Reflection Statement

'The Translator must re-cast the original into his own Likeness.'
– Edward FitzGerald[1]

'The original is unfaithful to the translation.'

– Jorge Luis Borges[2]

MY Major Work, *Translator, Traitor,* is a revaluation of translation and its place in the literary process. Translation is crucial to global literature, allowing expansion beyond one, insular tradition. Yet I believe translation is often undervalued and, despite its creative requirements, is seen as more of a "craft", inferior to the "art" of authorship. At the same time, when a translation is forced to deviate from the original, it garners mistrust and scorn, as though its intentions were to deceive. *Translator, Traitor* uses a series of connected narratives to perform its revaluation: the super-narrative shows Trent Slater's struggle for artistic recognition as a translator. Embedded within this narrative are Slater's "translations"—in fact appropriations—which invite the responder to both appreciate translation's artistic properties and to recognise that all literary processes must, like translation, deviate from the "truth". With its focus on all things linguistic, *Translator, Traitor* is intended for readers who are interested in languages and translation, or indeed anyone who reads translated books; I envision the readership of a translation journal like the Australian Association for Literary Translation's *AALITRA Review*, or, to avoid preaching to the converted, a progressive literary journal like *Overland*.

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[1] FitzGerald, Edward. *Letters of Edward FitzGerald.* Vol. 2. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1901. Print. 262

[2] Borges, Jorge Luis. "On William Beckford's *Vathek*". *Selected Non-fictions*. Ed. Eliot Weinberger. Trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, Eliot Weinberger. United States of America: Viking Penguin, 1999. Print. 236

My initial inspiration to write about translation came from reading David Bellos's

Is That a Fish in Your Ear?[3], a survey of the practices of and attitudes towards

translation. Bellos argues that translation is undervalued by the literary institution;

with my passion for languages and global literature, I found this lamentable, and I

decided my Major Work would be an attempt at rehabilitating translation.

I considered writing a critical response to this end. Yet after reading various

discussions of translation's artistic powers, I became convinced I could better achieve

my revaluation by replicating the processes translation undertakes. This was only

possible with a fictional piece, and so I decided a prose short story would best suit my

purposes. I made this decision after reading Manguel's *The History of Reading*, which

discusses Rainer Maria Rilke's 20th century, beautiful and modernist translation of

Louise Labé's originally trite 16th century love sonnets[4]. Further, in *The Art of the*

Novel, Kundera discusses the artistic translation of his own novel, *The Joke*, 'which

the translator rewrote [. . .] by ornamenting my style'[5]. I also consulted Barnstone's

The Poetics of Translation, an exhaustive study that seeks to 'brighten the focus on

translation as an art'.[6]

Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*[7] then gave me the form for my

ideas. Whilst studying this text in English Extension 1, I was exposed to the notion of

mise en abyme. This inspired me to write *Translator, Traitor* as a series of

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[3] Bellos, David. *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?*. Great Britain: Penguin Books, 2012.
[4] Manguel, Alberto. "The Translator as Reader". *The History of Reading*. Melbourne: Penguin Books Australia, 1996. Print. p. 261 ff.
[5] Kundera, Milan. *The Art of the Novel*. New York: Grove Press, 2000. Print. p. 121
[6] Barnstone, Willis. *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory Practice*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Print.
[7] Calvino, Italo. *If on a winter's night a traveller*. London: Vintage Books, 1998. Print.

"translations"—of *Beowulf*, Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, and Virgil's *Aeneas*—unified by a super-narrative about the individual making these translations. Just as Calvino's incipits are deceptive, so too are my translations deceptive: in creatively responding to translational difficulties, they become appropriations of the canonical text they purport to translate. However, each appropriation also shows an agent of the literary process—from propagandist to editor and finally poet—engaging in literary deception, such as Virgil plagiarising the *Aeneid*. I thus aimed to establish that "deceit" is inherent to literature but that it can create beauty, whether in poetry or translation.

The role of my appropriations grew in response to my study of Shelley's *Frankenstein*[8] in English Advanced. Like *Translator, Traitor*, this novel presents stories within a story. The stories' narrative voices offer conflicting messages, dynamically involving the responder in an ambiguous, nuacned textual journey. Similarly, my appropriations became a continuum of views on translation, leading away from mistrust and towards artistic transformation. There is first the bard—a slavish propagandist who distorts the truth; then Max Brod—an editor who alters manuscripts for mundane purposes; and finally, Virgil—a genius-poet, who in order to make art, must metamorphose material already given to him.

I consulted multiple versions of the three works I would appropriate—both in translation and in the original[9]. This allowed me to evaluate diverse approaches to the complexities and translational intrigues of these works; through Slater's musings, I then explored these intrigues, appealing to a literary-minded audience. Further, the content of each appropriation reflects the original, seen for instance in the alliterative

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[8] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein.* London: Penguin Classics, 1992. Print.
[9] See bibliography.

style of the *Beowulf* story. Anyone with a passion for literature will respond to these references, and better engage with my Major Work.

I also attempted to involve my audience with the opening nightmare sequence. Influenced by *If on a winter's night a traveller,* this section addresses the reader in the second person, engaging them as a character in the story. They are then forced to translate the Italian idiom 'traduttore, traditore' (literally 'translator, traitor'), which I came across in *Is that a fish in your ear?*[10] Struggling with their ignorance of Italian and the subtlety of Italian wordplay, the reader feels for themselves the pressures and creative demands of translation. At the same time, a web of allusions—to Dante, for instance, or to *2001: A Space Odysse*y—appeals to literary-minded readers, but also confronts them with the possibility that something may be missed; this too reflects translation's difficulties.

Slater's characterisation further invites the responder to accept his and my views on translation's artistic potential. Ermes Marana, the malicious translator of *If on a winter's night a traveller* provided a model against which my well-meaning and artistic protagonist, Trent Slater, could react. Interaction with his publisher allows Slater to express positive views on translation, in conflict with the publisher's negative ones; since the publisher is a ridiculous mash up of Penguin and Puffin, I suggest to the reader that its opinions should be scorned. Slater, in contrast, is a sympathetic, if quirky character. Under the influence of my Preliminary Extension 1 Text, *The Pilgrim's Progress*[11], he was initially entirely allegorical—a vehicle for an idea akin to 'Pilgrim' or 'Evangelist'. In the final work, he begins as a stereotype of a

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[10] Bellos, *op. cit.*

[11] Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress.* Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1965. Print.

translator, but gradually develops human, emotional responses. I thus invite the responder to identify with the artistic revaluation Slater embodies.

Further, by investigating the short story form, I was better able to construct a final work that fulfilled my purpose. Short stories like Joyce's "Araby"[12] end with an epiphany: in Araby, the protagonist is transformed from an innocent boy into a 'creature' aware he was 'driven by desire and vanity'[13]. These kinds of epiphanies satisfy responders, who look for human development in characters. As such, my Major Work is structured to end with such a revelation: after repeated rejection, the publisher asks Slater to translate his appropriations for sale as original works on the foreign book market. This moment revolutionises Slater's character and motivations, marking his change from embattled idealist to accepted artist. The responder engages with this human development and becomes convinced that artistic reconciliation between the literary institution and translation is possible.

However, in the Major Work's final line, the publisher asks Slater to do an Italian translation of his appropriations. This recalls Slater's nightmare—shared by the reader—and his insecurity about his lack of Italian. Through this open ending, the responder may sense that translation's story is not over: even though we now value translation as an art form, its inherent struggles and anxieties—first encountered in the nightmare—remain.

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[12] Joyce, James. "Araby". *Dubliners.* Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1992. Print.
[13] *ibid.* 28

The editing process further shaped my Major Work. Faced with a first draft that was over the word limit, I focused on cutting anything that didn't contribute to the story's overall direction: the *Beowulf* appropriation's pleonastic tricolon—though a feature of Old English poetry—was thus reduced, as too were Slater's conversations with the publisher. Further, I decided to use a range of fonts, particularly for the publisher's communications with Slater. I was here influenced by Soyinka's poem "The Telephone Conversation"[14], where small capitals impart an impersonal tone to a racist woman on the other end of a telephone line; my publisher similarly speaks in small capitals on the phone, thereby becoming recognisable as cold and distant.

Finally, I decided to format my Major Work to look like a book. I was influenced here by my Extension 1 text, *Night Letters*[15]*,* which includes endnotes written by a fictitious editor, thus appearing more "literary". Analogously, I set my margins to 3.5 cm, this width recalling the A5 pages of a published book. I also constructed a cover and preliminary pages that parody the layout of a Penguin book, thus continuing the "Puffguin" joke. All this book-like formatting involves the responder in the playfulness of my Major Work, capturing their interest and making them more receptive to my message. Moreover, with the author's name listed as "Trent Slater", I suggest that the Major Work is itself the book Slater ultimately publishes; it thus becomes an artefact of his success and proof that artistic translation is viable.

The process of writing *Translator, Traitor* has been illuminating: I have come to appreciate the struggles and artistic potential not just of translation, but of writing and

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[14] Soyinka, Wole. "The Telephone Conversation". *Selected Poems.* London: Methuen Publishing, 2002. Print.
[15] Dessaix, Robert. *Night Letters.* Sydney: Macmillan, 1996. Print.

the broader literary process. I would like my reader to undergo a similar transformation—to reconfigure their understanding of translation, and, through their experience of my Major Work, embrace this art form. Then, perhaps, translation can enjoy the literary recognition it deserves.