, it is obvious that there are a number of serious problems which need to be considered here. The first one is connected to the philological tradition of close reading. The second one is connected to

the question of languages. But the most important one is the third problem. It is of a theoretical nature and connected to locating the issues of the relationship between concepts of translation and trans-creation, of the appropriation of texts in another cultural environment and the naturalization of one linguistic environment (with its assigned discourse) into another one. These problems produce two reactions: first there arises an opportunity to naturalize a particular text and make it more locally embedded. This may include its title, re-creation of the play of words, the appropriation of a whole set of contextual issues (the treatment of women, particular manifestations of nationalism, ethical values, etc.) and the appropriation of a particular set of values into another environment.

Also, there are various limitations attached to the process of trans-creation. In film, there is always a risk of not understanding the ironic layers in fast moving scenes, of misunderstanding allegoric layers or intertextual connotations. In the area of novel-reading whole discursive macrostructural issues can be misinterpreted or appropriated. For example, if Croatian or Polish readers are not familiar with the problems of suicide in the contemporary Korean community, or of concept of *han*, or in some situations the still very traditional treatment of women and/or wives, for example, it would be very difficult to understand some complex connotations in *The Vegetarian* or in the novel *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself*. In that respect, a closer acquaintance with Korean literature in Croatia, Serbia, Hungary, Poland or Austria will be very much dependent on further reading and the critical texts that support the novel. But since, on the literary market, these critical issues of translation (or trans-creations) are practically non-existent, that opens yet another set of problems.

4. Limitations of “local identification” and tactics of (possible) changes: Korean and Korean-American Authors

How are the contemporary academic and cultural communities (in a wider sense) dealing with these limitations imposed by language barriers and discursive non-inclusions? In practice, works from other literatures usually are translated without any awareness of the complexity that these problems impose upon the exegesis and other types of interpretative practices (usages) of “foreign” texts/novels. Instead they are consumed in a process of appropriation, which in literature is labelled as a “control of meaning” (see Arrojo 2002) and/or the “politics of translation” (Spivak 2012). There are a number of options to approach these issues. In the 1990s the question of cultural identity (Brisset 2012) was in the centre of attention and in the mid-to-late 2000s most of the studies in the field were connected to ideas of interdisciplinarity within the humanities and transnationality in the area of global citizenship studies (Snell-Hornby 2006). One of the options that I will stipulate as relevant here is the idea of Cross-Cultural

research across the humanities that will prepare (or at least help) translators to deal with issues embedded in a particular cultural discourse where these topics are, more or less, self-explanatory. The concept is already promoted by the Germanic studies community and especially in the work of Snell-Hornby. She claims that we cannot talk about a paradigm shift in the approach to translation, but for sure we are in the age of “shifting the viewpoint” in the discipline. In a centre of Snell-Hornby’s attention is the idea of “*Blickwechsel*,” which in German means the “exchange of glances” (2006: 2). In her opinion the central focus of this change of viewpoint should be on the interweaving of discourse and cultural factors (2012: 134). As stipulated by Spivak, this leads towards a new type of intercultural communication which is now not Eurocentric in the consideration of the domination in space nor Anglocentric in the sphere of language ownership, but also open to views, judgement calls and manipulations from the “other side” as well (since every hegemonic order has its counter-hegemonic opponents). If a text is not conveyed (trans-created) with the thorough consideration of most of the issues discussed here, in another culture (as well as in another discourse and hegemonic order) readers/viewers may, and probably will, miss subtle suggestions⁸ from some finely conveyed layers of textual possibility, and sometimes can under-interpret or over-interpret the underlayer(s) of crucial importance for understanding the textual potentials, being it in a particular novel, poem, film or television series.

In the context of what has been said so far, we first have to say a few words about trans-creation as a process that is very closely connected to cross-cultural research and teaching. This is not only a problem from a “foreign,” “far away,” or “unknown” culture but it represents a significant issue in connecting to a text’s discursive anomalies (or un-globalized, locally connoted and suggested issues/layers of meaning). These local issues are usually not understood to the full extent in translations without footnotes, or without some sort of departing from the traditional way of translating (as described by Bandia 2018) and they engage in the process of trans-creation that we have mentioned a number of times so far. To do so we shall peruse a few works related to Korea and Koreans that are written either by Korean writers or of Korean descent living in the United States. For examples in this article I have chosen three writers of Korean descent, or, if we look from (an)other perspective, Koreans who write and live in *another language*, or we can also say discourse, cultural environment; that is – they write in English and are positioned in between two cultures. But they are still connected to their culture of origin. One of these three writers’ lives in United States and writes in English, two other female writers used to live in the United

8 On the questions of “overinterpretation” and “under-interpretation” see the book co-authored by Umberto Eco and Richard Rorty: *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1992; Cambridge University Press).

States, but now they have returned to Korea while they still publish in English. Looking from the perspective of the presentation and representation of their narrated worlds, all three of them, to a certain degree, belong to what nowadays is considered to be the realm of global literature. All three of them are supporters of local, Korean themes and traditions while at the same time they remain strong advocates of de-localized, universally human issues. The writer living in the United States from the age of three is Chang Rae Lee. He has received numerous prizes in American “mainstream” literature, has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize twice and is well respected in “mainstream” American literature, while still considered to be an ethnic writer.

In works of Chang Rea Lee these processes of delocalization are taking a few different directions in his narratives. After publishing his first novel, *Native Speaker*, he was labelled as the founder of American Korean writing school (Page 2017: 16), even though there have been a number of Korean writers in the States before him, for example there was Younghill Kang with his novels *The Grass Roof* (1931) and *East Goes West* (1937), or later Richard E. Kim with his best seller *The Martyred* (1964). Being labelled “the first Korean American writer,” he was often considered an autobiographical author, and put in a position of *Being of Two Cultures and Belonging to Neither*, as Pam Belluck (1995) wrote in the *New York Times*. Many critics emphasize his “rapturous evocation of past life, viewed across a great gap of time and culture” (Page 2017: 2). Insisting on the autobiographical element, many American critics, as Amanda M. Page in her book on Chang-Rae Lee put it, undermined the author’s work as a piece of creative fiction.

Sometimes it is the destiny of authors with “ethnic” names and literary topics to be simultaneously considered global and dislocated in the space between their countries of origin and the cultures of difference they are trying to bridge in their imaginary worlds. Homi Bhaba (1994) speaks about this positioning “in between” as “being neither here or there.” This is the position Lee uses not only in *Native Speaker*, but in all of his later books. He will use this tactic to reconcile his double folded identity: the position of belonging to “the great western tradition” and simultaneously being the other in comparison to its mainstream topics, issues, language and created world(s). Following these tactics, he not only writes about (Korean) minorities, but also other types and modules of otherness. In my opinion this can best be seen and interpreted in two of his novels: *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) and *My Year Abroad* (2021). The first book is set in some distant future (maybe 150-200 years from now) and the division of the imagined society is very much dependent on today’s understanding of the positioning between different cultures, and the domination of one cultural paradigm over the expense of other(s). To be able to read this in such a key, the interpreter has to be able to translate not only elements of speculative space and chain of events, but the consideration of the present being transformed (or

changed) into a mostly upsetting and destructive image of the future. Many elements of contemporary Korean life and signs referring to Korean discourse are embedded into the procedures of this imagined future and its ways of handling the crises of the future to come. By not decoding these signs it is very difficult to understand some of the textual layers. For example, even though the novel is written in English and in the United States, when talking about community responsibility in the joint households of the future, one could not fully understand and appreciate the irony of this social hierarchy in if the discourse of the Korean family is not familiar.

If we take a look into Lee's latest novel, *My Year Abroad*, the motive of being Asian, or especially of Eastern Asian descent, has an important role in better understanding the motivation of the main character and some of the elements of the "Asian way of doing business," of "being entertained," which to outsiders may look unconvincing or even grotesque. In other words, the whole not-trans-created world of difference, either "in between" or of "the other," will not be understood and accepted in its complexity and there will always remain something exotic, foreign or/and excluded, that to the "outsider" (*the other*) looks and sounds artificial. This is exactly the way in which we read today famous Indian-British authors such as Salman Rushdie or Aravind Adiga. The way that British critics have appropriated and naturalized their works takes its framework from postcolonial studies and the ways in which cross-cultural issues are settled in a process of the negotiation between the so-called Centre (West) and the Otherness of what is usually called *the space of others* (sometimes the Orient, sometimes the East, sometimes the Edge or the Border, and sometimes the Third World).

East Asian positioning in relation to the idea of the West and of "being western" is different, both in the tactical approaches of authors and critics and in the way otherness is treated. This is especially visible in popular culture and film. A good example is Euny Hong. She is the author of just one novel in English which had limited success. It may even be better to say that this novel did not reach a wide audience, or even better, that it was not read in the appropriate key.⁹ *Kept* is definitely a novel about *being other* in the United States, and by being other I do not only think of being Korean, but of being some sort of the third entity

9 In my opinion in Hong's novel (2006) there is more "ethnic-self-irony" by and "otherness-destructiveness" which is a driven and inscribed potential than in today the very popular and often-quoted book by Gary Shteyngart entitled *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* (2002) which was, on one paperback issue by Penguin, proclaimed to be a "visionary" novel about a "Russian immigrant who is trying to find himself." The Korean ex-student and pseudo-prostitute in *Kept* in my opinion is a better character. Nevertheless, it is an interesting fact that Shteyngart was Chang Rea Lee's student in his course of creative writing, and that Lee was instrumental in publishing Shteyngart's novel in 2002.

(similar to some of Lee's or Shteyngart's characters). This third entity of Hong's is neither Korean nor English, but also not one, but many (things and not-possibilities) at once. It is about being pure and tainted, being faithful to the family but also its black sheep. The novel is set in both the United States and Korea, but I am of the opinion that it would be read very differently in each of the cultures. Furthermore, if the cross-cultural, and even transcultural context is not an integral part of the reader's horizon of expectations, it would be very difficult to understand not only the ironic and allegorical levels of communication, but also the very nature of the otherness presented in the novel. When talking about Euny Hong, we must mention two books which, contrary to her only novel so far, are great hits worldwide. One of these books is especially popular. At the same time this book is a popular reading and reference source for scholars. That is *The Birth of Korean Cool*, with its subtitle *How one Nation is Conquering the World through Pop Culture*. The book is written from a personal perspective, in its introduction it gives Hong's personal story: after 20 years in the United States her parents decided to move back to Seoul in 1985. Hong was 12 years old at the time. That means she had a basic knowledge about American culture (in America school kids called her a "Jap," and she "never made the effort to explain that she was actually Korean"). When asked by other kids if she is Chinese, her answer was "yes," so not to complicate things. Already in this first chapter she changes the perspective and starts the narrative about Korea's journey from poverty and anonymity to being the fifteenth largest economy in the world, and discusses the scope of popularity of Korean popular culture, being it film, tv series, video games, cartoons or popular music. The style and narrative positioning in which the story about "the Korean cool" is narrated is very much located from the perspective that Bhabha would label as "in betweenness." Hong went back to the United States for her university education, and then returned to Korea for a second time. She always stipulates that her education is American, that she understands what westerners "expect" from the/her story of otherness, from distant others and their ways of living, thinking, acting. This is obvious when she discusses the vernaculars of Korean life and consciously works on a contextualization of these differences intensively using a frame of reference that would be understandable to the Westerners. In other words, she trans-creates the Korean other into the form and language (English) in a way that is going to be understandable, acceptable and palatable for this western frame of mind and its expectations; that is the preconceived idea(s) of the East Asian other.

In the chapter on irony, for example, Hong explains how irony was a foreign concept for the Korean frame of mind, while herself using irony in a process of elaboration. She also explains (in very superficial terms and with a strong ironic zest) the concept of *han*, the importance of tradition, and later in another chapter the idea of *hallyu* as a neo-politicized way of "conquering" the (at least Eastern) part of the world. She completes the story of Korean Cool by

exposing the “secret weapon” of South Korea’s conquering of the world, which is video games. In her second non-fictional book (*The Power of Nunchi: The Korean Secret to Happiness and Success*, 2019) Hong continues in a same “foreign but insider” style, now writing about the idea and various perceptions of the concept of *nunchi*. At first glance, this book may be conceived as belonging to the so called “self-help” genre of “world pseudo-literature,” while in fact this text is a very cleverly organized continuation of the previous book. It exploits the concept of an original Korean idea and the practice of difference as well as the usage and possible tactics through which this difference can penetrate the contemporary global environment (market). In brief, this book could be a good example of what we said at the beginning in the theoretical introduction: being locally identified, a cultural entity at the same time strives to be recognized outside of its own discursive surroundings, while also mystifying the origins and specificity of its own differentiation tactics and locally shared experience. The purpose of this “mystification” is the (post)modern urge to be different yet the same, original yet the part of the bigger picture, a user but also a contributor to the “wider course.” This ambivalent concept of difference-sameness is what is “hardest to grasp” in the other cultural (or discursive) environment¹⁰ and it is not primarily of a philological nature. It can best be denoted at the level of reading the tactics in which it can be seen how the idea of otherness is used in the hierarchy of text and its manipulative tactics, as well as in the wider practices of the poetics of the everyday.

This possibility is mastered in the prose works of Krys Lee, which are written in English. She as well was educated in the United States, but also in the United Kingdom. Just as Hong, she now lives in Seoul. While Hong is a journalist, Lee is pursuing an academic career, teaching creative writing. She is a well-respected author on the international scene, as both of her fictional books are. Her collection of short stories *The Drifting House* is situated in both the United States and South Korea. This is a socially-aware literature and all of the stories deal with problems of contemporary society. In the focus of her narrative attention is the difference between the Far East (Korea) and the West (United States). Through her narrative procedures, Lee often reminds us of the works of British sub-continent writers and their specific, sometimes ironic, but most of the time emphatic view of the difficulties with the concept of “being in between.” This authorial intention is even more direct in her novel *How I Became a North Korean*. In that very complex and complexly layered prose text she is re/presenting at least two different spaces (the States and the Korean Peninsula), three nations (Koreans,

10 This process is very openly visible in Korean society because the process of modernization (and post-modernisation) in South Korea was very fast, planned and in some respects forced upon communities. That can be seen very well in the novels of Hwang Sok-jong, Kim Young-ha and Han Kang.

Chinese, and Americans) two systems (Capitalism and Socialist Dictatorship), the dichotomy between religion and agnosticism, between the North and the South (particularly in the case of the Two Koreas), but also between China and North Korea as well as between Eastern Asian communism (and the pseudo-capitalism of China) and American society (with all its complex entanglement of opportunities, repression, inclusions and exclusions). In this complex structure it is obvious that voices employed by author stipulate what Mikhail Bakhtin labelled as polyphonic consciousness. However, this is a very specific kind of polyphony. It divides, rather than intertwines voices with different discursive backgrounds and often remotely located spaces of identification. To translate intentions and tensions between various cultural paradigms and their discursive differences becomes an interpretative necessity, despite the fact that the whole novel is written in English. This unique literary work is very much embedded in the space of otherness (the border between North Korea and China) but also has a form of a contemporary global (read western, or stipulated by the western idea) novel. Lee intentionally writes with an intention to be read and accepted on the global literary scene, but even in this form that is common and acceptable by Western reader(s), there are a number of semantic and tactical layers that call for further cross-cultural references (active engagement of the reader/interpreter) in order to be understood and accepted as rounded and aesthetically completed, as “suitable” for reception in the English-speaking world.

5. Conclusion: The other language as a tool through which the “local” is becoming global (Korean literature as World-Literature)

Our examples of three Korean writers who write in English show two facts which are important for any cross-cultural studies project. The first is that the translation of the text is not simply a question of transfer from one language to another, that is an interaction with *an/other language*. In order to better grasp the various textual layers and interpret the textual connotations sometimes crucial for interpretative consensus, *the question of translation* also involves consideration of the other culture and its discursive power games. This becomes a very demanding extra-linguistic pressure, including cultural appropriation and ideological naturalization, involving a number of intercultural and cross-cultural tactics and activities that accompany the philological procedure of “accurately” translating the text. These problems have been in the focus of attention over the last thirty to forty years, especially in the domain of interdisciplinary translation studies (see Katan 2018, Spivak 2012 and Snell-Hornby 2006). I mentioned some of these problem in the description of Snell-Hornby’s term “glance of the

eye” and the dilemmas between a “paradigm shift” or a “new view of looking into problem(s).”

In my opinion working with texts and the extra-textual context of Korean-American (or in of our two cases former-American, or even better: global) writers provides a very good example of this process where “cultural procedures” and “the other discourse” are not only the focus of attention, but without them it is not possible to read a text without a significant “reminder” of un-translated discursive possibilities. The beginning of this “process-solving environment” can be established as a framing discourse while the dynamic and dialectic process of interviewing one cultural and hegemonic complex with (or against) an/ other starts to take place in the practice of academic and pragmatist communities. In the relatively brief tradition of intercultural translation studies it is already consensually established that translation is always also an interpretation (see Edwards 2010) and that while translating, the question of “the right interpretation” is always connected not only to the text, but also to the way in which signifiers are interconnected (Derrida 2012). There are a number of scholars from literary theory, semiotics and philosophy who have paved the way to this “turn”: Umberto Eco with his book *Experience with Translation* (2010), Spivak, Derrida, Rorty and others. Coming from this type of background myself, I also argue for closer relationships between translation and interpretation but also for a comprehensive cross-cultural approach which will not only study various contextual differences and “discursive exchanges” but also a much wider series of interviewed phenomena and the models of their signification(s). The question of writers who write in the language of a dominant culture are introducing models of signification practices which are characteristic for various “cultures from the edge,” or “marginalized cultural practices” could play an important role in not only understanding what in translation “is lost” and what “also can be gained,” as it was cleverly written by Salman Rushdie,¹¹ but also what are the conceptual mechanisms in which this loss is substituted by what is gained. What type of linguistic, discursive and critical language and methodology is going to be applied here? How wide is the intervention that is going on behind the “pleasure of the text” in Barthes’s sense of the word, and should it be undertaken? And last but not least: would such an interpretative action also be a political act, or only an academic exercise?

These are very complex questions and for now I suggest that they remain open to be “tackled” from various angles and methodological standpoints. At this stage I will conclude that translation (or the work of perpetual translating) is a necessary tool in a process of interpretative practices, not only for foreign texts (ones originally written in another language and another discursive

11 This quote is paraphrased from the introductory chapter of Rushdie’s book *Imaginary Homelands* (1991).

environment) but also in works written in seemingly the same language (but in different discursive frames). Probably the major problems of the above questions can be better detected and discussed if one starts with the double fold possibilities of a text that represents some sort of “foreign object” attached to the dominant language as if it were some sort of weight. For trans-creation from language to language things will become more complex and multi-layered.

It now becomes obvious that in the process of cross-cultural communication (translation) we are dealing with two processes that take place simultaneously. The first one is the process of appropriation. That in fact is translation from language to language, but at the same time it is a translation (interpretation?) from one culturally and hegemonically distinguished discursive environment into another one. This involves not only the traditional philological procedure of translating words and sentences, but also knowing both the discourses and cultural differences between them. The appropriation of the cultural paradigms of another culture into the space of dominant others is one of the major macrostructural tools in Chang-Rea Lee’s novels. By transferring cultural patterns from “excluded” cultures (Chinese, Korean) into post-apocalyptic America, Lee also appropriates these patterns into a possible world of speculative reality. With that tactic he opens the possibility of viewing the other in imagined forms of interaction and domination, offering alternative possibilities that in different circumstances may not look convincing.¹² The second process is naturalization. This is also a process where adapting the “content” of the text into another environment is taking place. However, it also mimes the re/creation of the situation and spirit of another language and/or culture into the other environment. Instead of being introduced to another culture as a text that can be understood to the maximal extent, here the written utterance also has an ironic dimension. It is seemingly adapting into the realm of (an)other space (and language) but also tends to remain purposely different, at the same time tamed and untamed (but not wild). How misleading that can be is obvious in the novel *Kept*. I am aware of the series of metaphors with which I am trying to describe metaphorical language, narrative tactics and the imagined world of fiction. However, what is produced in the attempt to answer the questions posed in this conclusion is yet another metaphorical realm. Rita Felski in her above-mentioned chapter on metaphors produced as an answer (interpretation) of other metaphors claims that this prolonging, or deferring of definite answer(s) is in fact the true nature of our job as literary critics and interpreters. Nevertheless, I think that the question of margin and the “edge” (as understood by WReC 2016) is better seen and it is easier to approach it from the perspective of the usage of the same

12 French hermeneutician Paul Ricoeur distinguishes the difference between the convincing and the true in literary work. According to him, the major characteristic of a fictional world should be persuasiveness (to be convincing), and not to speak the truth.

language for the purpose of fighting one's own battles, being it the preservation of a hegemonic order (in the imagined and imposed order of "Global Culture"), or a counter-hegemonic resistance fought in the language of one's own *other(s)*.

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