Translation and Ethical Empathy:
Robert Lowell's *Imitations*

Toshiaki Komura

Translation is a complex process in which language, culture, and their traditions intertwine, generating infinite possibilities for translators to experiment with its art form. In order to elucidate this mysterious process, theorists have historically resorted to the use of metaphor to conceptualize what translation is and what it does: various metaphors that have been employed in the past range from Friedrich Schleiermacher's transplanted foreign flora, Walter Benjamin's fragments of a vase, to travels across borders and cultures, as envisioned by the nomadic theory of translation. These developments have destabilized our notion of what constitutes faithfulness to the original text, which has long been regarded as the hallmark of ethical translation; as a result, they have also complicated the discussion of ethics in translation. In this context, the interventions of the present paper are two-layered: on one level, as a continuation of the metaphorical conceptualization of translation, I propose to theorize translation with a metaphor of an actor on stage. Just as actors have dual loyalty—to the role that they play and to the actor that they are—the target of the translator's allegiance is both the original text and his or her identity as a translator. On another, related tier, the present paper shifts the debates of translational ethics from its traditional ground—namely, the debates over translational fidelity—to a different arena: the effect of translation. In this paper, the ethics of translational outcome is linked specifically to the question of empathy: a concept that constitutes one measure of moral code and, like translation, entails cross-boundary components.

To these ends, I will examine Robert Lowell's book of translation entitled *Imitations* as a case study. In *Imitations*, a collection of poetic translations published in 1961, Lowell acts in the role of the writers of various languages—

including Sappho, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Rilke, Pasternak, among others—while still projecting his own voice. In the preface to the volume, Lowell describes his translation philosophy as follows: he tried to "do what [the] authors might have done if they were writing their poems now and in America" (xi). In part because the statement sounds presumptuous—how could Lowell claim knowledge to what these authors might have done in those circumstances?—*Imitations* has been criticized heartily by numerous critics. This manifesto, however, can be more profitably understood as a functionalist approach that follows Walter Benjamin's model of translation as an "afterlife" of the original. This translational strategy echoes Theodor Reik's theory of empathy, which, like Benjamin's conceptualization of the original and the translation, underlines the mutual independence of the subject and target of empathy. Combining these translational and psychological theories, one may reevaluate Robert Lowell as a translator who practices the craft in the spirit of an actor: his translational voice remains distinctively his own, but the poems also bear indelible marks of the writers he translates. The result is a hybridity that stands outside of the realm of faithfulness, appropriation, or mistranslation—one that requires a new paradigm of what counts as ethical translation. Lowell's translation can be adjudicated as ethical because its outcome yields a more equitable form of cross-cultural, cross-lingual, cross-historical empathic engagement.

Among literary genres, poetry in particular has often been described as difficult to translate. In *Conversations on the Craft of Poetry*, Robert Frost famously states that poetry is what gets lost in translation (Frost 7). In a sense, poetry has frequently been defined as something that defies translation; many theorists, including Roman Jakobson, have argued that all poetic texts are technically untranslatable, because complete equivalence is unachievable (Jakobson 434). The defining characteristic of poetic texts is multivalency, which is ill-suited, or even oppositional, to the idea of equivalence. At the center of untranslatability is the premise of loss. To paraphrase Terry Eagleton, what makes poetic texts complicated is that poetry is semantically saturated, packed with more information than any other discourse (Eagleton 88); because it is so condensed, replication becomes nearly impossible. In an essay entitled "Translation with No Original: Scandals of Textual Reproduction," Emily Apter claims that one of the "primal truisms of translation" is that "something is always lost in translation" (Apter 159). When one operates under this postulation of loss, translation becomes synonymous with an act of compensation that is bound to fall short of the original.

This idea of loss in translation, however, is itself problematic. Loss assumes a

prior presence or possession; the underlying assumption is that there is an original that is secure, inviolable, and immutable. Poetry, however, is not transparent, and the original, or its interpretation, remains amorphous; even when reading a poem in its original language, readers arrive at a wide array of different interpretations, albeit within the range of what the evidence bears. Even if the words on the page are the same, their impact, meanings, and effects differ significantly: that is the basic tenet of reading response theory, where readers "actively make the meaning they find in literature" (Tyson 170). This model of poetry reading suggests that a reader's interpretation is also like a fragment of a broken vase: no reader, not even the poet himself or herself, can capture the entirety of the meanings or effects that the poem creates.

The translational model of loss and faithfulness rests on a faulty premise, and the effort to depart from it has a long tradition. Historically, translation has been theorized in the form of metaphor. In "On the Different Methods of Translation," Friedrich Schleiermacher likens translation to the transplantation of foreign flora into native soil; the idea is that accommodating foreign elements into the receptor language enriches that language, just as exotic plants cultivate the homeland by mingling with domestic plants and creating a landscape that is both familiar and yet new (Schleiermacher 43). In the early twentieth century, Ezra Pound envisioned translation as a "canvas," on which the translator engages in a creative process (Cheung 2); the idea is that the translator is an artist, and that translation is more an act of creation than a practice of replication. In "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin compares translation to a fragment of a broken vase (Benjamin 21). In this conception, each work of translation constitutes a fragment of a larger whole; when put back together with the rest of the pieces, it reconstructs the entirety of the lost vase. This lost vase stands for the essence of the original text that we can only access through the proliferation of translations. A more recent nomadic theory of translation, formulated in works such as Michael Cronin's *Across the Lines*, conceptualizes the translator as a traveler who straddles the borderline between cultures (Cronin 2). This theorization of the translator as a traveler—a temporary visitor to a foreign land, on the boundary and not bound to the destination but away from the origin—has further complicated the ongoing discussion of the ethics of translation: it bypasses the tension between the dominant practice of the "domestication" of foreign texts for readability and the alternative practice of "foreignization" advocated by Lawrence Venuti's seminal work, *The Translator's Invisibility* (Venuti 6, 24), and instead shifts the focus to the ambivalence and

impermanence of translational acts.

It is in this context and tradition that I theorize poetic translation with the metaphor of an actor on stage, with dual loyalty to both the original poem and the translator's own style and voice. To this end, Lowell's *Imitations* presents a fruitful case study. *Imitations* was composed during a period in Lowell's career that many observers regard as a "dry period" (Williams 112), and it has received numerous aspersions for what critics characterize as licentiousness and inaccuracies. The samplings of the criticisms include the following: "Nobody… is going to take this as straight translation" (Hobsbaum 98); "These were no ordinary translations but poems that just happened to closely resemble the originals" (Johnson 126); "many reviewers and critics have regarded *Imitations* as a collection of more or less free translations" (Yenser 109). Marjorie Perloff comments on Lowell's translation of Rimbaud's "Mèmoire," and suggests that Lowell "destroys a carefully conceived imagistic design *without replacing it with anything else*" (Perloff 71). In one of the more scathing denouncements, John Simon characterizes Lowell's translations as violence against the original that alternates between the overabstract and the overspecific, and adds this statement: "I cannot escape the feeling that Lowell translates when he is unable to write anything of his own, not so much out of love for the poem translated as out of love for the sound of his own poetic voice" (London and Boyers 136-137). In an otherwise complimentary essay entitled "The Achievement of Robert Lowell," Willard Spiegelman refers to the poems in *Imitations* with an air-quote, "'translations'" (Spiegelman 152). These are some of the disapprobations that have solidified the reception of Lowell's translations as more of "Lowellization"—an imposition of the Lowellian voice onto other writers' works, perhaps even a sort of vandalization or violation of the original poems—than actual, ethically sound translation.

This much-maligned "Lowellization" deserves reevaluation in part because of the sea change in the way we regard translation since the mid-twentieth century. One of such developments is the ascendance of the functionalist theory. At the most basic level, translation has two functions: to preserve, and to transfer (Chesterman 23). Functionalist theory gives more weight to the latter; the translation cannot disregard the original, but it has to be internally coherent, which is to say independently operable, and it has to be shaped to adapt to its outcome. Walter Benjamin's model of translation as an "afterlife" of the original echoes this idea; the task of the translator is not so much to reenact the original but rather to generate its aftereffect (Benjamin 16). From this vantage point, Lowell's project to

do what these authors might have done if they were writing their poems "now and in America" is akin to the functionalist approach in its emphasis on the outcome. What may be licentious for a custodian of a sacred, immutable text is a productive, functionalist project for an actor on stage, whose allegiance extends both to the original interpretation of the source text and to his or her identity as a translator that it epitomizes. In this sense, the adaptive translational strategy of *Imitations*— an actor playing a role—has become more justifiable than the collection's earlier receptions indicate.

Lowell's translational practice becomes not only defensible but also ethically viable when we ground the valuation of ethics less in the degree of fidelity and more in its produced effects. The debate over translational ethics, including in the subfield of literary translation, has largely focused on the perception of faithfulness to the original. As Douglas Robison informs us, the professional ethics of translation "have traditionally been defined very narrowly: it is unethical for the translator to distort the meaning of the source text" (Robison 27). In "Introduction: The Return to Ethics in Translation Studies," Anthony Pym generally cautions against interfering or embellishing the original text, suggesting that "there is no need for translators to claim any commitment to the content of what they are translating" (Pym 130). The translator as a mediator remains a generally preferred form.

While fidelity and moderation are certainly desirable ideals—and those are definitively necessary qualities for all types of translational efforts—the contention of the present paper is that the scope of translational ethics can be fruitfully expanded, particularly in literary translation in the mold of *Imitations*, to include what the translated text accomplishes with regards to higher purposes. A closer look at specific examples may be instructive. One of the poems in Lowell's *Imitations*, "Three Letters to Anaktoria," is an adaptation of Sappho's fragments. It is also one of the instances in which Lowell's outcome-based, functionalist tendency toward translation is most evident. As the name suggests, "Three Letters to Anaktoria" is comprised of three sections, and it takes the form of a speaker, presumed to be the persona of Sappho, writing letters to Anaktoria, her lover. The most common reading of this poem assumes that the lyric "I" speaker is Sappho, while "you" is Anaktoria and the third wheel is the male hero. As Lowell himself admits in the introduction to *Imitations*, the first two sections are "really new poems based on [Sappho's]" (xii), and this announcement has been read by some readers as a declaration of Lowell's intent to take liberties so he can come close to recreating the effect of Sappho's tone (Mazzaro 37). The second piece stitches together several

unrelated Sappho fragments. The third piece, however, is more or less a faithful translation based on a well-known anthology poem entitled "The moon has set"—except that Sappho did not actually write it (Lipking 119).

While Lowell's translational philosophy may be defensible, some of the particulars of his strategies have been controversial. In the epigraph, Lowell writes out the plot of these three letters as follows: "*The man or hero loves Anaktoria, later Sappho; in the end, he withdraws or dies*" (3). The reversal of agency is notable; the letters are written by Sappho and are addressed to Anaktoria, but Lowell promotes this "man or hero" as the subject of this plot line. This relegation of Anaktoria and Sappho to targets of affection has invited critical assessment that Lowell has succumbed "to his masculine instincts" and that his imagination is so limited as to reduce Sappho's desire to mere "need for a man" (Lipking 118, 119). Lowell's discomfort at impersonating, or imagining the interiority of, a woman is demonstrably palpable; it manifests itself in other poems like "Cleopatra" in *Near the Ocean*, and it takes a more infamously objectionable form in collections such as *Lizzie and Harriett* and *The Dolphin*.

But in places where Lowell's limitation does not reach the level of gratuitous self-aggrandizement and patriarchal silencing or subverting of the female voice, this discomfort becomes redemptive. Sappho is a problematic poet to translate; many of her poems have only survived in fragments, and often as quotations in someone else's work. And as exemplified by "The moon has set," some of the fragments attributed to her may not have been hers at all. Because the original is largely missing, the translator projects elements of his or her engrossment onto the translated text to fill the gap; the original, as it is preserved, is a false "home"—the poem seeks fulfillment in someplace other than its initial placement. For this reason, Lowell's lyric voice paradoxically sounds most eloquent when it announces its inability to speak:

> Refining fire purifies my flesh!
> I hear you: hollowness in my ears
> thunders and stuns me. I cannot speak.
> I cannot see.
>
> I shiver. A dead whiteness spreads over
> my body, trickling pinpricks of sweat.   (3: I. 9-14)

The intensity of the line "I cannot speak" (I. 11) is built up through the performance

of reticence, as Lowell enacts an act of quieting by progressively shortening the last line of each stanza, from six syllables in the second stanza, four syllables in the third, to two syllables in the fourth. The frequent stops—caesurae and end-stops—mimic the halting speech of a broken tongue, and the anaphoric construction—"I cannot speak," "I cannot see," "I shiver"—amplifies the effusiveness of this speechlessness through the repetition of the simple sentences. The lyric "I" routinely poses a problem: unlike the first-person narrative in fiction, a genre that allows plenty of space for character development and readerly identification, the lyric "I" comes with no attribution, and requires more of the reader's imagination to form an alliance. In a sense, the "I" becomes a blank slate on which meanings are assigned; meanings are constructed as a result of transference, a displacement from the page to the reader's mind. That the lyric speaker remains hollow suggests that Lowell is not wholly comfortable appropriating Sappho's voice. It is this unease that gives voice to the sense of self-displacement in this poem—the sentience of a self that is not at peace with what she is. It is also this unease that actualizes the voice of a woman caught in a love triangle, which is rendered distinctly Greek and historical—rather than American and in the present—through Lowell's habitual overspecification, powered by the proper nouns that do not show up in the original, such as Thermopylae, Spartan phalanx, Salamis, and Athenian triremes.

These observations—the poem's discomfort with appropriating someone else's voice as well as its deliberate geographical and temporal distancing—lead to the ensuing question: how can "Three Letters to Anaktoria," and its outcome-based, functionalist translational strategy, be construed as ethical? The answer lies in the effect it produces: namely, cross-cultural, cross-temporal, and cross-lingual empathy that the poem foments. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith describes how the observers gazing at a tightrope walker act as if they are experiencing the same situation, and suggests that empathy is a largely automatic emotion:

> The mob, when they are gazing at a dancer on the slack rope, naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do if in his situation. (Smith 4)

In Smith's theorization, empathy is similar to reflex; it occurs in us without us knowing it, just as we writhe, without realizing that we do, when we watch a tightrope walker in the air. This view of empathy as a natural, innate capacity in

human beings has been influential, contributing to both the argument that the development of empathy has been crucial in human progress (Rifkin 8, 1) and the recent reevaluation of empathy as lacking objectivity and yielding counterproductive outcomes (Bloom 13). Contrary to Smith's notion of empathy as an automatic reflex of one placing oneself in another's place, however, Theodor Reik's *Listening with the Third Ear* proposes a model of empathy that is characterized by a complex interchange of engagement and disengagement. In this model, empathy develops in four stages: identification with the other, incorporation of the other, reverberation between the self and the other, ending in detachment that reinforces mutual independence (Clark 100). The defining feature of this theory is the paradoxical dynamics of attachment and detachment; its end result is that the sympathizer and the sympathized remain distinct from one another while still being deeply interconnected. Empathy emerges not when one feels another's feelings as though it is one's own, but rather when one translates another's feelings into terms intelligible to one, with full awareness that one cannot own or usurp them. This awareness of contradiction surfaces as discomfort.

My use of the word "translate" to describe the process of empathy-formation is not accidental; there is a close affinity between the terms used to describe translation and those employed to define empathy. As cited earlier, Andrew Chesterman characterizes the dual functions of translation as preservation and transference. Similarly, Reik's model stipulates that empathy transfers one's emotion to another person through the first three phases—identification, incorporation, and reverberation—but also preserves its singularity and integrity by ultimately ending the process with detachment. Just as translation finds its fulfillment in its departure from the original text into the target text, empathy engenders itself as the sufferer's feelings travel outward, to be received by the sympathizer. Translation—which, like acting, is an enterprise of going inside another person's interiority and coming back out of it into one's own—is an act of creating empathic connections. Likening empathy-building to translation also yields a useful critique of the recent skepticism over the concept of empathy. That is to say, just as there are successful translations and failed translations, there are ethical and unethical empathies. If, like translation, the purpose or "skopos" is the determinant of the form of empathy, the empathy deployed on sound consequentialist or deontological moral grounds would be considered a more ethical form of empathy, while the kinds that bring about injurious consequences or are conjured through objectionable acts or principles would fall into the undesirable category. For instance, if empathy with victims of

crimes committed by immigrants is either purported or foreseen to incite people's latent xenophobia, it would not be considered an honorable form of empathy, particularly when immigrants as a group are statistically less likely to commit crimes than natural-born citizens as in the case of the United States and when blanket stigmatization of this nature is neither an inevitable nor helpful outcome.

Returning to Lowell's *Imitations*, displacement, such as evidenced in "Three Letters to Anaktoria," is one theme that enables Lowell to produce ethical forms of empathy, both with the authors he translates and with the personae depicted in the poems. If one were to choose a poem from *Imitations* that best exemplifies the symbol of displacement, it would be "The Swan," a translation of Charles Baudelaire's poem, "Le Cygne." That Lowell chose to translate this poem is significant in and of itself; the choice of the subject is as crucial as the manner of translation. Immediately in the first stanza, the poem evinces a sense of dislocation as its dominant mood:

> Andromache, I think of you. Here men
> move on, diminished, from those grander years,
> when Racine's tirades scourged our greasy Seine,
> this lying trickle swollen with tears!
>
> Some echo fertilized my magpie mind,
> as I was crossing the new Carrousel.
> Old Paris is done for. (Our cities find
> new faces sooner than the heart.) . . .   (57: I. 1-8)

"Old Paris is done for" in that Paris was completely remade under the supervision of Baron Haussmann in the nineteenth century. As the lyric speaker walks through the new and strange Carrousel, he sees a Paris that has changed rapidly—"cities find / new faces sooner than the heart," he says (I. 7-8)—that he hardly recognizes it: a sight of unease, which brings to mind the widely known Tennysonian rhyme, a "change" that makes things "strange." The speaker feels as though he is misplaced, and this feeling of alienation leads him to liken his condition to that of a foreigner, a "refugee" (II. 7), overlaying himself onto various characters who are dispossessed.

"The Swan" is a poem that catalogs a diverse array of figures of displacement: beginning with Andromache, the wife of Hector who is removed from her homeland, a victim of what we today might characterize as an act of human

trafficking; the lyric speaker, who was at home in the Old Paris and feels exiled in the newly Haussmanized Paris; the swan who, having escaped from a menagerie, looks pathetic walking on the street, whereas it would have remained graceful had it been not removed from the water; Jeanne Duval, a Haitian immigrant and Baudelaire's lover, who likewise appears alienated in Paris as she ruminates over her ancestry; and others similarly uprooted and dejected. The anaphora of "I think of you" followed by the catalogue of these exilic personae signals that the speaker identifies and sympathizes with those characters.

As with the Sappho poem, Lowell's strategy of overspecification adds intercultural components to his translational empathy, and it does so by exposing his understanding of the difference between his own sense of displacement and that of the figures depicted in the poem. "The Swan" is not the most licentious of Lowell's translation; in fact, the poem is surprisingly standard, especially when compared to his other translations. For this reason, it is all the more conspicuous when he departs from the original for the purpose of being overspecific. Where Baudelaire's original merely states "la négresse" (Baudelaire II. 13), Lowell uses the proper name Jeanne Duval (II. 14). Likewise, the African continent—"Afrique" (II. 15)—is turned into a specific country, Mozambique (II. 16). With these changes, the poem accentuates the fact of individualized exile, illuminating the Atlantic slave trade and shaking the readers out of the idealized identification with the conceptual exile; as Barbara Johnson notes, Lowell "makes it impossible not to see the fallen and pitiful state of the Negress in Paris" (Johnson 133). The effect of this poetic move is that it diminishes the facile relatability of the Baudelairean speaker ruing the destruction of the old, familiar Paris; Jeanne Duval is culturally and individually extricated from the Baudelairean speaker, no longer a mere metaphor of his nostalgia. In addition, other French words that are not in the original, such as *arrondisements* (II. 2), are added in a way that overdoes the translational foreignization; these moves further highlight the cultural and linguistic distances between the original and the translated texts, and, as a result, they generate additional layers of detachment. These overcompensations suggest two things: the engagement-disengagement paradox of empathy-building is at work in this poem; and this poem is explicitly crossing the cultural lines to generate a more ethical kind of empathic relations.

Displacement—the feeling as though one is in a place that one is not meant to be, or one wants to be where one should really be—is a sentiment that permeates Lowell's poetry. This element of Lowell's poetry becomes more pronounced in *Imitations*, since translation is itself a type of alienation: a process of foreignizing or

finding the meaning of the original in another language, whereby the translatability of a literary work stipulates "the work of art's search for a fulfillment in something other than the original itself" (Gasché 90). If translation "issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife" (Benjamin 16), the original work is bound to find its destination somewhere outside of itself. As Julia Kristeva asserts, the proper self "no longer exists ever since Freud and shows itself to be a strange land of borders and othernesses ceaselessly constructed and deconstructed" (Kristeva 191). The *unheimlich* shatters the imaginary integrity of self-cohesion. Lowell's *Imitations* exposes this presence of otherness within its poems; because translation is in its essence a relation-building activity—between the original and the translation, the author and the translator—it subjects the lyric voice to the trial of identification and differentiation, in search of actualization outside of itself. Because of this mechanism of detachment, translation lends itself to the project of the Reik model of empathy building—for, when the original and the translation come to be distinctly demarcated as separate entities, the possibility of empathic engagement between them is engendered.

By undertaking this relation-forming project, Lowell's translations forge alliances with various personages possessing diverse identity attributes: Sappho, a lesbian poet from ancient Greece; Jeanne Duval, a Haitian immigrant in Paris; Andromache, a victim of human trafficking; the swan, a martyr of animal cruelty; and many others that are deemed foreign and "the other." Poetry is a product of its time, and we will never know if, had he been alive today, Lowell might have written poems that are sympathetic to immigrants and refugees, even as he recognizes the crucial differences between their hardships and his struggles as an unwanted child of a privileged family. Because of the presumed difficulties of cross-cultural relatability, empathy is often seen to be invoked along the lines of race, nationality, gender, class, religion, or other shared traits. But if we regard empathy as less a product of relatability than that of translatability, Lowell's poetic translations adumbrate for us the possibilities of more genuine and meaningful emotive connections across cultures, languages, nations, or identity categories.

An *Imitations* poem that intimates this empathic potential is "Helen," which is a translation of Paul Valéry's poem, "Hélène." "Helen" is a dramatic monologue spoken from the persona of Helen of Troy. Lowell's translational philosophy finds its home in the translation of dramatic monologues; because the gap between the lyric speaker and his or her persona is inherent in this genre of poetry, those poems instructively reveal the identification-detachment tension in the act of translation.

Helen of Troy is a popular but also problematic motif in art. At the heart of her representational conundrum is the ambiguity of her character and her role in the fall of Troy: was she abducted, or did she elope? Is she a victim, or is she a traitor? In spite of—or perhaps because of—this indeterminacy, one common thread that runs through many of the classical and modern portrayals of Helen is the relative lack of her interiority. Whether as a temptress who led nations to ruins or as a hostage who was at the mercy of her fate, Helen is often rendered vacuous and one-dimensional; examples of this characterization include William Butler Yeats's "No Second Troy," as well as Symbolist poets and painters who tend to treat Helen as a siren-like femme fatale figure (Nash 142). Even though Valéry rejects this Symbolist rendition, for him, Helen is an idea, a concept rather than an individuated presence; as Matthew Gumpert argues, Valéry's Helen "neutralizes history" as she is liberated "from the constraints of dramatic narrative" (Gumpert 206). Lowell's Helen, however, projects something different:

> I am the blue! I come from the lower world
> to hear the serene erosion of the surf;
> once more I see the galleys bleed with dawn,
> and shark with muffled rowlocks into Troy.   (95: 1-4)

Whereas Valéry's original begins with the first line "Azur! c'est moi… Je viens des grottes de la mort" (Valéry 6:1), Lowell's translation inverts the syntax: "I am the blue! I come from the lower world" (1). Through this inversion, the emphasis on the blue sky in the original is shifted to the "I" in the translation. Moreover, the use of the word "blue" instead of its more literal equivalent "azure" strips the connotation that the word definitively refers to the sky; as it is, "blue" can be the color of the sky or the sea, and this ambiguity of the scene further illuminates the certitude of the speaking voice. In Valéry's original, the sky and the speaker are separate entities, and the speaker addresses the sky as a metaphor of herself. In Lowell's translation, on the other hand, the sky recedes to the background while the speaker claims to be "the blue" itself, the dominant color on the canvas. The repetition of the sentence construction that begins with a blunt "I"—I am, I come—further cements the centrality of the "I." This is a monologue of a confessional poet's intimacy, rather than an abstraction of a modernist's conceptual voice.

Because of this opening line, the perceptions of the subsequent lines in respective poems undergo a subtle transformation. Receptive actions such as "I see"

and "I hear" color the Valéry original, conforming to the chain of reception that has enshrined Helen as a symbol or archetype. In contrast, the subjectivated Helen in Lowell's translation makes operative actions such as "I… run" and "I wept" more noticeable. Even the final line's passivity—"the gods… / reach out their carved, indulgent arms to me!" (12, 14)—is tinged with self-determination, as the syntax of the original line—"Tendent vers moi leurs bras indulgents et sculptés" (14)—is modified to end with the first-person pronoun, "me." Lowell's translation highlights the internal workings of self-assertive Helen, which come to life in a dramatic monologue of a confessional mode.

One may reasonably argue that Lowell's "Helen" is an unfaithful translation. As seen in another translator's rendition, the syntax of the aforementioned lines hardly requires tweaking, as it often is the case between near-cognate languages such as English and French: in David Paul's version, line 1 is "Azure, it is I! … come from the grottoes of death," and line 14 is "Stretch out towards me their fond and sculptured arm" (Valéry 7: 1, 14). This license, however, is one manifestation of translational ethics. As discussed earlier, it requires a paradigm shift in our thinking about poetic translation to see ethical quality in Lowell's translation: the valuation of ethics can be less grounded in translational fidelity, and more situated in the effect of the translation. The effect that Lowell's translation produces is the cross-lingual, cross-cultural empathic engagement observable in the interaction between the original and the translation. We recall that the defining feature of the Reik model of empathy is the concomitant entanglement of engagement and detachment; the outcome of this process is that the sympathizer and the sympathized remain distinct from one another and yet interdependent on one another. In Lowell's translation, Helen escapes idealization and instead gains an individuated voice. Empathy emerges not when one feels another's feelings as though it is one's own, but when one translates the other's feelings into intelligible and palpable terms, while remaining fully aware that one cannot usurp those feelings. This awareness of contradiction surfaces as discomfort. And this discomfort signals cross-boundary empathic engagement.

Unease, which comes from the awareness of the other's inviolability, is an essential component in the metaphor of translation as an actor on the stage. The actor seeks to enact the character of another fictional or nonfictional human being, but is also bound to return to their inner core to play that character, whether as a protean Robert De Niro or as an ever-laconic Clint Eastwood. Bringing together the contradictory forces, the actor sublimates the tension between the role they play

and their identity as an actor. A similar process occurs in dramatic monologues. Helen Vendler characterizes lyric as a script written for performance (Vendler xi), and as such, dramatic monologues particularly underscore this actor-on-the-stage performativity of lyric poetry. What "Lowellization" in *Imitations* reveals is that there is an affinity among the critical elements assembled in this paper: the actor on stage with dual allegiance; the Benjaminian functionalist translation with its emphasis on the separation between the original and its "afterlife"; Reik's model of empathy-building that underscores the detachment between the agent and the target of sympathy; and lyric dramatic monologue and its performative differentiation. Through perspectival adoption, dramatic monologues produce an authentic voice of individuation that triggers Reik's model of empathy-building: identification, incorporation, reverberation, and detachment. When one bases ethical valuation less on translational fidelity and more on the translational effect, Lowell's translation may be characterized as an ethical endeavor, for the authenticity that it projects, and the empathy-building that it sets in motion.

References

Apter, Emily. "Translation with No Original: Scandals of Textual Reproduction." *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, edited by Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood, Princeton UP, 2005, pp. 159-174.

Baudelaire, Charles. "The Swan." *The Flowers of Evil*. Translated by James N. McGowan, Oxford UP, 1998, pp. 173-176.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." Translated by Harry Zohn, *Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti, Routledge, 2000, pp. 15-23.

Bloom, Paul. *Against Empathy: the Case for Rational Compassion*. Harper Collins, 2016.

Chesterman, Andrew. *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory*. John Benjamins, 1997.

Cheung, Andy. "A History of Twentieth Century Translation Theory and Its Application for Bible Translation." *Journal of Translation*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2013, pp. 1-15.

Clark, Arthur J. *Empathy in Counseling and Psychotherapy: Perspectives and Practices*. Routledge, 2014.

Cronin, Michael. *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*. Cork UP, 2000.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. Blackwell, 2008.

Frost, Robert. *Conversations on the Craft of Poetry*, edited by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961.

Gasché, Rodolphe. "Saturnine Vision and the Question of Difference: Reflections on Walter Benjamin's Theory of Language." *Benjamin's Ground: New Readings of Walter Benjamin*, edited by Rainer Nageles, Wayne State UP, 1988, pp. 83-104.

Gumpert, Matthew. *Grafting Helen: The Abduction of the Classical Past*. U of Wisconsin P, 2012.

Hobsbaum, Philip. *A Reader's Guide to Robert Lowell*. Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1988.

Jakobson, Roman. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation." *Language in Literature*, edited by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, Harvard UP, 1987, pp. 428-435.

Johnson, Barbara. *Mother Tongues: Sexuality, Trials, Motherhood, Translation*. Harvard UP, 2003.

Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Translated by Leon Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1991.

Lipking, Lawrence. *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition*. U of Chicago P, 1988.

London, Michael and Robert Boyers. *Robert Lowell: a Portrait of the Artist in His Time*. D. Lewis, 1970.

Lowell, Robert. *Imitations*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1961.

Mazzaro, Jerome. Review of *Imitations*. *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 2, no. 5, 1973, pp. 35-41.

Nash, Suzanne. *Paul Valery's Album des Vers Anciens: a Past Transfigured*. Princeton UP, 1983.

Perloff, Marjorie. *The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell*. Cornell UP, 1973.

Pym, Anthony. "Introduction: The Return to Ethics in Translation Studies." *The Translator*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2001, pp. 129-138.

Rifkin, Jeremy. *The Empathic Civilization: the Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis*. Polity, 2010.

Robinson, Douglas. *Becoming a Translator: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Translation*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2012.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. "On The Different Methods of Translating." Translated by Susan Bernofsky, *Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti, Routledge, 2012, pp. 43-63.

Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Cambridge UP, 2002.

Spiegelman, Willard. "The Achievement of Robert Lowell." Review of *Collected Poems by Robert Lowell*, edited by Frank Bidart and David Gewanter. *The Kenyon Review*, New Series, vol. 27, no. 1, 2005, pp. 134-169.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-friendly Guide*. Taylor & Francis, 2006.

Valéry, Paul. "Helen." Collected Works of Paul Valery, Volume 1: Poems. Translated by David Paul, Princeton UP, 1971, p. 7.

Valéry, Paul. "Hélène." *Collected Works of Paul Valery, Volume 1: Poems*. Translated by David Paul, Princeton UP, 1971, p. 6.

Vendler, Helen. *The Given and the Made: Strategies of Poetic Redefinition*. Harvard UP, 1995.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: a History of Translation*. Routledge, 2004.

Williams, C. K. "On Lowell's *Imitations*." *Salmagundi*, no. 141/142, 2004, pp. 110-112.

Yenser, Stephen. "Many Personalities, One Voice: *Imitations*." *The Critical Response to Robert Lowell*, edited by Stephen Gould Axelrod, Greenwood Press, 1999, pp. 109-115.