Translators Writing, Writing Translators

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Recommended Citation
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Translators Writing, Writing Translators

Edited by Françoise Massardier-Kenney, Brian James Baer, and Maria Tymoczko
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9 Translators Writing, Writing Translators
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The Kent State University Press  Kent, Ohio
Photograph of Carol Maier on dedication page is by Gerald L. Funk.
“How the Brain Works” by Maggie Anderson was originally published in The Iron Mountain Review 21 (Spring 2005): 4.
“The In-Between: Scenes from a Life in Translation” by Lawrence Venuti © 2016 by Lawrence Venuti
“Antigone’s Delirium” by María Zambrano appears courtesy of the Fundación María Zambrano.
“Pro Pombo” from Contra Natura by Álvaro Pombo appears courtesy of Álvaro Pombo. Dimitra by Octavio Armand appears courtesy of Octavio Armand.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Translators writing, writing translators / edited by Françoise Massardier-Kenney, Brian James Baer, and Maria Tymoczko.
   pages cm. — (Translation studies ; 9)
   Includes bibliographical references and index.
P306.5.T723 2016
418’.02—dc23 2015012331
20 19 18 17 16  5 4 3 2 1
Carol Maier is professor emerita of Spanish and translation studies at Kent State University. The inspiration for this book, she is a prizewinning translator of the works of Octavio Armand, Severo Sarduy, Rosa Chacel, and María Zambrano and a leading scholar in translation studies who has published widely on topics ranging from the poetry of Ramón del Valle-Inclán to issues of gender, ethics, and the pedagogy of translation. She was instrumental in giving voice to translators in the United States through a number of interviews and many collaborative works. She has had and continues to have a profound influence on many students, scholars, writers, and translators, several of them contributors to this volume in her honor. Her work displays a rare combination of extreme precision, erudition, daring, and generosity. She is currently the book review editor for Translation and Interpreting Studies and a member of the advisory board of The Translator, TTR, and the book series Literatures, Cultures, Translation (Bloomsbury). She is also translating work by Octavio Armand and Rosa Chacel and editing a volume in honor of another formidable translator, the late Helen Lane.
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Introduction

Maria Tymoczko, Brian James Baer, and Françoise Massardier-Kenney

Translation studies is one of those rare fields in which it is common for a person to be both a practitioner and a theorist. This combination sets translation studies apart from most other disciplines, particularly in the humanities. Professors of English literature, for example, are sometimes producers of literary works but not usually, and historians rarely make history. But translation scholars routinely produce translations, a fact that makes the separation of theory and practice untenable. In this regard, Carol Maier is exemplary, having achieved an especially productive balance between theory and practice. Her suspicion of totalizing theoretical approaches and her advocacy for unflinching self-reflection ensure that neither term assumes primacy over the other but that both exist in a relationship of mutual interrogation. When Maier theorizes, she keeps the real-world implications of that theorizing in view, including the implications of theory for translator training, for teaching literature in translation, and for rethinking professional codes of ethics and the translator’s positionality. This complex orientation is what has lent her work relevance over the course of her professional life as a scholar, a teacher, and a translator, and it is something that her work shares with that of other scholars whom she admires outside translation studies proper—bell hooks and William Boyd Smith, for example—and inside the field.

When Maier published “The Translator as an Intervenient Being” in 2007, she articulated the need for more “raw material” about translators, including investigation of translators’ memoirs, diaries, autobiographical material,
correspondence, drafts, and notes, as well as fictionalized accounts and empirical data about translators, including data about the cognitive activity of working translators. The result in translation studies has been a closer scrutiny and deeper exploration of translators themselves and their position with respect to their work, questions that she observed were still relatively little explored at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This book is a contribution to the emerging body of research on those topics. Many of the authors have responded directly to her call for more “raw material,” and the material presented and explored here ranges from Rosemary Arrojo’s exploration of a fictional translator to direct accounts by translators and the historical research of Noël Valis, who contributes a biographical study of two nineteenth-century sisters-in-law related through poetry, politics, and translation. The autobiographical pieces include strikingly honest portrayals of their own lives in translation by Lawrence Venuti, Susan Jill Levine, and Christi Merrill. Other essays—including those by Peter Bush, Moira Inghilleri, Roberta Johnson, and Maria Tymoczko—explore specific aspects of the processes of translators translating.

Like Carol Maier, to whom this volume is dedicated, many of the contributors to this volume are known for sustained self-reflexive engagement with translation. In some cases contemporary theorizing of translation and cross-cultural communication are inseparably linked to their work as practicing translators. The primary purpose of this volume is therefore not merely to pay tribute to the work of one of the founding figures of contemporary translation studies. It is not a backward-looking volume. Instead the authors extend some of the lines of thinking that Maier has initiated, and they attempt to deploy and elaborate on the insights she has offered. Indeed, the rapid globalization of the world’s economy and the militarization of diplomacy that have occurred alongside the “discovery” of translation by promoters of world literature have made Maier’s explorations of the position of translators more relevant than ever. Specific aspects of Maier’s work—including her focus on the translator’s body, the processes of translation, and the positionality of translators—have taken on new immediacy in a world that is moving to the use of global English as an international link language and in a world where the threat to translators and interpreters in war zones has become widely known through the mass media.

This focus on the body is something that Maier shares with Severo Sarduy, the Cuban-born novelist, poet, playwright, book editor, and critic, whose works Maier translated periodically beginning in the late 1980s. Such a felicitous pairing of translator and writer is, of course, the stuff of chance, but in hindsight their collaboration seems inevitable. Never a neutral conduit, Maier
reveals in her thoughtful introductions to her translations of Sarduy, particularly his collection of essays *Written on a Body* (1989), how profoundly she engaged with his writing, how it pushed her to deepen her thinking about the fundamentals of translation once it is freed from the burden of textual mimesis, as expressed in the opening paragraph of her essay, which serves as both translator’s preface and scholarly introduction.

The suggestion that simulation is an essential, biological force promises an exhilarating freedom for a translator, that most mimetic of readers who is ever aware of how much her work will inevitably be something of a disappointment, a mere attempt at likeness, a flawed reproduction. By apparently legitimizing, even welcoming transgression, Severo Sarduy’s definition seems to contend that the original is the copy, that the simulacrum throbs with life. (Maier 1989b:i)

Such a rethinking of the translator’s role presents the translator as a co-constructor of meaning, a collaborator, whose body is thoroughly engaged in the process of translation.

We should note that Maier’s work as a whole is characterized by an ethos of collaboration, of which her work with Sarduy is merely one example. She promotes and practices collaboration not only between translator and author but collaboration with creative people across academic disciplines and across the arts. It is, therefore, fitting that this volume opens with a poem by Carol’s friend and colleague Maggie Anderson, and includes a reproduction of a photograph by her long-term colleague and friend Marilyn Kiss. The theme of collaboration is a leitmotif of her essays on the role of the translator, and many of the people involved with this volume have collaborated closely with Maier on various translation projects. Several of us have had the distinct pleasure of teaching with her or of observing her teach. In his essay in this volume, Kelly Washbourne contemplates the nature of author-translator collaborations.

Translation and Gender

Throughout her long and productive career as a translation scholar, teacher, and practitioner, and through her translations and reflections on translation as a process, Carol Maier has documented the ways that translators view and perform their work. In light of her definition of translation as an “activity in
which a literary work is rewritten in a different language,” it is not surprising that her description of this process of rewriting has led her to interrogate the “understanding of originality, gender, and nationality” (in Palatella 1997:19). Gender is a marked aspect of the body in most human cultures, and thus Maier’s focus on the embodied nature of translational work leads naturally to an exploration of gender and translation. In the cultural context in which she first began to translate—second wave feminism and the rise of feminist criticism in the 1970s—the intersection of gender and self-reflection on the body in relation to translation became one of Maier’s central concerns as a translator and as a translation scholar. In this regard her writing has been at the forefront of translation studies; not surprisingly this aspect of her work is another facet extended here in contributions with a similar focus from some of her many collaborators and colleagues, including Christi Merrill, Noël Valis, and Roberta Johnson.

In her critical writing on translation, the trajectory of Maier’s thinking follows an arc starting from a gender-based identity to questioning of the very notion of gender and its implications for writing and translating—from a “woman-identified” to a “woman-interrogated” positioning. Her reflections on her own activity as a translator over the last 40 years, as well as her translations themselves, bear witness to a dynamic and evolving view of what constitutes “woman” and gender in translation. After establishing herself as a scholar of modern Spanish literature through her work on Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Maier began her career in translation by translating the works of Cuban poet Octavio Armand (1976, 1977, 1979, 1980) and Chicano poet Ana Castillo (1978). She accompanied these translations with reflection on her own writing—in the words of Isabel Garayta, “taking the pulse of her own development” (1998:74)—and using her own work as an object of study. Far from being a solipsistic inner turning, this sustained analysis of the principles that guide her practice has allowed her to bear witness to the largely unacknowledged and untheorized labor of translation, providing a rare glimpse into the complex process by which a text becomes a literary work. Maier’s insistence that a translator be aware of the factors that affect her practice led her to acknowledge the ways in which her social (if not biological) identity as a woman has influenced her translation process. As Garayta makes clear, although the resulting translation, the “product,” may not reveal the workings of Maier’s position as a woman translator, her critical essays and notes bring to light the importance of these considerations.
In this sense, Maier’s discourse about translation takes Borges’s statement below one step further.

No problem is as consubstantial to literature and its modest mystery as the one posed by translation. The forgetfulness induced by vanity, the fear of confessing mental processes that may be divined as dangerously commonplace, the endeavor to maintain, central and intact, an incalculable reserve of obscurity: all watch over the various forms of direct writing. Translation, in contrast, seems destined to illustrate aesthetic debate. . . . Translations are a partial and precious documentation of the changes the text undergoes. (Borges 2000:69)

Maier’s body of writing in and about translation documents the way these changes occur. We see many aspects of her thinking in her statements about translating the works of Armand. For instance, in “A Woman in Translation, Reflecting” (1985), she describes how Armand’s erasure of the mother’s voice in his poetry leads her to feel anger and discomfort. Her drive to translate Armand and her admiration for his work are complicated and inflected by her identification as a woman. She writes, “Armand’s texts in English were written by me and because of that they convey my femaleness and my antagonism as well as my affection” (1985:7).

Interestingly, this unease does not lead Maier to adopt the interventionist tactics of feminist translators, such as those of Canadian author-translator Suzanne de Lotbinière-Harwood. Maier does not rewrite or censor the masculine/patriarchal text; she does not bring back the voice of the erased mother. Instead, she uses a paratext to establish a dialogue with the poem outside the translation itself, questioning the author’s erasure of the mother. This approach allows her to provide a broader context for Armand’s work and to speak about the difficulties of her position as a woman translator without adopting aggressive translation strategies. She returns to this technique again and again in her work.

Maier discusses her early identification with women and its problematic nature directly in “Notes after Words” (1989a). Elsewhere she describes how being a woman translator, which she hoped would lead to an “egalitarian working mode” with the author Ana Castillo (Garayta 1998:128), turned out to matter less than her status as an Anglo academic with stylistic preferences at odds with those of the author she was translating. At this early stage of her career, Maier’s working assumptions still involved gender as a category that placed the female/translator below the male/author, but her “feminist” positioning led her
to seek a less authoritarian relationship. With Castillo, as with Armand, Maier the translator decides to respect the integrity of the author and to recognize the limitations of her gender identification while at the same time bearing witness to the process of “setting aside one’s terms and attempting to perceive something in a new way” (Maier 1996:59). What is significant in this statement is not so much her final choices or decisions about translation (to change or not to change the character of the text based on the translator’s preferences), but her focus on the thinking/translation process. Rather than leaving unthought the complex workings of gender, Maier is one of the rare translators who provides a window onto the mind of the translator, exposing the work of translation as the writing of a tension, that is, the writing in the translator’s own words of two experiences sometimes sufficiently different as to be antagonistic.

Maier’s interest in and interrogation of gender as part of her position as a translator is also visible in her choice of writers to translate: all lived part of their lives in exile, and issues of gender are central to their writing. Sarduy lived in exile in France and investigated gender and transvestism in his work. Spanish writer Rosa Chacel was an advocate for women as early as 1915; she lived in exile for many years (in Brazil and the United States) and presented her novel Memoirs of Leticia Valle (1994) through the mind of a young girl narrator. Similarly philosopher/essayist María Zambrano left Spain for Cuba, Italy, and France. As part of her “life-long resistance to the historical idealization of women she found so crippling,” Zambrano “continually questioned the sense of ‘woman’ in history and society” (Maier 1998:106, 108).

Living in exile and writing from exile inevitably led these writers to question what it meant to be Cuban, or Spanish, or American, and to interrogate the notion of a stable identity, be it national or gendered. For Maier (and consequently for her readers), translation becomes the site where certainties about our identities are held in suspension and ultimately dissolved. Her call for viewing translation as a rewriting that “is best realized and discussed interrogatively” (Maier 1998:108) should therefore be read not as a tentative gesture but as a radical positioning.

Reading Literature in/as Translation

Although for most of her career Maier has trained translators, she has seen that raising awareness of translation and the role of translators outside the translation classroom is a pressing concern. Maier began arguing in the early 1990s
that translated texts were being read in schools and universities as if they were written originally in English, thus erasing the very differences that make such texts valuable for instilling global awareness and sensitivity. Therefore, Maier has called for a special pedagogical approach to the teaching of texts in translation, aimed at instructors and students who do not know the language of the original. Such a pedagogy is a way to make difference visible and in doing so to resist the powerful homogenizing tendencies that accompany globalization.

As a result, many of Maier’s writings are directed less to her colleagues in the field of translation studies than to colleagues in Spanish and Latin American studies, literary studies, and feminist studies. For many years Maier’s was one of the few voices to pose what David Damrosch refers to as “the problematics of translation” (2009:8) outside the field of translation studies proper, as evidenced by the fact that Maier authored the entry on translation in the 1997 Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory, edited by Elizabeth Kowalski-Wallace; the entry on translators in the 1995 Oxford Companion to Women’s Writing in the United States, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Linda Wagner-Marin; the essay “Teaching Monolingual Students to Read in Translation (as Translators)” in the roundtable discussion on teaching texts and translations, published in the ADFL Bulletin (Maier 2001); and the chapter on translation, entitled “Teaching the Literature of the Spanish Civil War in Spanish-to-English Translation,” in the 2007 MLA volume Teaching Representations of the Spanish Civil War, edited by Noël Valis.

Maier consistently opposes the focus on origins and originals that continues to organize the study of (national) literary traditions in many parts of the world today by calling upon instructors to make translators and translations visible. She writes, “Instructors must also ensure a discussion not only about the author of the work and the historical, political, and literary climate at the time the work was written but also about the climate in which the translation was made, the translator, and the response to the translated work” (2007a:248). We must not forget, out of expediency, to ask why any specific work was published at a specific time and by a specific translator. We must, so to speak, see the other, a metaphor that brings us back to the importance of the body in literary studies, including the body of the translator whose work has produced the text being read. Maier also advocates giving monolingual students the opportunity to experience—through work and the involvement of mind and body—the complex decision-making involved in the translation of literary texts by having them compare multiple translations of a single work and then create their own translations from those texts, explaining why they made
the choices they did. In addition, Maier has advocated strongly for the position that students who read texts in translation must be introduced, “however briefly, to important principles of literary translation and the challenges that translation involves” (2007a:248). By involving students in the process of translation, Maier sensitizes students to their own positionality.

Carol Maier’s concern that the monolingualism of many American students prevents them from understanding the complexities of cross-cultural communication in general, and those of literary translation in particular, leads her to advocate not only for explicitly addressing translation theory in the literature curriculum but also for reading literary texts featuring translators and interpreters as a way to encourage discussion of the translator’s role. Among Maier’s favorite works featuring fictional translators are Lydia Davis’s *The End of the Story* (1995), Barbara Wilson’s *Gaudí Afternoon* (1990), and Banana Yoshimoto’s *N.P.* (1994), translated by Ann Sherif. These “intimate portraits of translators,” Maier argues, “prompt a reader to ponder the effect translation can have on one’s understanding of originality, gender, and nationality” (in Palatella 1997:19). In this way her emphasis on self-reflection extends not only to the writers of translations but to the readers as well.

Maier has turned regularly to the theme of fictional translators as a way to think about translation and identity as, for example, in “The Translator as an Intervenient Being,” which appeared in the volume *Translation as Intervention* (2007), edited by Jeremy Munday. Fictional portrayals of the translator, Maier asserts, “provide insights into the translator’s work with language, originality and creativity. This work, in my opinion, contributes to some of the most profound discomfort occasioned by intervenience” (2007b:7). It is in this article that Maier calls for more autobiographical writings by translators and interpreters to provide the data necessary for an understanding of the complexities of the translator’s task.

Many of Maier’s views on teaching literature in translation have been consolidated in the two collected volumes that she has edited on the subject: *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts* (1995), which she coedited with Anuradha Dingwaney, and *Literature in Translation: Teaching Issues and Reading Practices* (2010), which she coedited with Françoise Massardier-Kenney. *Between Languages and Cultures* was daring, ahead of its time in a number of ways, perhaps most obviously in its interdisciplinarity, with almost all the contributors coming from fields outside translation studies proper but united in their concern over the ethical representation of otherness. In that volume Maier and her coeditor provide one of the most
succinct and nuanced statements of the issues that must be addressed when teaching literature in translation. Advocating for a practice of reading literature in translation that is based on a “subtly dialectical interplay of identity (identification) and difference,” one that neither sacrifices nor appropriates difference, Maier and Dingwaney caution:

The dangers of mobilizing solely one or the other category are many. An uncritical assumption of identity is, as we have shown through Rigoberta Menchú, a mode of appropriation. Similarly, identification is a function of recuperating the unfamiliar “other” in terms of the familiar; reading this way relies on the stereotypes one culture utilized to understand, and domesticate, (an)other. An uncritical assumption of difference, which presumes that (an)other is never accessible, allows readers to abandon, indeed exonerates them from, the task of ever reading cross-cultural texts. Deployed solely, each category produces an impasse. (1995:312)

The act of reading translated texts, they advise, should be organized around this “complex tension,” which can serve as a site from which to question and destabilize linguistic and cultural identities.

Their emphasis on the dialectical relationship between identification and difference is especially important today in view of the popularity of Lawrence Venuti’s (1995) concepts of foreignization and domestication, which are often treated as a simplistic binary opposition. To the extent that the assimilation of new knowledge always involves some degree of scaffolding or identification, that is, making connections with our previous knowledge and experiences, any encounter with the foreign must to some extent be domesticating for it to make sense at all. The only truly foreign work, then, is the work that is not translated. At the same time the promise of new knowledge—the experience of the foreign—is precisely what motivates most readers to read translated literature and most teachers to use such texts. Thus, domestication and foreignization cannot be understood as a binary choice; they are inseparably linked and their relationship constantly negotiated in any act of translation and in any teaching using translations. This productive tension, for which there is no easy resolution, no quick fix, is at the heart of Maier’s theorizing on translation and of her translation practice.

In the volume Literature in Translation: Teaching Issues and Reading Practices (2010), Maier again addresses the need—made more urgent by the increasing popularization of world literature—to develop a pedagogy for teaching
translated literature. Recognizing translation to be a mediation of a mediation, the book outlines a pedagogical approach that attempts the difficult but ethically sound task of reading translated texts in such a way as to neither erase the difference of the source text nor reify it. The organization of the book operationalizes the two-pronged approach Maier has advocated since the mid-1990s.

Maier opens section one with an article advising instructors on how to choose a translation for a course. Maier’s concern with the application of theory is most evident when she discusses, in her typically undogmatic fashion, what instructors should consider in selecting a translation or translations and why explicit discussion of that choice should be a part of the presentation of the work. Maier recommends that instructors and students alike critically reflect on their expectations of a translation as a necessary first step in opening themselves up to the experience of the foreign, in allowing themselves to be surprised by the language of translation. “After all,” Maier writes, “readers guided solely by their expectations and preferences jeopardize their chances of experiencing the risky readings that can put one unexpectedly in touch with language used in unanticipated ways” (2010:21). That risk, as Maier acknowledges elsewhere in her work, carries with it certain ethical considerations.

**Toward an Ethics of Translation**

In discussing Carol Maier’s views related to the pedagogy of translated texts, we have already drawn attention to the ethical concerns that permeate her discourses on translation. Inevitably, self-reflective translators and those who explore the position of translators grapple with questions about ethics, including the ethical responsibilities of translators; the relationship between ethics and specific strategies of translation; choices at both the macro and micro levels of translation; obligations toward the authors they translate; the role the translated text will play in the receiving culture; and the translator’s responsibility to the writers and readers of both the source and target texts. These are persistent themes in the essays in this book and many of the authors have been inspired by the work of Carol Maier in formulating their own answers to these questions. Maier has been a strong voice in exploring the ethics of translation, and where she has led, others followed.

By setting Carol Maier’s ethical explorations and discourses in a broad intellectual context and by showing their connections with her feminism and her approach to pedagogy, we can better understand the breadth, depth,
and importance of her thinking about the ethics of translation and the ethical position of translators. The orientation to ethics in Maier’s writings is not the classic ethics of the Greeks nor is it prescriptive and absolute. The sources she appeals to in her statements about ethics are both implicitly and explicitly diverse. They include, for example, Buddhist traditions, pragmatism, and existentialism, though not necessarily identified as such. Her ethical explorations converge on the position of writers, translators, and readers in an approach reminiscent of situation ethics. Proponents of situation ethics insist that there is no simple universal or absolute ethical position in any given circumstance but rather that a person—a translator or interpreter, for example—must adjudicate the complexity presented by each particular situation and act accordingly. Such an approach to the ethical questions faced by translators and scholars in translation studies illustrates the usefulness of complexity theory in the field of translation studies (cf. Marais 2013), which points to the necessity of considering the minute particulars of a translator’s position even while taking into account larger ideological and global factors.

An important publication in relation to Carol Maier’s ethics of translation that invokes situation ethics is Carol Gilligan’s seminal study *In a Different Voice* (1982). Gilligan links the ethical choices of women to their assessments of situational criteria for ethical decisions rather than to their reliance on universal abstract principles, thus linking situation ethics and feminist issues. Carol Maier read this key book of second wave feminism with attention in connection with her early work in women’s studies. It is not surprising, therefore, that Maier’s orientation to ethics involves an interweaving of situation ethics and feminism.

The essays in this book here return persistently to the specificity of situations, particular nuances of specific texts, the production of translations in specific contexts, and so forth. Rather than attempt to make sweeping generalizations about ethics, Maier has taken the lead in showing the importance of the particular and the local in discussions of the ethics of translating, the situational dilemmas of specific translators and translation tasks, and the necessity for reading texts and translations with an informed consideration of context. Thus, specific political contexts are relevant to diverse times and places, demanding a nuanced ethical response from both a translator and a reader of translations. For a self-reflexive translator, the politics of a situation will be concrete: the events of the time of the text’s writing and the translation’s reception, the status of the nations involved in the translator’s work, the specifics of gender politics, the identities of the writer and the translator, and so on. Political discourses will also be factors, whether they are discourses
about postcolonialism, neocolonialism, violence, religious questions, or the many other discourses of any particular era. She advocates undertaking research and adopting practices reflecting such issues.

Maier’s emphasis in “Translating as a Body” (2006) also has an ethical dimension, indicating that translators must approach their task not as a person with an abstract textual puzzle to solve but as a whole person in dialogue with another whole person, particularly when working with living authors. Here her ethical position reveals an existentialist orientation that can be compared, for example, to Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* (*Ich und du*, 1923). Buber stresses that relationship is the essence of I-Thou modalities in contrast to the experiential qualities of I-it modalities in relation to the world of objects. Thus, Maier’s ethics of presence and the importance of being attuned to the body in translating have implications connecting her views to both popular and theological existentialist positions in ethics.

A strength of seeing translation as a dialogue between a translator and an author as whole persons is that it enables the translator to retain her identity and her own ethical stance, allowing her to assume a face-to-face position in which she can “speak back” to the author; even while acting as translator, she can engage in critical, ethical, and social dialogue with the author. As we have already indicated, this is a practice Maier has embraced, again facilitating both her ethical and feminist position as a translator. A number of the essays in this book extend her exploration of the role of the body in the work of a translator, including those by Lawrence Venuti, Moira Inghilleri, Maria Tymoczko, and Noël Valis.

In “The Translator as an Intervenient Being” (2007b), Maier aptly points out that translation studies has neglected research about translators themselves, and she identifies various resources available for such research, many of which involve the ethos of particular translational situations. Ethical issues are central to this essay, which initiated an outpouring of research about translators at work, much of which has also addressed ethical questions. Maier initiated a new phase of descriptive translation studies, which has focused on translators rather than translated texts (as was the case in twentieth-century descriptive studies), and many of the essays in this book continue this wave of research.

Early on Carol Maier identified the necessity of incorporating the exploration of ethical dilemmas into teaching strategies for both translation students and students reading translations. Her desire to facilitate surrogate experiences of a translator’s ethical dilemmas among students and readers of translations is akin to John Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy of art outlined in
Art as Experience (1934). He argues that knowledge of art and understanding artistic creation are possible only if artistic production can be experienced bodily. In a sense, by having students rethink the decisions of translators, Maier, like Dewey, encourages them to assess translations experientially with their minds and bodies using ethical, esthetic, cultural, and linguistic frameworks, and to move beyond treating texts and their translations as sacrosanct, finalized, and static cultural artifacts. The experiential involvement of readers of translations—particularly student readers—in the ethical assessment of translation processes and the ethical dilemmas of translators who produced the texts being examined is an important technique for heightening ethical awareness of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication that has both local and global consequence.

Much of the force of Carol Maier’s work on the ethics of translation is distilled in the powerful metaphors that she has created for conceptualizing the positionality of translators. Maier is eloquent about the power of metaphors, writing “one metaphor becomes another because the words of that metaphor sink in” (2006a:147). To be able to create new metaphors is a great intellectual gift and a notable contribution to any discipline. Metaphor is one of the most important means by which human thought expands in every sphere of activity and every field of knowledge, including translation studies (cf. De Man 1978, Hauser 2009, and St. André 2010). In turn, thus, the creation of important metaphors is a form of creating essential cognitive tools, because metaphors are used recursively as frameworks for the articulation of questions and problems and for exploration that leads to further knowledge, points that Maier articulates in her quote just cited. Not surprisingly, such recursivity is another of the fundamental characteristics that distinguish human and animal thought, according to Marc Hauser (2009), which together with human combinatorial facility results in the capacity for generativity of language, thought, and culture.

One of Maier’s most productive metaphors related to the ethics of translation, found in her article “The Translator as Theorós” (2006b), is her view of translators as a type of pilgrim. There she gives an extended explanation of the metaphor, indicating that in Greek thought the theorós was originally “one who travels, observes, and contemplates, glimpses possibilities and learns about other people and their customs, but also risks becoming estranged, rejected, ridiculed” (2006b:163). Moreover, the theorós was a type of “ambassador, witness, or reporter but not a pontificator of universals, norms, rules, or arguments” (163), who did not “mandate a particular practice” but in Greek thought was “associated with contemplation and wonder” as a precondition
of practice (163). This metaphor offers a powerful reconceptualization of the situational and ethical positioning of a self-reflective translator/theorist. Implicit in Maier’s metaphor is the proposition that translators are open and vulnerable and that their translations have the same quality: translations are essays in the etymological sense of the word as “attempts.” Hence they are provisional reports of what translators have learned from their travels with source authors, from observation and contemplation of other people and customs in the texts they have translated, and from their role as ambassadors or witnesses of that learning for receiving audiences. The metaphor brings with it an appreciation of wonder, an open acknowledgment that translators do not fully master or possess what has been witnessed.

This metaphorical conception of the task of the translator seizes the imagination because it differs from popular views of the role of translators and their credentialed expertise. In many translation programs, efforts focus on instilling certainty into student translators, teaching them unquestionable knowledge, and preparing them to present themselves to employers as fully competent in two languages and the transpositions required in moving across those languages. The ethical problem with the conventional view—as Maier’s metaphor indicates—is that a translator is thus figured as one who has certainty about meaning, valuation, and judgment. Maier’s metaphor forestalls the tendency among translators to base their practice on the “largely unexamined certainty that their work [holds], or [makes] possible for others,” namely, “experiences identical to experiences occasioned by work first written in a different language,” as well as the “tendency to project oneself into the text of another and to assume that the projection [gives] rise to accurate, authentic, and truly shared feelings that [erase] or [transcend] mediation” (Maier 2006a:137). Such a reconceptualization of the task of the translator is inherently an ethical formulation. Moreover, adopting such a perspective radically reorients pedagogical practices in translation studies. The metaphor is a reminder of how thin the knife edge is in training competent translators who must remain open to their own ignorance, their own need to wonder and learn, and who nonetheless must learn to deploy the tool kit of translation studies in a competent manner.

In Maier’s own methods of translating and writing, the roles of translator and translation scholar as theorôs are manifest. She is known for her extensive research on texts, authors, and contexts in both roles. Her wondering and wandering in ideas as she investigates the possibilities raised by her projects are models for a scholar in any field. In this way, she embodies the principal aspects of her most well-known metaphor.
The metaphor of the translator as theorôs can be seen as framing a second powerful metaphor that Maier has contributed to translation studies, namely the view of a translator’s practice as intervenience. Here Maier chooses for her metaphor of the translator’s position the term an intervenient being and for the translator’s work, the term intervenience. These terms are conceptually related to intervention and interference but they are words that are less well known and that have been more commonly used to refer to the agency and activity of those who come between (often in legal contexts) rather than to the action itself. The notion of intervenience is also commonly used to describe the role of someone operating within a single or unified context where mediation may be required across different positions being held or contested within that context. One value of this metaphor is that the words are defamilialized. Their metaphorical force helps to move translation studies beyond worn-out conceptual entrapments, ways of thinking that have lost their vitality, and trite associations associated with such words as translation itself, transference, and between, all of which entail significant conceptual difficulties that have been widely discussed in translation studies.

Again Maier’s own practice embodies her metaphors. Her deep learning and impeccable and indefatigable research (involving wondering and wandering not just through the realm of books but also in mutual inquiry with her many collaborative colleagues), and her lucid verbal precision have often made her the ideal scholar to address and adjudicate quandaries and controversies both intellectual and ethical in the field of translation studies. She does these things with intervenience that never feels aggressive, interfering, or interventionist. She has invariably enriched the field and been a positive force for clear thinking in her intervenient roles.

The contributors to this book repeatedly deploy the metaphors and precision-crafted language that Carol Maier has developed to explore and reflect on the nature of translation, the work of translators, the positionality of translators, and the roles that translations and translators play in culture. The use of her metaphors and her language in the essays gathered here, as in a great deal of the current work in translation studies, is much more than a simple tribute to her that one expects in an honorary volume. Ipso facto by using her metaphors productively, the writers in this volume build on her project of self-reflexive investigation of translation. They attempt to explore, deepen, extend, and advance thinking about the very issues that Maier’s work has highlighted in translation studies and the valuable frameworks that she has worked so hard to construct.
As a collection this book indicates the seminal importance of the work of Carol Maier in developing and shaping the field of translation studies. The explorations collected here both apply and re-enliven her insights, illustrating the key roles she has played in enlarging the domain of translation studies through her own work, her collaborations, and her influence on other scholars. Like herself, many of the authors are translators writing self-reflexively about their own work, processes, and lives. They take her practices and many of her views as points of departure for writing about the processes of translation and the position of translators in relation to pedagogy, ethics, and life. The book illustrates the ways in which Carol Maier has enriched the quality of thought in the field of translation studies about the agency of translators, the position of translators at work, and the social functions of translation in bringing individuals and cultures together in an ethical manner.

Works Cited

In Introduction


