



# Translation und „Drittes Reich“ II

Translationsgeschichte  
als methodologische Herausforderung

Larisa Schippel/Julia Richter (Hg.)

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**Instead of a preface:**  
**The Act of Interpreting: Embodiment, Humanity, Hope**

My grandfather's name was Armand Jacobovitch. He was born in 1913, in Zurich Switzerland, then son of stateless Jewish immigrants from Poland. In about 1919, his family moved to Strasbourg, France, where he grew up and began studying German literature at the University of Strasbourg. His secondary education was disrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. He was drafted into the French military; when France fell, he was discharged, and then he and my grandmother went into hiding in the "Free Zone" in the south of France. When that, too, fell to the Germans in 1942, they fled again, to Switzerland, where both were lucky enough to be accepted as refugees and interned in refugee camps. My grandfather was released from his internment to study in the newly founded School of Interpreting at the University of Geneva, and as soon as he earned his degree, he was recruited to work as a simultaneous interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials. And so he began his career with the strange distinction of being the only professional interpreter at the Trials who was still a refugee from the Nazis at the time he began translating their voices. While there were a few other Jewish translators and interpreters at the trial, and some former refugees, my grandfather, as far as I can ascertain, was the one most directly affected by the Nazi genocide: not only was he himself a refugee, as well as his wife and daughter (who were still living as refugees in Switzerland during the trials) – he actually learned how his parents perished in Auschwitz as he observed and translated the first testimonies of those mass murders.

My grandfather spoke fairly often of his experiences during the trials, much more often than about most of his experiences during the Second World War. As a child I loved to hear him explain the system of lights the interpreters used to signal to the rest of the court; to recall the comments French Judge Henri Donnedieu de Vabre liked to mutter under cover of his bushy mustache (my grandfather was assigned to be Donnedieu de Vabre's personal interpreter part-way through Trial One); to recount how difficult it was to translate Hermann Göring's long, elaborate sentences.

But although my grandfather had no trouble describing the labor of the Trials, he was almost silent when it came to the work it required – about what he was translating and the impact it had on him. In a radio interview with Tomas Fitzel in 1995, my grandfather commented that the work had been a kind of filter – as long as he kept working, the knowledge of its contents seemed not to affect him. But, as Fitzel later observed to me, “in reality the filter was he himself, without being conscious that what he translated became something he kept in him.” But it was. The trauma and tragedy of what he saw and heard affected him deeply, so deeply that at times it was hard for him to find the will to live. But far more importantly, what my grandfather translated fundamentally altered the way he viewed humanity. His work at the Trials made him an adamant and active opponent of the death penalty as long as he was able to speak out against it.

Although my grandfather made clear that there was a connection between what he had seen and done at Nuremberg and this deep opposition, he was never fully able to articulate it to me. And I did not understand it until I myself became an interpreter, which, coincidentally (if anything in life is truly a coincidence) happened while I was conducting the research for my first book, which explored the story of my grandparents’ survival during the Second World War and their subsequent, mysterious estrangement.

The act of interpreting means many things to many people in many contexts, but interpreting is always embodiment: in a brief, evanescent way, an interpreter incarnates an essential component of someone else’s humanity – everything a subject expresses of him or herself through speech. A strange, temporary power reversal occurs. Another person has taken your life, not into their hands, but into their very self. My first experience of this had nothing of the gravity of Nuremberg, and yet I saw clearly how much was at stake for the man whose words I was to translate: I accompanied some American health and hygiene officials on an inspection of a French cheese factory. I could see the factory owner becoming increasingly distressed at the Americans’ lack of interest in his one overriding passion, which was producing perfect cheese. No matter how thoroughly he explained each step of the process, from selecting the right sea salt to washing the cheese rinds to his meticulous ripening schedule, all the inspectors asked about and noted was whether his milk was pasteurized. By the end of the visit, the factory owner had become so frustrated that it was all he could do not to grab me by the collar and shake me. “Can’t you explain?” he beseeched. “This is my entire life! Can’t you make them see?” I was his only chance to make himself understood. He needed me to embody his passion and commitment – he needed me to be his ally.

In any situation where an interpreter and subject are able to observe each other, they both live, if only fleetingly, a moment of alliance, a moment when one of them hands a piece of themselves into the other's care. Interpreter and subject, if only for an instant, have opened the door on their shared humanity. In a situation like Nuremberg, when the defendants' lives actually were on the line, the light shed by that open door could feel quite stark. The defendants reacted in different ways. "You are shortening my life by several years," Hermann Göring is reputed to have snapped at one interpreter. Albert Speer, who my grandfather described as *le moins pire* ('the least worst') would sometimes drop notes to the interpreters to help them with vocabulary. And what about the interpreters? What about my grandfather? Mario Vargas Llosa has called interpreting "the profession of phantoms" but I believe that it was my grandfather who was haunted, for the rest of his life, by this experience of shared humanity. As Romain Gary put it in *The Kites*, "What if Nazism isn't an inhuman monstrosity? What if it's human?"

Most translation under the "Third Reich" and in its wake took place in situations of violence, coercion, and constraint, or in their shadow, in an inhumane culture whose end goal was the eradication of not only the languages and cultures being translated, but also the translators themselves. It may at times seem difficult to bring much in the way of hope or light to the study of this dark era – let alone to carry any away from it. But to do so is essential for any lasting historical project. To me, remembering the interpreter and subject's experience of embodiment and embodying is crucial to the process of building a historiography of translation under the "Third Reich". To interpret and to be interpreted is to be forced, if only for an instant, into a mutual recognition of each other's humanity – to unsettle, in other words, the Nazi project and worldview.

When my grandfather watched certain defendants at Nuremberg nodding hello to him and the other interpreters as they filed into the courtroom, what he was observing was nothing less than a minute breakdown of the system his would-be executioners had attempted to impose. They were brief flashes in which the Nazi defendants recognized the humanity of their interpreter at the same time that their interpreter recognized his own humanity in them. What happened in those instants must not be forgotten: we become one another. We are one another. Interpreting embodies that truth. My grandfather was, as he said, a filter. He was irretrievably "infiltrated" – by not an idea, but by the powerful, firsthand experience of the interconnected humanity of himself and a group of men who had set out to obliterate him. Let us, as we work, carry with us this small sliver of hope: whenever interpretation takes place, a fragile bridge

is built. It may not last; it may be dismantled as quickly as it was erected – but across it, in the time it remains standing, humanity itself may pass.

Anm. d. Hrsg.: Miranda Richmond Mouillot veröffentlichte 2015 die Geschichte ihrer Großeltern *A Fifty-Year Silence. Love, War, and a Ruined House in France*, das 2017 in der Übersetzung von Astrid Finke als *Anna und Armand. Wie meine Großeltern im Krieg die Liebe fanden und das Leben sie doch für immer trennte* bei Blanvalet erschien.

## Einführung: Translationsgeschichte als methodologische Herausforderung

Während der Tagung „Translation und ‚Drittes Reich‘“ in Berlin, deren Ergebnisse im Band *Translation und „Drittes Reich“. Menschen – Entscheidungen – Folgen* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2016) vorliegen, kristallisierte sich sehr deutlich heraus, dass Translationsgeschichte an sich, aber Translationsgeschichte für den Zeitraum 1933 bis 1945 in ganz besonderem Maße einer gründlichen Reflexion ihrer Methoden bedarf. Diesen Überlegungen geht Lieven D’hulst nach und systematisiert die Kriterien, mit Hilfe derer sich Translationsgeschichte für den Zeitraum des „Dritten Reichs“ bzw. des Zweiten Weltkrieges bearbeiten und aufarbeiten lässt. Diese Beobachtung der besonderen Anforderungen führte zu einer weiteren Tagung, dieses Mal in Wien, und nach längerer Bearbeitung zu dem hier vorgelegten Band. An die Autorinnen und Autoren erging die Bitte um Diskussion spezifischer methodologischer Probleme und Erwägungen.

Den literarisch-biografischen Auftakt schuf Miranda Richmond-Mouillot mit ihrer Spurensuche nach dem dramatischen Bruch im Leben ihres Großvaters Armand Jacoubovitch, der als Dolmetscher bei den Nürnberger Prozessen arbeitete, eine Tätigkeit, die sein Leben und das seiner Familie dramatisch veränderte.<sup>1</sup> Einen Bruch anderer Art im Leben eines von den nationalsozialistischen Verfolgungen gezeichneten Lebens stellt Malgorzata Tryuk mit der Auschwitz-Überlebenden Wanda Jakubowska vor, deren Film *Ostatni etap* einer der ersten Auschwitzfilme überhaupt, eine Lagerdolmetscherin zur Protagonistin im Film macht. Wie ist mit einem solchen Zeugnis umzugehen, wo doch Translation in den NS-Lagern besonders schwierig zu erforschen ist und fast ausschließlich von Augenzeugenschaft, Berichten und Autobiografien lebt. Marta Borning gelingt es anhand von Archivdokumenten nachzuzeichnen, wie die Dolmetsch- und Übersetzungsarbeit im Getto Lodsch (Eigenbezeichnung der Juden für ihre Stadt) über ein eigenes Übersetzungs- und Korrespondenzbüro organisiert wurde. Die Tatsache, dass Marcel Reich-Ranicki in seiner Autobiografie über seine Tätigkeit im Übersetzungs- und Korrespondenzbüro des Gettos in Warschau berichtet, liefert hier einen Anhalt für die strukturelle An-

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1 Anna und Armand. Wie meine Großeltern im Krieg die Liebe fanden und das Leben sie doch für immer trennte. Blanvalet.



lage translatorischer Tätigkeiten im Getto. Michaela Wolf betrachtet unter diesem Aspekt und in einem Herangehen mit dem Instrumentarium der *Histoire crosée* Konfliktsituationen im Konzentrationslager, wo translatorisches Handeln mitunter lebensrettend sein konnte. Sie prüft hier das Aufschlusspotential sich „überkreuzender Blicke“ für Konfliktsituationen.

In Ergänzung zu den bereits publizierten Arbeiten zur sog. Dolmetscher-Bereitschaft, einem Weiterbildungs- und Gleichschaltungsorgan speziell für Dolmetscher der NS-Reichsfachschaft für die Sprachen Französisch, Englisch, Russisch, Spanisch und Italienisch, befasst sich Raphaela Wiltsche mit den Spezifika dieser Texte für Russisch-Dolmetscher.

Das sogenannte „Dritte Reich“ ist für viele Menschen unauflöslich verbunden mit der Notwendigkeit, Deutschland oder Österreich und später auch von der NS-Wehrmacht besetzte Länder zu verlassen, was freilich vielen auch nicht gelingt. Einer der Anlässe für das Exil von TranslatorInnen waren die berüchtigten Thesen „Wider den undeutschen Geist“, die auch das Rückgrat für die Bücherverbrennungen in Deutschland bildeten. Tomasz Rozmyslowicz untersucht den Inhalt der 7. These im Hinblick auf eine translationstheoretische Interpretationsmöglichkeit als Pseudo-Übersetzung.

Mit Translation im Exil und mit Übersetzerinnen und Übersetzern im Exil, ihren translatorischen Möglichkeiten, den im Exil entwickelten Optionen zur Übersetzung der eigenen Werke, um in der Academia im Exilland erneut Fuß zu fassen, beschäftigen sich die Beiträge von Ariadne Avkiran (Hans Reichenbach im Exil in Istanbul als Beteiligter der Reform der Universität Istanbul), Stefanie Kremmel, die an Justinian Frischs Leben ergründet, wie biografisches Schreiben bei der entsprechenden Quellenlage, mit translatorischem Forschungsinteresse unter Nutzung der familiären Hinterlassenschaft und seiner Korrespondenz zu aussagekräftigen Daten über ein Leben im Exil führen, sowie von Barbara Reitz, für deren Protagonist, Stefan I. Klein, eine sehr heterogene Quellenlage zu konstatieren ist, weshalb die Verfasserin zu einer Methodentriangulation anhand eines Korpus aus Selbstzeugnissen, Biografien, Zeitungartikeln sowie Stefan Kleins bisher untersuchter Übersetzerbibliografie (derzeit mehr als 60 Buchpublikationen der ungarischen literarischen Avantgarde und der politischen Linken), historiografischen Fachpublikationen sowie einer auf Basis der Archivalien erstellten annähernden Geobiografie greift, während Julia Richter sich einer zwar intensiv erforschten Autorin – Hanna Arendt – zuwendet, um nachzuverfolgen, welche Arbeitsweisen und Beteiligten die netzwerkbildenden Fähigkeiten dieser Autorin hervorbringen, wenn es darum geht, bereits publizierte, aber auch neue Arbeiten von Arendt auf Englisch zu veröffent-

lichen, womit es Julia Richter zugleich gelingt, deutlich zu machen, dass da noch Neues, vor allem translationshistorisch Neues, wartet. Der eher modische Terminus des kollaborativen Übersetzens, der heute in der Translationswissenschaft Fuß fasst und scheinbar auf neuere Konstellationen translatorischer Zusammenarbeit zielt, bekommt hier einen historischen materialreichen Hintergrund. Ine Van Lindhout untersucht, wie sich die translatorischen Präferenzen des NS-Regimes entwickeln, entwickelt werden und weshalb besonders flämische Autoren ausgewählt werden, um in Übersetzungen einem deutschsprachigen Lesepublikum angeboten zu werden. Pekka Kujämäki stellt eine weitere Inszenierung, hier die der „finnisch-deutschen Waffenbrüderschaft“ in den Mittelpunkt seiner translationshistorischen Betrachtungen und lenkt unsere Aufmerksamkeit damit auf die Vermittlungs- und Verständigungsarbeit der Dolmetscher „auf der Hinterbühne“. Eine völlig andere Facette des Kriegs bzw. der notwendigen Vorbereitung auf die Kriegssituation zeigt Alexandra Škapova, indem sie in einem historischen Abriss zeigt, welche Anforderungen plötzlich vor der sowjetischen Translationswissenschaft standen, um das Land mit Militärdolmetschern und -übersetzern versorgen zu können, und welche Entwicklungen damit in dieser Disziplin einsetzten. Damit wirft sie einen Blick auf die Folgen des Bruchs des Deutsch-Sowjetischen Nichtangriffsvertrags und damit auf die Folgen im Land des erklärten Feindes des NS-Regimes. Mit Spätfolgen dieser Gegnerschaft befasst sich Ludmilla Grischaewa, wenn sie an einer rezenten Übersetzung von Erinnerungen deutscher Kriegsgefangener ins Russische fragt, wie die unterschiedliche Position im und nach dem Krieg und damit auch unterschiedliche Diskurspositionen translatorisch zu behandeln und kenntlich gemacht werden können.

Einen Blick auf ein Übersetzerleben im Inneren des Systems wirft Magdalena Partl, indem sie die Bemühungen um die Aufrechterhaltung ihres Tätigkeitsspektrums als Agentin, Literatin und Übersetzerin von Hermen von Kleeborn nachverfolgt.

Georg Felix Harsch beschäftigt sich mit zwei Übersetzungen von Texten, die die Taten nationalsozialistischer Funktionäre beleuchten und mit den Auswirkungen, die diese Übersetzungen ins Deutsche auf das Leben zweier dieser Funktionäre nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges in den Zielkontexten der beiden Übersetzungen haben: in der Nachkriegs-DDR und der Nachkriegs-BRD.

Übersetzen unter Exilbedingungen und einem Netzwerk auf der Metaebene geht Larisa Schippel nach und wirft einen transkulturellen Blick auf die Übersetzungen und Übersetzer eines antifaschistischen Buches, das selbst im Exil

entstand – Ignazio Silones *Fontamara*, indem sie die Übersetzerinnen und Übersetzer mit ihren politischen und translatorischen Haltungen in Beziehung setzt und den semiotischen Raum skizziert, der mit diesen Übersetzungen innerhalb weniger Jahre entsteht.

Die hier versammelten Beiträge zeigen deutlich sehr viele Anknüpfungsmöglichkeiten für weitere Forschungen, deuten auf noch nicht untersuchte translatorische Konstellationen hin und lassen zugleich erkennen, dass das Feld aufgeschlossen ist und weiterer Exploration harrt.

Die Herausgeberinnen

## Translation and the “*Third Reich*”: digging into the historian’s toolbox

### 1. Preamble

In both the title of this volume and this contribution, the conjunction “and” links “translation” and the “*Third Reich*” without synchronizing them, as with “during”, and so the scope includes or may include translation before as well as after the period 1933-1945. Further, “translation” may cover interlingual translation as well as other transfer modalities, including audiovisual translation and so-called cultural translation. As to the term “*Third Reich*”, it may apply to a range of social, political, cultural, legal, military or administrative spheres in which translation has played a role. Finally, as a token of totalitarianism, the “*Third Reich*” may invite for a comparative viewpoint that looks for parallels and differences with Spanish, Italian, Portuguese or other hegemonic regimes, before or after the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

All in all, the topic and argument of *Translation and the “Third Reich”* has a considerable potential for translation studies at large, and translation history in particular. The following contribution will go through a number of practical and theoretical issues that may have relevance for a historical approach of translation and the “*Third Reich*”: a set of possible objects of translation history and few historiographical challenges. But first comes a terminological clarification of the term translation history, which brings together, once more, two domains or practices.

As we understand it today, translation *history* is a scholarly and self-reflexive endeavour that spells out the concepts and methods it uses. Its scholarly bias is also evidenced by an openness toward hypotheses and methods coming from a wide array of branches of current historical research, such as cultural history, micro-history, political history, comparative history, memory studies, etc. Also, translation history engages in a close dialogue with other disciplines of the social sciences and beyond, either directly, or indirectly, i.e. via the latter’s historical branches: think of the history of legal translation, translation sociology, media translation, etc. As to the self-reflexivity of translation history, it may evolve into

an apt study of the concepts and methods of history-making, in which case it deals with historical epistemology, the underlying presuppositions of the historian, the use of time and space categories, or the metalanguage of the historian<sup>1</sup>. Here again, translation history strongly interconnects with other branches or disciplines.

*Translation* history differs from other types of translation research, not so much because of the nature of the objects involved (translation history may cover most items that belong to the field of translation studies, and history or temporality is a basic feature of all things, be they inanimate or human), but because of the historical viewpoint it applies to these objects. This is not to say, however, that all objects of the past are observable, nor that all observable objects will ever be studied, notably because they are not all interesting or revealing<sup>2</sup>. Historical viewpoints are indeed rooted in present concerns. As a matter of fact, it is only recently – and still partially – that the issues of language and translation during wartime and even more the “*Third Reich*” or other hegemonic regimes have been brought to the fore of translation studies. To explain why would need further investigation, for instance about the growing awareness that “cultural policy and practices [are] at the very centre of our understanding of fascism” (Rundle and Sturge 2010: 3), and about the growing awareness of translation as “a prime area of interest for scholars of fascist cultural policy” (Rundle and Sturge 2010: 4). There is more to say, of course, but let it suffice at this point to recall that historian’s viewpoints are by definition rooted in present concerns.

## 2. Objects and procedures

Lists of objects are helpful as a heuristic resource. They do not make up a research program, but may open up avenues, among which seven will be briefly prospected hereafter.

### 2.1. Agents

The last decades witness a growth of translator oriented research, including in the domain that concerns us here. Given the long-standing translationalogical fo-

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1 There is a consistent body of research on metahistoriography in general and with regard to disciplinary fields (cf. a. o. P. VEYNE 1978<sup>2</sup> and E. F. K. KOERNER 2006). See also D’HULST 2010.

2 Even if the “*Third Reich*” will leave nobody indifferent, if only from an ethical point of view.

cus on literary translation, it should not come as a surprise that literary translators have benefited from greater attention than other agents (e. g. STURGE 2004; LOMBEZ 2019). Nonetheless, new trends have emerged, which highlight professional translators (e. g. ANDRES et al. 2017), women translators (WILTSCHE 2021) as well as other mediators such as dubbing actors in propaganda movies, or interpreters during trials (cf. GALBA 1998; TRYUK 2016a). More diversity in scope allows new themes to appear on the agenda, such as the training of translators, their social and institutional embedding, their relations with other mediators, or their transnational activity (e. g. SCHIPPEL & KUJAMÄKI 2021).

Yet, translators and, even more, interpreters remain among the most unequally accessible mediators. They are small links in large and complex communication chains designed by political and administrative authorities. Their non-printed output (correspondence, memoirs, draft versions) has not stood the test of time, has not been kept by heirs, or remains unclassified in archives. Most invisible, perhaps, are the countless anonymous soldiers, officers, civils and prisoners working in central, or local administrations, in police and court, in the exceptional setting of war zones, and labour and concentration camps, where written communication has been less documented and filed, if not deliberately destroyed (see however the research carried out on the basis of survivor accounts by a. o. WOLF 2013, 2014, 2016 and TRYUK 2016b).

Counterbalancing historical oblivion, memory and fiction may take over the task of representing the past. Fictional, or fictionalized, figures of the translator and interpreter have become an interesting theme in translation studies. Narrative, movies and other media representing interpreters both at the time and later on (e. g. TRYUK 2016b) invite for a comparison with real translators while they provide indirect or hetero-images that may complete the rare instances of translator's auto-representation. Additionally, translations of testimonies and other private documents produced during wartime may yield ideological and ethical shifts of auctorial auto-representations (e. g. SPIESSENS 2013).

## 2.2. Texts, genres and media

Translated documents of all types and shapes (direct and indirect translation, partial translation, auto-translation, intersemiotic, audio-visual translation, legal translation, etc.) are an almost inexhaustible source of information about translation norms, i.e. the views about, and the techniques and intended effects of textual transmission between languages and cultures, all the more since the expertise to approach these norms from a historical and qualitative viewpoint is

by now largely spread, notably through so-called descriptive translation studies (TOURY 1995). It is a commonplace to say that the forms and functions of textual norms as well as their evolution depend on the interplay between numerous factors: cultural, economic, moral, ideological, etc. Literary translation norms differ from norms used in non-literary documents and genres, or other media, like interviews (a. o. DEGEN 2018) or movies (a. o. DÍAZ-CINTAS 2019).

The translation techniques developed or used during the “*Third Reich*” may be located on a scale going from literalism in bilingual grey literature to free and manipulative renderings of adult fiction, children’s literature, biographies, essays, etc. No need to recall that, being norm-driven, they are strongly dependent on the properties of genres, reader-expectations, or public policies.

On a more general note, it is worth bringing up that historical research on translation has largely neglected non-literary translation techniques, as well as other transfer or rewriting modalities such as paraphrases, abstracts, quotations, comments, with the exception of the already mentioned free translation in domains such as children’s literature, education or media. These modalities and hence the source-target relationships which they embody are no doubt less easily identifiable than translation proper. Nevertheless, they are of paramount importance when it comes to draw a fuller picture of the exchange modalities taking place between cultures or language communities (D’HULST 2012).

To account for the specifics of the hegemonic regime’s impact on norms, it is commendable to compare the “*Third Reich*” with other regimes over a longer period of time, i.e. one that extends the usual terms of the “*Third Reich*”. Norms are unevenly indebted to prevailing ideologies: some obviously bear direct traces of set nazi norms active in the literary domain, both as to the selection of source literatures (e. g. the Dutch and esp. Flemish being favoured in comparison with the French in Belgium, cf. VAN LINTHOUT 2018), source genres and texts (e. g. rural narrative in the case of Belgium, Van Linthout 2018). Others are shared with other regimes, sometimes over an extended period of time<sup>3</sup>. As we know, German Nazism offers some common points with the Italian regimes, as well as with the semi-fascist or para-fascist ones of Spain and Portugal (RUNDLÉ & STURGE 2010: 4). Naturally, these commonalities do not extend to all aspects or categories of translation and transfer.

As a case in point, hegemonic and transnational regimes such as the “*Third Reich*” make ample use of a large range of transfer techniques. These await then

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3 Cf. C. Stallaert on parallels and differences between Spain during Inquisition and Germany during the Nazi regime (STALLAERT 2006).

further investigation, not in the least because an integrated view of interlingual exchanges between and within occupied territories may lead to a better understanding of the distinct value and role attached to translation itself in comparison with other modalities, as well as its relative frequency, or its preferred association with certain domains and genres.

To compare views and practices and draw conclusions is no doubt fruitful, while it is a truism to warn for decontextualization and linear transposition from culture to culture, from period to period, from area to area or for neglecting specifics and differences in favour of parallels. It may be hoped that translation output will be inventoried and quantified in a more systematic way, allowing comparisons with original work in the same target language (cf. RUNDLE 2021), and hence a more nuanced view on norms.

### 2.3. Geographies

Spatial elements have recently clustered into a distinct domain of interest in translation history (D'HULST 2018). As to translation under hegemonic regimes, new tracks open up, like the study of places and zones of production and distribution of translations. One may think of translation and interpretation occurring in cultural and media centres hosting radio broadcasts (Germany calling, Radio Paris, the BBC, etc., cf. CHADWICK 2015) or institutional translation, including bilingual and multilingual propaganda posters, being made and printed in one controlling centre and then distributed into different occupied zones, or having a regional and local coverage only. Cities, towns and even smaller municipalities are important translating places during the First and Second World War, e.g. Brussels serving as a hub for the German occupant's translation policy in Belgian administration and cultural domain (FINCOEUR 1997), or Istanbul as a meeting and translating place for German academics in exile during the "*Third Reich*" (SEYHAN 2015).

Also, ad hoc translation loci deserve special mentioning: a. o. the escape routes that interlink free and occupied zones, the war areas inhabited by mobile groups of civilians and soldiers with varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as the many camps spread over Europe, which shelter multilingual communities with a high level of interlingual exchange.

Another spatial dimension to consider is directionality. Source and target languages feature countless translation directions within or across given language communities. Arguably, a hegemonic and expansionist regime tends to privilege extratranslation as a principle, while admitting if not favouring at the



same time intranlation in some niches of the national repertoire, e. g. in the literary domain, as with Flemish prose during the “*Third Reich*” (VAN LINTHOUT 2018).

## 2.4. Policies

As all regimes, hegemonic regimes devise language and translation policies that initiate and regulate communication and translation activities in all spheres that they consider relevant to the exercise of power, notably international politics, justice, education, army, economy, literature, press and propaganda. These policies belong to the set of instruments by means of which different authority levels of these regimes exchange with their citizens and those of occupied territories, as well as foreign governments and their administrations. They decide a. o. which texts are selected for translation, how they are translated, by whom and for whom, but also which texts and translations are banned, censored or manipulated otherwise. So far, little attention has been paid to the history of translation policies at large (D’HULST et al. 2016), while more comparative research would help to distinguish peculiar and shared aspects of regimes such as the Habsburg Empire, the first French Empire or the 20<sup>th</sup> century hegemonic regimes of Germany, Spain, Portugal or Italy.

Limited samples show that shared aspects may point at a kind of historically recurrent pragmatism, which is basically a pursuit of communicative effectiveness that often characterizes public policy in general, and language and translation policy in particular. Even in cases that seemingly lack an explicit regulation, “there is always a default policy” (GAZZOLA & GRIN 2017: 107). Such a hypothesis calls into question the assumption that there is a unique and determining relationship between a given regime and its translation policy. As a matter of fact, while the Germans applied much the same translation policy for propaganda purposes during the two World Wars in occupied Belgium, there is little doubt that they also reemployed existing techniques going back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Austrian Netherlands, which in turn had borrowed their techniques from earlier regimes (D’HULST 2017). Like habitualized translation, e. g. under Habsburg rule<sup>4</sup>, institutional translation has a long tradition based on pragmatism.

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4 This term refers to “the bilingualism or multilingualism that made the speakers of the various languages within the Monarchy switch between linguistic and cultural contexts in order to perform the daily labour of communication arising from their class-specific, professional and personal situations” (WOLF 2020: 59-60).

Besides the threads running through their policies, regimes also adjust the latter to different practices, media or genres. Take literature: while extratranslation seems to be the privileged direction (as in the case of legislation), intratranslation is equally practiced to a large extent and is steadily encouraged by promotional actions and subsidizing agencies. This points at a less studied aspect of translation policies, namely the dynamic interplay between dominant and dominated translation policies. While the first are a token of the strategy developed by rulers to extend or maintain power outwardly and inwardly, the second may express a tactics of survival<sup>5</sup>. They may also become a token of resilience against the dominant language and culture of the camps in contemporary or later narratives (as with Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* 1958<sup>2</sup>).

## 2.5. Causality

Historians of natural sciences take causality as a normal principle of evolution<sup>6</sup>, while interpretive explanations are preferred to causal ones in the history of most social sciences, including translation studies (KOSKINEN 2010). All the same, probabilistic and predictive thinking, which is in line with causality approaches, is highly debated in cultural and social history (a. o. LOISON 2016). Why translation occurs, why changes take place in translation policies, modes, functions, directions, frequencies, etc., are questions that gain real value when they provide appropriate answers to concrete historical questions.

Take, again, the issue of public translation in Belgium in wartime. One may list a number of possible answers to the question why translations were actually carried out: First, on the side of both the central German and local Flemish administrations, they ensured efficient communication with non-German citizens and communities. Second, on the side of Flemish cultural activists<sup>7</sup>, they expanded the expression range of their literature and history. Third, on the side of both German and Flemish political activists, they pushed back the otherwise

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5 Philosopher and anthropologist Michel de Certeau 1980 has coupled the metaphors of strategy and tactics, while adding cognates like poaching (braconnage), culling (ruse) and detour (détournement).

6 "The natural sciences presuppose the existence of laws of nature, and therefore that we can infer relationships, past or present, or between past and present, based on those laws; among natural scientists the claim that there are such laws is essentially taken as axiomatic. For humanists and social scientists, this is far more complex and contested territory" (ORESKE 2013: 595).

7 Flemish activists were actively involved in the *Flamenpolitik* of the Occupant, with the aim of obtaining more rights for their language and culture. The political branch was zealous for independence for Flanders.

dominant language and culture (France and French). Finally, on the side of German political nationalists, they were a means to sustain Pan-Germanism.

It is far from obvious to find a common denominator for these answers, the more since translators or governors rarely commented upon translating, and since, as already mentioned (see 2.4), translation had roots in communicative default policies, which call for additional, social and anthropological, hypotheses. Still, small answers make up an aggregate that may come closer to an interpretive explanation of bits and pieces of past translation events.

Nonetheless, to consider translation as shaped by a specific historical regime, i.e. the “*Third Reich*”, spontaneously invites for a one-sided study of the effects of translation: those that this regime exerts on values and ideas, regulations and practices, as well as on effects of translation. This runs the risk of one-sided determinism. For example, it remains to be seen to what extent translation and interpretation have been used as ways of resistance against the regime (see 2.4). Further, agents, language forms, genres, translation techniques, modes of printing and distributing, etc. are often maintained and reemployed by successive regimes, as part of a default policy deprived of an explicit regulation (cf. *supra*). Once again, one cannot but make a plea for a substantially broad historical description of the field of translational communication in order to lay bare which elements are borrowed from tradition and which elements change through decisions imposed by the regime.

## 2.6. Time

The concept of time includes a number of features that are of central concern for translation historians: continuity, reversal, radical change as well as simultaneity and periodization, to name but a few. More pointedly, they invite for a comparison with the temporal divisions common in other scholarly practices such as literary history or political history (RUNDLE 2018).

Understandingly, translation historians of the “*Third Reich*” rely on insights gained by their peers in this respect. Even then, as one knows, historical insights are dynamic and changing: for some the “*Third Reich*” was a unique regime that should be approached accordingly, for others it was one instance of a broader system of totalitarianism (e. g. RÜGER & WACHSMANN 2015). Correspondingly, translation historians may choose to focus on the limited period 1933-1945 only, or extend the scope. A stimulating perspective would perhaps consist of comparing translations of that period with later retranslations of the same texts, which may trigger different epistemological and ethical challenges.

Be that as it may, to approach translation within a timeframe that fits the regime or a larger period does not exempt the historian of inquiring about the layered nature of ideas on translation or translation techniques. It is worth recalling here the three temporal dimensions devised by French historian Fernand Braudel (1949): the *longue durée*, the *moyenne durée*, and the *durée événementielle*. Generally, translation historians have privileged the last and shortest temporality when it comes to study ideas, policies or techniques, while it would make sense to ascertain whether these ideas, policies or techniques exceed one generation, if not extend to longer periods. As argued before (see 2.4), some of the views and policies conceived by “*Third Reich*” translators and their authorities were in fact inherited from earlier hegemonic regimes.

## 2.7. Interdisciplinarity

It would be incongruous to reduce interdisciplinary interactions to some binary construct made up by a historical viewpoint and a translational viewpoint. Both are indeed multipolar: translation history comprises many subdomains as does history itself and so interaction may take place at several levels. Both are also mutually determined: at whatever level, the translation history viewpoint depends on the history viewpoint and the other way round. Still, a point of dissension might be the potentially unequal or unstable interface between both (cf. RUNDLE 2012). As long as translation historians of the “*Third Reich*” manage to highlight the exploratory potential of their domain of study, discover new events, actors, products, techniques, etc., they will no doubt attract peers, find resources, and interest scholars coming from other domains, including historians of the “*Third Reich*”. Yet, translation historians are not necessarily on a par with professional historians. The latter handle a stronger work divide, as do e.g. historians of language and linguistics, cultural historians, political historians and the like. They are able to do so because they are numerous, well surrounded, while the broadening field of translation history is covered by a small amount of translation historians, who have to become multitaskers, run the risk of remaining superficial, of neglecting aspects, of choosing tools with insufficient overlap, of advancing hazardous hypotheses.

One could naturally argue that all historians of the “*Third Reich*” and all translation scholars may find themselves faced with the fuzziness of the basic concepts or categories they use: what do we understand by translation, and what do we understand by the “*Third Reich*” (see also 1). But this fuzziness may even create greater gaps between the historical viewpoints expressed in case studies.

Be that as it may, the only way to make some progress, it seems, is to assume that the centre of gravity of the historical endeavour is not *a priori* translation proper, i.e. the *differentia specifica* of objects, translational and others, or viewpoints, translational and others, but a dynamic process of interaction. And so, the historical analysis of the relations between translations and the “*Third Reich*” is a never-ending process of interpretation and reinterpretation. If all viewpoints benefit in whatever respect from the interaction, there are good chances to think they all will go on cooperating.

Translation history is a demanding undertaking, not the least because the categories or research angles briefly evoked above are dynamically interactive: policies underpin translation flows and directions, agents carry ideologies, translators and interpreters combine an array of transfer techniques, time invests them all, etc. However, the principle of interaction does not by itself lay the foundations of a solid methodology, nor does it guarantee the possibility of designing feasible research plans. How then should the historian proceed when facing the many potential avenues? I would suggest to rely on Lévi-Strauss's views on anthropology as an intellectual process of “bricolage”:

[...] la règle de son jeu [du bricoleur] est de toujours s'arranger avec les “moyens du bord”, c'est-à-dire un ensemble à chaque instant fini d'outils et de matériaux, hétéroclites au surplus, parce que la composition de l'ensemble n'est pas en rapport avec le projet du moment, ni d'ailleurs avec aucun projet particulier, mais est le résultat contingent de toutes les occasions qui se sont présentées de renouveler ou d'enrichir le stock [...] (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1962: 27).

The “rule of the game” seems an appropriate way to describe translation historians as “bricoleurs intellectuels” (intellectual tinkerers), working in the immensely variegated field shaped by the articulation of “translation” and “*Third Reich*”. The path to follow is well known: one sets up a project, formulates a research question, defines a corpus, looks for a method that is fit to underpin a hypothesis. Some of the tools will be borrowed from adjacent disciplines and if necessary adapted to some extent. However, like most research in the social sciences, translation studies in general or translation history in particular rarely follow a set procedure (TAHIR GÜRÇAĞLAR 2007). This state of affairs may invite for a further reflection on procedures, as well as on recurrent matters of contention with regard to the history of translation in hegemonic regimes.

### 3. Conclusion

What does this overview of research objects and procedures that are deemed relevant for a historical approach towards the *Third Reich* amount to? The insights yielded by the perhaps unusual focus on translations, and notably on translations carried out under complex and extreme conditions may considerably diverge from those that are commonly expected to emerge from the application of a pre-existing and quite familiar frame, such as the one procured by so-called descriptive translation studies. These insights diverge as to the concepts that underpin them, including the concept of translation, as well as to the methods handled, including the recourse to interdisciplinary borrowings that have been deployed in order to achieve these results. But more striking and challenging are probably the insights with regard to the functions that are given to translating and translation. Some of these have been studied already, others no doubt wait to be defined and described in detail.

There is no point in discussing here whether one should take these divergent insights as possible extensions of what one could impolitely call mainstream research in e.g. the history of literary translation or institutional translation, rather than a new framework that would transversally cut through domains and genres and accept the use of an array of tools. Nor is there enough evidence to claim a generic potential for such a framework, one that could serve historical research in other eras and areas. Not only is it simply premature to take such a stand, there is in my view no gain to be expected from any plea for another turn: turns are more rhetoric or strategic than reliable. Above all, the historical viewpoint should refrain from making predictions in the first place. If history may be of use for the future, it is because it has been able to understand the past.

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## Marta Weiss – A Cinematic Figure of an Interpreter in a Nazi Concentration Camp

The Case of *The Last Stage* by Wanda Jakubowska

### Introduction

Fictional or cinematic representations of a translator are prominent figures in modern literature and film. Their symbolic function for literary or film narration has been deepened by scholars in Film or Literary Studies. This has also been broadly described from the Translation Studies perspective, notably in the seminal works by Andres (2008), Delabastita (2009) and Kaindl (2012) to name but a few. The motif of a translator in a given time or a situation is commonly used to depict their role for social, historic or communication questions of our times. This is usually contrasted with descriptions of the authentic social or historic reality of the practice of translation and interpreting contained in memoirs or recollections in order to investigate the concept of visibility of a translator and his or her role in a given period. *A fortiori*, the fictional or cinematic representation of the practice of a translator in extreme situations, as in a concentration camp during World War II, makes it possible to have insight into this atrocious reality. The present paper will deal with one of the first representations of a camp translator as shown in a feature film.

### *The Last Stage* and Film and Holocaust Studies

Film can be seen as most popular and powerful medium through which a specific narrative can be transmitted and collective memories of various social groups can be shaped. The visual representation of experiences of former inmates in Nazi concentration camps can be a way to gain access to different sorts of knowledge, including the subjective knowledge of history. For the film scholar Joshua Hirsch, Holocaust cinema is not only a transmitter of historical trauma, the films not only present historical events but also constitute an at-

tempt to embody and reproduce the trauma for the spectator through their form of narration (HIRSCH 2004: xi). At the same time the films can serve as a therapeutic treatment for both the audience and the narrator. The cinema can also be exceptional evidence of a practice when there is no other confirmation of the action in a particular situation or a period. In my paper, I intend to focus on the figure of an interpreter as painted in one of the first films about the Holocaust from 1948 by Wanda Jakubowska entitled *The Last Stage* (in Polish: *Ostatni etap*).

Wanda Jakubowska (1907-1998), Polish film director, was actively engaged with the communism during her entire life. In the summer of 1939, she finished her first film *Nad Niemnem* ('On the banks of the Niemen') based on the novel by Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841-1910), a prominent Polish novelist. It was never shown to the public and all the copies of the film disappeared without a trace during the war. She was active with the Polish resistance and was arrested by the Gestapo in Warsaw in 1942. First imprisoned in the infamous Pawiak prison in Warsaw, Jakubowska was sent to the concentration camp in Auschwitz, where she received her prisoner number 43513 which was tattooed on her arm. In the winter of 1945, she was transferred to the Ravensbrück concentration camp in a long and murderous death march from Auschwitz. She was freed on April 30, 1945.

In an interview with Barbara Hollender (1987: 14), Jakubowska admitted that she had planned to make a film about Auschwitz already during her deportation, while working as a photographer in the Rajska camp commando, which was an experimental agricultural branch of KL Auschwitz and where the taraxacum kok-saghyz, a plant for the production of rubber, was grown. Her decision to make a film about Auschwitz strengthened as soon as she passed the camp's gate in 1945. In another interview accorded to Barbara Mruklik in 1985, she explained that it was her personal duty as a camp survivor and as a film maker to bear witness to history and to register "the enormity of evil" she experienced in the camp. At the same time, the making of the film became a therapeutic endeavor for Jakubowska who repeated that she remained in the camp until 1948, the date of the film's production. In Jakubowska's own account, the years spent in the camp were the most formative for her as a person and as artist (KERNER 2011: 18).

The scenario of the film was written by Wanda Jakubowska together with Gerda Schneider, a German communist imprisoned in KL Ravensbrück, then sent to KL Auschwitz in 1942. She had the function of a *Blockältester* in block 4 and since 1943, she was *Blockältester* in the Rajska camp commando, where she

met Wanda Jakubowska. In 1944 she was sent back to the main camp Birkenau. The music of the film was composed by Polish composer Roman Palester (1907-1989). The author of the cinematography was Soviet photographer Benstion Monastyrsky.

Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor wrote that "Auschwitz cannot be explained nor can it be visualized" (SAXTON 2008: 6). Wanda Jakubowska's intention was not to explain Auschwitz, but to show a part of the truth about the concentration camp. At the beginning of her film, Jakubowska introduces a statement about the authenticity of the presented scenes ("The film is based on authentic scenes"), and a disclaimer that they "represent only a small fraction of the truth about the Auschwitz concentration camp". Jakubowska together with Schneider assembled stories of the Auschwitz camp survivors to reflect their collective experience. Therefore, her film is not *the* story of the Holocaust, it is *a* story of the Holocaust (KERNER 2011: 21). Notwithstanding the narration, the film director wanted to highlight the dignity, solidarity and friendship among those who suffered in the camp, the idealization of human relationships. Examples of solidarity, fraternity, compassion and sacrifice are shown throughout the film. At present, however, critics firmly stress what is missing in the film: the desperate fight for survival, the ever-present hunger and fear. Political prisoners shown in the film, who were with no exception communists, are overrepresented at the expense of the struggling and dehumanized masses. Today the film is considered as a pure propaganda picture of communism. The film does not have a central character as such, but instead features an international and communist collective. The characters of the film serve as symbols of the main enemies of fascism, i.e. Jewry, communism and the East, which conforms to the socialist realist ideology of that time (KERNER 2011: 19). These ideological issues were shared by Jakubowska herself who remained profoundly committed to communism till the end of her life.

Jakubowska's name is almost exclusively associated with this film, despite the fact that she has directed 13 feature films and her career spanned almost 50 years. The film marked the birth of Polish post-war cinema. It had more than 7 million viewers and it was exported to dozens of countries. At the Third Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (Czechoslovakia) in 1948 *The Last Stage* was awarded the Grand Prix. For film studies scholars (e. g. BALAZS 1987) *The Last Stage* is one the first docudramas in world cinematography, a genre between documentary and drama in which "the events in a way begin to represent themselves, to speak through their metonymic traces", as characterized by Loewy (2004: 179). A docudrama shows historical facts, the dialogues include the ac-

tual words of real-life persons and in general it is filmed in the actual location in which the historical events took place. *The Last Stage* depicts the monstrosity of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau and drew on Jakubowska's first hand experiences to portray a concentration camp which was in fact a 'factory of death'. Jakubowska intended her film to be based exclusively on the authentic events witnessed either by herself or by her fellow inmates who survived the Holocaust. To reflect the reality of the camp, the ever-present mud, the shabby barracks surrounded by barbed wire and the heavy pall of smoke over the crematorium, she decided to produce her film on location in the former camp of Auschwitz. She made the film with the participation of the local population. Several episodic roles were played by the camp's former inmates, the survivors as herself, who were forced to relive their Auschwitz experiences for a second time. The film's team made their home in the former SS quarters in the former camp (HALTOF 2012). To this very day *The Last Stage* remains a "definitive film about Auschwitz", a prototype for future Holocaust cinematic narratives (HALTOF 2012). *The Last Stage* is called "the mother of all Holocaust films" (LOEWY 2004), as it establishes several images easily discernible in later narratives on the Holocaust: the dark, realistic images of the camp; the passionate moralistic appeal; and the clear divisions between victims and oppressors.

### ***The Last Stage* and Gender Studies**

Besides the undisputable importance of Wanda Jakubowska's film for film studies scholars, *The Last Stage* has gained a new importance for the gender studies in the last decade as it is considered to be one of the leading films for this perspective for two reasons at least. First, the authors of the film were women: the scenario was written by director Wanda Jakubowska together with another fellow inmate, German communist Gerda Schneider. Secondly, the main characters in the film are almost exclusively women. They form an international group of inmates opposed to female SS guards and *kapos*. Their fate as women, the femininity, labor and motherhood in the camp, their solidarity expressed by collective singing or praying and finally their resistance to the oppressors constitute the topic of the film (TALARCZYK-GUBAŁA 2015). In the last decade the theme of feminism and gender in the context of an extreme situation, which was the Holocaust, has been approached in different manners in numerous writings. The feminine body defeminized in the camp, forced prostitution and sexuality have been approached by numerous Polish and international authors (KARKOWSKA

2009; NIKLIBORC 2010; PETO et al. 2015; STÖCKER-SOBELMAN 2012). Jakubowska's films are considered as the first feminist works in Poland. Therefore it is not surprising that Jakubowska's *The Last Stage* can also be analyzed from this new perspective.

*The Last Stage* opens with a brief, quasi-documentary scene of a German raid on a street in Warsaw, which results in the arrest of several people, including Helena, one of the film's characters. The next scene moves the action to the camp by showing a train loaded with Polish Jews arriving at the camp, in the night and fog, the selection of prisoners, the procedure which follows their arrival, i.e. the unclothing, the shaving of the hair, the tattooing, the « accommodation in barracks ». The main part of the film takes place in the *Revier* (so called camp hospital) for female inmates where three groups of people are shown: the victims (inmates), the functionaries (*kapos*) and the Nazi. Throughout *The Last Stage* Jakubowska depicts the nightmarish conditions in Auschwitz, i. e. recurrent roll calls, random executions and selections, images of powerless people being tortured and herded to the gas chambers, and the terrifying efficiency of the camp run by SS guards and camp administrators, both groups portrayed as the embodiment of evil. The ubiquitous terror is stressed by merry music played by the camp orchestra conducted by a woman inmate to mark all the tragic moments in the inmates' lives: the way to work, the selection to gas chamber, the executions.

Wanda Jakubowska's objective is also to show the women's solidarity in their suffering as well as in their struggle against fascism. The resistance and the commitment to the struggle for the communist cause are the main topics of the film. Jakubowska focuses on carefully chosen female inmates, mostly communists and supporters of the communist resistance in the camp, who represented different oppressed nationalities and groups of people. The Auschwitz Babel of tongues is chiefly represented by a number of characters: two Russian inmates, Eugenia, the physician and Nadia, the nurse; Anna, a German nurse, who was portrayed on Gerda Schneider; Helena, a Polish woman who lost her newborn baby in the camp killed by phenol injection by the German doctor; there is Michèle, a French *résistante* singing the French anthem *La Marseillaise* while being sent to the gas chamber; Dessa, a Serb woman POW; a nameless Gypsy singer and finally, there is Marta Weiss, the interpreter.

## *The Last Stage and Translation Studies*

It has been already said that even though there is a massive amount of authentic recollections of former extermination and concentration camp inmates which have been collected in the former camps archives (TRYUK 2010, 2012, 2015) or numerous memoirs (i. e. AKAVIA 1989; BIRENBAUM 1967; KOSSAK-SZCZUCKA 1967; POSMYSZ 1962; PÓŁTAWSKA 1962; SZMAGLEWSKA 1945 or ŻYWULSKA 1946, to name but a few women survivors of the Nazi concentration camps), references to interpreting or translating *per se* are scant, and when they do occur they tend to be random and laconic, usually consisting of dry facts. In addition, inmates sometimes offer differing versions of the same event. For these reasons, obtaining an objective, empirical account of events is virtually impossible. Even so, those narratives of victims of the Nazi regime as related by them in their records can be compared with the figure of Marta Weiss, a camp interpreter, as presented in Wanda Jakubowska's *Last Stage*.

Marta Weiss is the figure of the film who guides the spectators through the inferno of Auschwitz. Marta is a Polish Jew who, thanks to her linguistic skills, is appointed as an interpreter by the commandant of the camp. She understands all the languages and she can speak to anyone in the camp, to the inmates as well as to the guards. She can be addressed by any prisoner, by anyone who has something to say or to ask. She speaks Polish, German, French, and Serbo-Croatian, but surprisingly, she does not speak Yiddish. Marta Weiss interprets not only languages but also camp life and the Holocaust, from the first to the last scene of the film. It is she who is asked to by her mother at the arrival of the train in the night and fog: "Marta, słuchaj, co to jest, gdzie my jesteście?" ['Marta, listen, what is this, where are we?'] (scene 12'50). It is she also who utters the last words of the film, seconds before she dies: "Nie pozwólcie, aby Auschwitz się powtórzył" ['You must not let Auschwitz be repeated']. "Nie powtórzy" ['It will not be repeated'], responds Helena, who is holding her dying friend in her arms (scene 1'44'09).

The character of Marta Weiss was modelled on Mala (Malka) Zimetbaum (1918-1944), a Polish-born Jew, a KL Auschwitz inmate with prisoner number 19880. As she was fluent in several languages, she soon became a messenger (*Läuferin*) and interpreter in the camp. She took an active part in the camp's resistance. She was remembered by many witnesses for her kindness, high spirit and assistance to other prisoners. Thank to her function of messenger, she could warn the inmates of the possibility of selection to the gas chamber, the "visits" of doctor Mengele or other punitive actions against the prisoners. In June 1944,

she escaped from the camp with a Polish inmate Edward (Edek) Galiński (1923-1944), prisoner number 531. They were caught and hanged in a public execution at the camp. There are several testimonies of this escape, also in the memoirs mentioned above. For all those witnesses, as remembered by Halina Birenbaum “Mala was a legend, a symbol of heroism” (BIRENBAUM 2001: 179). Primo Levi gives us the most meaningful testimony of Mala Zimetbaum’s life and death in the Auschwitz camp:

Mala was a young Polish Jewess who was captured in Belgium and spoke many languages, therefore in Birkenau she acted as an interpreter and messenger and as such enjoyed a certain freedom of movement. She was generous and courageous; she had helped many other companions and was loved by all of them. In the summer of 1944 she decided to escape with Edek, a Polish political prisoner. She not only wanted to reconquer her own freedom: she was also planning to document the daily massacre at Birkenau [...]

[After her capture] Mala had resolved to die her own death. While she was waiting in a cell to be interrogated, a companion was able to approach her and asked her, “How are things, Mala?” She answered: “Things are always fine with me.” She had managed to conceal a razor blade on her body. At the foot of the gallows, she cut the artery on one of her wrists, the SS who acted as executioners tried to snatch the blade from her and Mala, under the eyes of all the women in the camp, slapped his face with the bloodied hand. Enraged, other guards immediately came running: a prisoner, a Jewess, a woman, had dared to defy them! They trampled her to death; she expired, fortunately for her, on the cart taking her to the crematorium. (LEVI 1989: 155f.).

One of the scenes in the *Last Stage* shows Marta Weiss and a young messenger standing at the entrance gate after a barbarous selection for the gas chambers ordered by the SS. Most probably, Mala Zimetbaum stood at this very place each morning and each evening when the prisoners were leaving the camp to go to work and were returning after a hard day of work (BIRENBAUM 1967: 178).

Marta volunteers to interpret from the very beginning of her stay in the camp. When the train stops in an unknown place, which is KL Auschwitz, and the group of terrorized Jews descends from the train, Marta hears the words of the *lagerkommandant* Hans Schmidt. Marta instantly begins to translate:



*SS man: Es ist kein Grund zur Angst und Aufregung vorhanden. Ich bitte, daß ihr meinen Anweisungen der SS ruhig Folge leistet.*

*[There is no need to be frightened or nervous. I ask you to fulfill my SS instructions calmly.]*

Instantaneously Marta begins to interpret:

*Marta: On mówi, że nie mamy się czego bać. Mamy spokojnie robić to, co nam każą.*

*[He says we should not worry. We should do what they tell us to do calmly.]*

*SS man: Die Trennung muß stattfinden, da wir nicht alle in einem Lager unterbringen können. Die alten Leute und Frauen mit Kindern kommen in ein anderes Lager, während die jungen und gesunden hierbleiben.*

*[You should split because we cannot house you in one camp. Old people and women with children go to another camp, and young, healthy men stay here.]*

*Marta: Mamy się rozdzielić. Nie mogą nas wszystkich pomieścić w jednym obozie.*

*[We must split up. They cannot house us in one camp.]*

*SS man: Ich verspreche euch, daß ihr euch alle bald wiedersehen werdet.*

*[I promise you will see each other soon.]*

*Marta: Obiecuje nam, że niedługo wszyscy się razem spotkacie.*

*[He promises you will meet each other soon.]*

At that moment the SS man turns to Marta with anger and asks her:

*SS man [to Marta]: Was halten Sie für einen Vortrag?*

*[What are you talking about?]*

*Marta: Die Menschen verstehen nicht Deutsch und ich übersetze, was Sie gesagt haben.*

*[People do not understand German. I am translating what you said.]*

*SS man: Ach so. Sprechen und schreiben Sie fließend Deutsch?*

*[Oh yes. Do you speak and write fluently in German?]*

*Marta: Ja.*

*[Yes]*

*SS man: Gut! Ich brauche eine Dolmetscherin. Sie werden bei mir arbeiten. Sie gehen danach da drüben!*

*[Well! I need an interpreter. You will work for me. You will go to the other side.]*

*An old man [to Marta]: Co on mówił, czego on od ciebie chciał?*  
[What did he say? What did he want from you?]

*Marta: Powiedział, że będę pracować jako tłumaczka.*  
[He said I would work as an interpreter.] (scene: 14'57-16'10)

Later, during the so-called “accommodation” of the new arrivals in the barracks, she is confirmed in her duties as an interpreter. After the tattooing, when she receives the number 14111, Marta is told to go the barrack. She differs by her clothing from other inmates in striped dresses and headscarves: she wears a jacket with a stripe on her back and a black arm-band with the inscription “*Dolmetscher*”, as mentioned in numerous recollections of the former inmates (TRYUK 2015: 68).

While walking to the barrack with a fellow inmate, she is confronted for the first with the horror of the camp reality:

*Marta: Co to jest, to, to człowiek?*  
[What is it? Is it a man?]

*Inmate: To muzułmanin na drucie elektrycznym.*  
[It is a muselmann on the barbed wire.]

*Marta: Muzułmanin?*  
[A muselmann?]

*Inmate: Nie zadawaj naiwnych pytań. Muzułmanin to taka co więcej nie może.*  
[Don't ask naive questions. A muselmann is somebody who cannot do more.]

*Marta: A to, co to za fabryka?*  
[And this, is this a factory?]

*Inmate: Fabryka? To krematorium, gdzie się pali ludzi. Teraz właśnie palą się ci, którzy z tobą przyjechali. Miałś rodzinę? Głupstwo. Pewnego dnia i tak wszystkie pojedziemy przez komin i wtedy      pewno się spotkamy.*  
[A factory? This is the crematorium, where they burn people. Now they are burning those who arrived with you. Did you have a family? It's no big deal. One day we will all go through the chimney and we will all meet for sure.] (scene 19'58-20'23)

Marta is always present in the life of the inmates. At all times, she tries to ease their misery. For example, she intervenes when the sadistic *kapo* shouts at an