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Translating Hybridity: the Curious Case of the First Kanak Novel (Déwé Gorodé's *L'épave*)

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This article is a collaborative work, in which we reflect on issues that emerged from our co-translation of Déwé Gorodé's 2005 novel *L'épave/The Wreck*. The project arose partly from our collective reactions to and reflections on the interventions of editors and outside readers. It also follows on from Deborah Walker's work on domestication vs foreignisation and the issues surrounding the translation of cultural terms in indigenous literatures.¹

A Culturally Specific Novel

L'épave is itself a fascinating if uneven and in some ways difficult work. This first Kanak novel, by independence activist, prominent local political figure and writer, Déwé Gorodé, is barely even a novel in the conventional Western sense of the word. It is complex, plurivocal, and unclassifiably hybrid, defying attempts to categorise it in terms of genre or thematics and to summarise it in the usual terms of plot and characterisation. Constantly shifting stylistically and generically, its prose narrative is interspersed with didactic passages, some quite lengthy quotes from both the Koran and the Bible, reinterpretations of texts from Kanak "orature" (oral literature), and original pieces of poetry, rap poetry, even graffiti. As in oral tradition, stories or elements of story are woven together, not unlike the pieces of shell and flying fox fur, the beads or seeds that make traditional *monnaie*. Although it is impossible to read this novel in realist terms, it is not magic realism and although its cyclic characters can only be fully grasped through a symbolic reading, each represents a particular voice or positionality as well as sometimes doubling the voice of the narrator and indeed the author. Gorodé's novel has been seen as "dangerous" both by the French political establishment and by Kanak militants.

Synopsis

Against a backdrop of political protest, two young Kanak protagonists, Tom and Léna, begin a romantic relationship. An old upturned wreck on a beach, not far from the centre of Nouméa, is the scene of their initial lovemaking. Léna has just lost her mother and is unsure whether she is ready for a relationship. Moreover, she is haunted by dark childhood memories that both trouble and deepen her growing passion for the young Tom, who until now has experienced nothing beyond fleeting sexual encounters with women. The young couple will cross paths with a series of other characters, each with their personal grief and

¹ Deborah Walker, "Voice Image Text", in Raylene Ramsay (ed.), *Negotiating Identities in Francophone and Anglophone Pacific Literatures* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010, forthcoming).

often dark secrets. The rap poetess, Lila, victim of incestuous child sexual abuse back in the *tribu*, will be raped and murdered. Suspicions fall on Old Tom, the tramp who inhabits the wreck on the beach. Is he benign sage or threatening ogre? Perhaps a mixture of the two? Then we meet Léna's double, Old Léna, herself the sexual victim of a perverse older uncle, who eventually seeks solace in the arms of another woman, Eva, temporarily escaping with her into the "Paradise of Women". Young Tom and Young Léna will learn, like so many others before them, that passion can be as much a prison as a paradise. The final chapter ends ambiguously, with elements of poetic justice and suggestions of hope juxtaposed with doubt. The closing sentence leaves the reader unsure as to whether the cycles of abuse that pervade the novel have been finally arrested.

Hybrid Reading Frames

The novel raises the dual questions for the translator of cultural specificity and readership. One Kanak reader is inscribed within the text: this is Lila, *la conteuse aux pieds nus*/the "bare-foot Bardessa", the re-teller of stories from oral tradition, who observes that although she may be only a street girl, she is perfectly capable of understanding and supporting the work done by her educated activist "sista". Other implied readers are those targeted by the text's detailed ethnographic descriptions – of a wedding and a *bougna*,² for example – or indeed, those seeking new and truer cultural understandings of both the richness and the acute problems of contemporary Kanak society. These readers would be largely European, Metropolitan French. There are also a number of factors, both intra and extra-textual, that suggest Gorodé was also reaching out – through an eventual translation – to an Anglophone indigenous Pacific audience. More generally, the reader of the novel is called upon to solve the puzzles posed at the text's primary level, that of the detective story. The question of "who's who" relates in the first instance to who killed Lila or again to the psychological mystery/drama driving the plot. This is most immediately young Léna's slow coming to awareness of the secret of the childhood rape she has repressed. Léna's feeling of searching for things buried somewhere deep within her consciousness, "like the excitement of a detective sensing he's about to uncover the clue that will open the gates of truth", is, however, also a programme for both writer and reader, not to mention, of course, the translator. "Naked, cruel, indecent – whatever. I must have the truth. And I will track it down until it blows up in my face" ("Nue, cruelle ou indécente, il me la faut, la vérité! Et je la traquerai jusqu'à ce qu'elle m'explose en pleine figure").³ Gorodé's text thus also functions on a self-reflexive level, self-consciously modelling and commenting on the writing and reading processes required as on the purposes of her cultural practice.

One explicit European frame for a reading of the complexities and apparent illogicality of Gorodé's modern story of the power of the Ogre is the European fairytale. Old Tom, the incestuous devourer of his own children, incorporates the animal magnetism of the legendary figure of the animal fiancé,

² Foods moistened with coconut milk, wrapped in banana leaves and cooked in a traditional earth oven.

the Beast. However, whereas (Hé)Léna follows Eva into the primeval garden (“the paradise of women”) as into the “new Eden”, and goes into the mangrove behind Éva “as into an enchanted forest where her fairy godmother would wash away the bad memories of her past, and sluice them far away on the tide”, the fairy story as retold by the Kanak woman writer points most particularly to the shadows, to the underbelly of her society, to the literal source of the tale of the Cannibal Ogre. “For the stories of Prince Charming, of fairies and witches are only make-believe. At best, they end up with a little grandfatherly groping, at the worst, a little fatherly rape. Dads and granddads, they’re the true sorcerers and ogres of the fairy stories” (“Car les histoires de prince charmant, de fées et de sorcières ne sont que des contes à dormir debout avec au bout au mieux les attouchements du pépé et au pire le viol du papa. Les voilà les vrais sorciers et autres ogres du conte!”)⁴

Foreignisation vs Domestication

The very hybridity of these frames of speaking and reading return us to the question of cultural specificity and the issue of foreignisation vs domestication. The extent to which the translator should foreground or erase the foreignness, cultural specificity and difference of the ST (Source Text), has been at the centre of debates in literary translation studies for the last twenty years. Throughout the 1990s, Translation Theory focussed increasingly on the perceived colonising consequences of domestication, particularly when dealing with indigenous texts or texts whose subject matter involves depictions of, and lexical items and linguistic features belonging to or derived from, indigenous cultures. Domestication of the text, eliminating and/or concealing the uniquely foreign linguistic, cultural and social conditions of the original in order to create the illusion of transparency for the TA (Target Audience), came to be equated with Venuti’s “ethnocentric violence of translation”.

Running counter to the foreignisation trend is the central requirement for TT (Target Text) intelligibility, which must often come to terms with an inevitable degree of TA ethnocentric bias. Theorists such as George Steiner⁵ therefore see good translation practice as a perpetual balancing act, aiming at successfully negotiating the domestication-foreignisation divide or continuum.

In the 1990s, Venuti’s foreignising paradigm dominated translation theory, particularly in terms of post-colonial texts. Heavily influenced by French post-structuralist and deconstructionist theory,⁶ Venuti’s resistant, abusive, foreignising approach is one that more or less equates a foregrounding of the foreign with respect for the otherness of the source text and culture.⁷ The

³ Déwé Gorodé, *L’épave* (Nouméa: Editions Madrépores, 2005), p.61.

⁴ Gorodé, *L’épave*, p.130.

⁵ George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶ Venuti draws on André Lefevere, *Translating Literature. The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig* (Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977); Philip E. Lewis, *Vers la traduction abusive* (Paris: Galilée, 1981) and Antoine Berman, “La traduction et la lettre, ou l’auberge du lointain”, in *Les Tours de Babel: Essais sur la traduction* (Mauvezin: Trans-Europ-Repress 1985).

⁷ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge

influence of Venuti and other post-colonial theorists on culturally sensitive translators eager to recognise and reproduce the writing back of often resistant indigenous source texts resulted in a reluctance to situate translations at the domestication or cultural transposition end of the continuum. Domesticating strategies came to be seen as the mark of a colonising universalising gaze that sought to level out and eradicate cultural difference, and with it the identity of indigenous groups.

Since the late 1990s, however, and increasingly since the turn of the millennium, Venuti's foreignisation approach has come under considerable fire. While it is generally more respectful of the indigenous ST culture to foreignise by retaining culturally specific terms, it has been pointed out that such respect does not necessarily require or result from a rigid foreignising approach – in fact, quite the opposite can be the case.⁸ Far from empowering marginalised cultures, foreignisation can have the opposite effect of exoticising them in a patronising and/or elitist manner. Excessive, uncritical foreignising can also result in an obscure and overly literal TT, a series of stilted, clumsy calques that can often distort meaning, as we will see, and which do no justice at all to the indigenous author, his or her text and culture. As Tymoczko and Gentzler remind us: “No single translation strategy can be associated with the exercise of oppression or the struggle for resistance: no single strategy is *the* strategy of power.”⁹ In terms of translating New Caledonian texts in general and *L'épave* in particular, nowhere is this clearer than in the translation of the French term *la case*, to which we now turn.

Foreignisation vs Domestication and the Case of *La Case*

One difficulty in using a fully foreignising approach to translate central Kanak terms is precisely that, in the absence of a common indigenous language (Kanak culture comprises some twenty-eight regional languages), most now circulate in the language of the colonizing Other, i.e. in French. *La case* for the traditional dwelling is thus by no means an exception. Other equally important French terms are *la tribu* for the Kanak village or customary lands, *la pirogue* for the traditional outrigger canoe and *la coutume* for the exchange of customary gifts and custom in general as protocol/*kawa* or *tikanga*.

In the following section, we will discuss in some detail the translation problems, strategies and choices in translating *la case*. These are summarised

1995) and *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge 1998).

⁸ See, for example, Anthony Pym, “Venuti's Visibility”, *Target*, 8 (1996), 165–177; Gillian Lane-Mercier, “Translating the Untranslatable: The Translator's Aesthetic, Ideological and Political Responsibility”, *Target*, 9 (1997), 43–68; Maria Tymoczko, “Translation and Political Engagement: Activism, Social Change and the Role of Translation in Geopolitical Shifts”, *The Translator*, 6:1 (2000), 23–47; Edwin Gentzler, “Translation, Poststructuralism, and Power”, in Tymoczko & Gentzler (eds.), *Translation and Power* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), pp. 195–218; Mary Snell-Hornby, *Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints?* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006), pp. 145–148; Ovidio Carbonell i Cortés, “Can the Other Speak? Metonymic (Re)creations of the Other in Translation”, in Raoul Granqvist (ed.), *Writing Back in/and Translation* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 55–74.

⁹ Tymoczko & Gentzler (eds), xx.

in table form in Appendix I, together with other key indigenous terms and linguistic features of Gorodé's text.

La case variably designates the thatched house, the home or hearth, the ceremonial and spiritual centre of Kanak culture memorialized, for example, in the *cases ouvertes* of Renzo Piano's Centre Culturel Jean-Marie Tjibaou. For a young Kanak man, the collective building of his own *case* (narrated in ethnographic detail, on page 40 of *L'épave*) constitutes a rite of passage that today would symbolise a choice to (re)turn to Custom. Each linguistic region has its specific term and architectural form, but generally speaking, most are round buildings constructed out of beaten earth with a low entrance that forces anyone entering to bow down in respect for the "master of the place"¹⁰ and high cone-shaped thatch roof, generally topped by a ceremonial carving or *flèche faïtière*.

In rendering *la case* [ka:z], transfer is not possible without italics due to pronunciation issues and homonymic confusion with the English. Even with italics, *la case* more often than not, reads somewhat oddly when inserted into an English text. The term for the chiefly or "great" house *la grande case* is an exception due to the addition of the adjective. In our translation, we opted to transfer *la grande case* in italics, with a footnoted gloss added to the first mention.¹¹

For the "ordinary" *case*, we would have liked to use a transliteration, coining a neologism, *kaze*, in English, in order to facilitate TA pronunciation. However this solution was rejected due to the fact that the word *kaze* exists in Kanak languages from the Loyalty Islands, with (so we are told) the meaning of an evil spell.

A further, compounding problem in attempting to render *la case* in English, lies in the fact that the French term literally signifies a primitive or rudimentary dwelling: a hut. English Thesaurus searches for hut give: shed, shack, lean-to, cabin, shelter, shanty – none of which give an accurate picture of the architectural design and cultural signification which the originally pejorative French term has come to signify in the Kanak context. A common synonym for *case* in French is *cabane*, used in New Caledonia (and by Gorodé) to signify several types of construction: variously a shanty, cabin, hut or shed. Thus, in translating *L'épave*, we reserved the use of hut for *cabane*.¹²

Gorodé has pointed out to us that *la case* is a mistranslation: the various indigenous words that describe traditional Kanak dwellings are the equivalent, not of *la case* as hut, but simply, and unsurprisingly, "house", sometimes also "container". Therefore, the "best" translation in the sense of best rendering the meaning of the signifier to the STA (Source Text Audience) – is a thorough

¹⁰ This point is made explicitly in Weniko Ihage's contemporary fable "L'oiseau migrateur" ("The Migratory Bird"), in Weniko Ihage & Déwé Gorodé, *Le Vol de la Parole* (Nouméa: Edipop, 2002).

¹¹ Gorodé, *L'épave*, p.12.

¹² In our earlier translation of Gorodé's poetry (Déwé Gorodé, *Sharing as Custom: A Bilingual Anthology*, trans. and ed. Ralene Ramsay & Deborah Walker [ANU Canberra: Pandanus Press, 2004]), seeking to avoid domestication, we sometimes resorted to "hut" for *la case*. This is a choice we deeply regret and would hope to rectify in a subsequent edition.

domestication. In contexts where the naturalising “house” would confuse the TA as to the architectural design and erase the cultural specificity of the dwelling in question, we have used *thatch-house* or, in one case, *thatched-case* as a more communicative equivalent.¹³ However, in most cases, early in the translation, in Chapter 2, for example, where the type of dwelling is made explicit by the text itself, we have chosen to translate *la case* simply as “house”. Our task was facilitated in many cases since the term *la case* is often followed by an explicative: *la case des femmes* = the women’s house; *la case de la cuisine* = the cooking house; *la case de mon grand-père* = my grandfather’s house.¹⁴ In subsequent chapters we have most often transferred *la case* using italics.

Our example confirms recent theoretical shifts away from an uncritical application of foreignising strategies, clearly illustrating that there can be no absolute fixed rule in terms of the domestication/foreignisation continuum. No strategy, no single point on the continuum, is intrinsically better or worse, more or less faithful to the ST than another. In the case of *la case*, we eliminated the pejorative literal equivalent: “hut”. In the case of *la tribu*, in the early chapters (1-4) we opted for either transfer or calque (“tribe”), eliminating more communicative glosses (Kanak/tribal village; customary lands; local people) as inappropriate for text and dialogue “spoken” from an insider cultural perspective.¹⁵

TA ethnocentric bias, “abusive fidelity”, reappropriation

If theory is to fuel rather than hinder best practice, it must be constantly mindful of the highly context-specific nature of translation practice. The translator’s aim will be to respect and render the otherness of the ST, respecting its tone and register while simultaneously ensuring comprehensibility for the TA. This process will necessarily entail varying levels of domestication, in order to recognise the inevitability of TA ethnocentric bias. As Maria Tymoczko’s recent work suggests,¹⁶ the latter cannot be totally eliminated due to hardwired neurological mechanisms: the brain processes new information by attempting to form associations with what is already familiar and in adulthood, its forward-feed mechanisms (the setting up of expectations for the future based on experiences in the past) make it reluctant to accept extreme novelty and difference. We would thus argue that a degree of familiarisation through domestication is a necessary pre-condition for the successful negotiation of difference.

¹³ We prefer “thatch-house” to the commonly used Pacific “round-house”, since the geometrically precise adjective would not work for all Kanak *cases*, some of which are rectangular.

¹⁴ Thus Gorodé’s earlier short story entitled *La case* is best rendered as *My Grandfather’s House* (as in Raylene Ramsay (ed.), *Nights of Storytelling: A Cultural History of Kanaky, New Caledonia* [Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2010, forthcoming]).

¹⁵ Subsequently, once we considered the reader would be familiar with the “original” *tribu*, we felt confident in dropping the *calque*.

¹⁶ Maria Tymoczko, “Neurophysiology and Translation: Hardwired Dimensions of Consilience and Conflict in Cultural Translation” (Conference paper: IATIS 3rd Conference, *Mediation and Conflict: Translation and Culture in a Global Context*, Melbourne, 7–10th July, 2009).

Returning briefly to Venuti's (via Lewis) concept of "abusive fidelity", one notes that its foreignising bias also incorporates a deconstructive, self-reflexive, dimension that gives greater visibility and power to the translator. Drawing inspiration from Barthes' *Death of the Author*,¹⁷ translation as consciously acknowledged rewriting can easily cross the invisible and oft contested line between translation and adaptation. While this is perhaps justifiable in the context of historical Western works (e.g. Shakespeare, Virgil, Homer), we are sceptical as to the merits of overly self conscious and/or "free" translation approaches that seek to re-appropriate the indigenous source text for the benefit of the perceived TA and greater glory of the translator/editor.

For the essential problem of translation licence as poetic licence, the tension between fidelity and invention, is particularly acute when dealing with indigenous literature, be it poetry or prose. Whether embodied by an individual or not, the indigenous author is not singular: behind him or her there stands a larger community, if not an entire people. And more often than not, a people whose voice has been constantly silenced, deformed, misappropriated by dominant colonial forces. For these reasons, we argue, a certain contemporary tendency towards translation as re-invention runs the risk of silencing the voice of the indigenous author and resulting in a colonising misappropriation of the text.

In the present case of *L'épave*, after consciously reining in our own editorial instincts, we had to deal with attempts by a number of outside readers and editors to help us clarify and smooth, i.e. "clean up", i.e. "whiten" and domesticate Déwé Gorodé's text.

The Editorial Process: Misreading Hybridity

Whether dealing with culturally specific terms or original authorial metaphor, in many cases, the translator need only stay close to Gorodé's own text, which is often at pains to explain the connotations or symbolism of a material element or sign. One of the paradoxes of Déwé's writing praxis is that despite the fact that her work constitutes a *parti pris* of rootedness, immersion, in a Kanak view of the world, she also engages with the Western reader in a sometimes surprisingly didactic manner.

This raises the question of the degree of insider cultural knowledge necessary to successfully translate the full significance of material symbols and of symbolic networks such as the customary pathways of matrimonial alliances, or the foundational character of intricately woven Kanak genealogies, for example. The decision to "foreignise" or to "domesticate" is further complicated by the recognition of the very real problems of reading that Gorodé's deliberately "savage" text poses for readers outside New Caledonia, including Metropolitan French.

The response of the editor and "expert" readers of the Pacific press ISP, with which we had a contract to publish before the Press was suddenly disbanded in 2009, brought home fully the significant issue of the text's receivability or

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

“readerliness” and the implicit expectations of what an emerging indigenous Pacific novel should be. These turned out to be much more constraining and conventional than we had anticipated.

As the editor writes: “[D]o you think Déwé would be prepared to look again at the work in the light of the [reviewers’] comments and take some of them on board? Alternatively, would she be prepared to allow me to work on the manuscript as it now stands, and offer a revised version for her consideration? I do believe that the work would be better received by an English-speaking audience if the points raised were considered. What do you think?” The assumption by the ISP editor that this first Kanak novel, translated from French to English, should be “worked on” in order to be “better received by an English-speaking audience” (domesticated in a radical way, indeed partially re-written) raised a number of questions for us both, as translators of a stylistically very original text whose interest lies precisely in its committed positioning inside Kanak culture and outside any evident Western canon.

Between the Noble and the Ignoble Savage

As scholars have now well demonstrated, the Pacific long served as Europe’s “Other”, allowing Europe to understand what it was in relation to what it was not and also providing a tool for the Enlightenment thinkers to critique the archaic, irrational and unjust aspects of French society. Gorodé’s text, in which both the myths of the noble and the dark (romantic) savage meet and mix, gives the reader no such clear moral purchase. Given the writer’s deconstruction of the politically correct, noble, eco-savage, it is not surprising that the editor’s preference for the novel’s title was for the passive past participle “Wrecked”, which would refer explicitly to the situation of the characters, rather than to the more literal, polysemous, and intertextual image of “The Wreck” that has been woven through New Caledonian literature since Jean Mariotti’s foundational “colonial” novel, *A Bord de L’Incertaine*.¹⁸ (This text figures a mysterious wrecked sailing ship, object of mystery and utopian desire but also of disillusionment for the young protagonist growing up in small town in rural New Caledonia.)

Between European and Kanak Structures

The readers’ reports reveal another evident gap between *L’épave*’s textual games with the French language and its commonplaces – that, we would argue, bear similarities to the experimental work of Queneau or even of Nathalie Sarraute – and their own horizons of expectation. The narrative structure based on multiple voices, the many life-stories *en abyme* within Léna’s story, told by the street-girl Lila, or by Eva, or by Old Tom, or again the tales from oral tradition adapted to comment on the present situation of women through Lila’s role as modern bard or story-teller, the inserted poems, rap-songs, young people’s “texting”/love-writing on the leaves of the aloe tree weave a complex tissue in a very particular space-time. As Witi Ihimaera’s novel, *The Matriarch*, describes this: “At the same time as the spiral is going out, it is returning. At the same time as it is going forward, it is going back.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Jean Mariotti, *A Bord de l’Incertaine* (Paris: Stock, 1942).

In the light of the readers' comments, it seems that the text's failure to enact an anti-colonial or feminist allegory or to construct a reality of childhood "abuse" that is evidently autobiographical, its failure, in short, to correspond to recognisable conventional categories creates a problem for publication/readership. So too does the novel's perceived lack of a moral message or of a happy ending (see Appendix II).

In fact, for many readers, knowing "who's who", in the text's complex, largely symbolic genealogies, accepting that four generations of women share the same name and many of the same characteristics, or admitting the power of the resurgence of layers of the past within the present, repeating patterns over generations, is not self-evident. And neither the courageous and complex message carried in the novel's critique of gender power-relations and sexual violence against young girls over generations (seen by one reader "as dreary, empty, and despairing") nor the play with words, with dialogue, with changing registers and genre ("a lengthy rap song that is difficult to follow, endless graffiti; and poetry"), fit within the horizon of expectation of the two so-called "expert" but clearly conventional readers. What is implicit in their critique is the assumption that the indigenous novel must fit pre-existing categories of Western understanding, literary genres and conventions to be readable – the traditional realist categories of believable, psychologically coherent, individually distinct characters who evolve within a continuous and coherent story. There is an expectation of something resembling a political allegory: thus one reader curiously sees Old Tom, as necessarily representing oppression by the "*new conquering masters*" (*sic*). It is notable that the most culturally different aspects of the novel, the power of *mana* for evil or to enslave others, of sorcery, or revenge are simply not mentioned.

This issue of general "readability" is one the editor would like the translators to address. In contrast to this desire to position Gorodé's messages clearly, the work itself is structured around the perversely hybrid, metamorphosing leitmotif of the wrecked canoe linked to the enigmatic fisherman, Old Tom

Translating Perversity

When her mother took her to Nouméa for the first time, at the age of eight, Déwé asked her about the identity of the statue of Colonel Gally Passebosc, killed putting down the 1878 Kanak revolt. Her mother, the daughter remembers, told her that it was a monument to Ataï, the Kanak chief who had led the rebellion. And if Déwé herself writes fiction to rehabilitate the place of the Kanak in their own history, it is also because "the political discourse that I myself used, colonisers – colonised, does not account for the perversity and ambiguity of the real relationship between the colonisers and the colonised in the past and in the present".²⁰ Perversity here is somewhat analogous to Homi Bhabha's "sly civility", the re-appropriation and redefinition of the dominant culture within the terms of the subaltern culture, a redefinition we would argue

¹⁹ *Witi Ihimaera, The Matriarch* (Auckland: Reed, 1986), p. 149.

²⁰ Blandine Stefanson, "Entretien avec Déwé Gorodé", *Notre Librairie, Revue des Littératures du Sud*, 134 (1998), 75–86.

to be characteristic of Gorodé's particular hybridity. Perversity again is what characterises her representations of a Kanak culture that, in her own words, is being presented (and not only to tourists) as "too clean" – deeply spiritual, non-physical, and unified.

There is, then, no pure origin or homogeneous noble selfhood, no possible full 'return' to some lost Golden Age: Gorodé's Old Tom, the ancestor, the cannibal ogre who devours his children, his son or avatar, the tribe's Orator and customary uncle, who molest little girls and are sexually pursued by them as older women re-write the myths of the noble savage as of the dark savage. Alongside the *parti pris* of a Kanak view of the world, the denunciation of the power of the maternal uncles, of rape and incest, is accompanied by the attempt to rewrite the dynamics of power in gender relations. The text explores the limits and possibilities of the liberation of women's bodies both from the Puritanical constraints imposed by the Church and from ancient forms of control by sexual "sorcery".

Might the ordinary readers' difficulties with this perversely hybrid text persuade us to revisit our translation? We had attempted to respect the novel's various voices and disparate styles – its movement without transition from smooth literary narrative to jagged, ungrammatical or colloquial speech. Should we now go back and distinguish systematically and clearly between Léna as the Ogress (Héléna's grandmother), Héléna/Old Léna, Young Léna, and Little Léna, glossing them into their respective generations and relationships, and making explicit hidden/possibly incestuous family relations? Should we effect some spatial marking of the transitions between main and embedded stories? Should we make the dialogue more "realistic" rather than dialogic? Reduce "perversity" to readability? On one level, the novel offers a degree of poetic justice and swift closure: the repressed secret of Léna's childhood rape is revealed to her and both her tormentor and his female accomplice (Old Léna) meet their deaths. However, there is also ambiguity: Little Tom and Little Léna, who in their turn are "learning to love" on the black stone of the ancestral canoe are possibly the grandson and granddaughter of the Orator, that is, descendants of Old Tom perpetuating age-old behaviour.

Should we heed the advice of our expert readers and slightly rephrase the last two lines, rendering the prospect for change explicit and making the end both a returning and a going forward in a love that is non-coercive rather than a suspected repetition of the familial pattern of incest? If form is meaning, then the answer must clearly be a resounding negative. Altering the opacity and pirouetting, the "now you see me, now you don't"²¹ positioning of the woman author addressing a taboo socio-political problem (the power of the maternal uncles/fathers to whom young girls can refuse nothing) within a culture to which she is also intensely committed, altering the attempt of the text to both explore and conceal the complex depths of its own questions would amount to unacceptably altering crucial elements of the textual message, replacing the indigenous authorial voice by a Western editorial one.

Similarly most of the "corrections" made to the submitted translation by the ISP editor or our own experienced English language editor who helped us

²¹ Gorodé, *L'épave*, p. 58.

in proofreading the Gallicisms out of the English, functioned in the direction of smoothing out a number of authorial idiosyncrasies (long sentences interspersed with fragments, mixed tense narration, original metaphors, abrupt changes in register) to produce a fluent but conventional literary narrative in a more uniform literary register. Readers also questioned the novel's unconventional use of tense or rhythm in French, which Gorodé draws from the tense patterns and registers used in the literary genres of Paicî, her first language. Notable is the present historic of Kanak "orature", as opposed to the "Once upon a time" past historic tense of Western story-telling traditions. As Déwé herself has pointed out:

You begin your stories with "once upon a time". In the formula used in my language to begin stories you cannot use the past tense. For us, when a story is being told, history is brought into the present. As if you enter a circle: you speak of the character, like in the theatre, and you are there together in the circle.²²

Where Gorodé's text is somewhat fragmented, the edits add commas and "and" to her lists, change the order and rewrite to create conventional literary register. The present is changed to the past. Past tense narration is regularised. Original metaphors are made more standard and the register often moves higher or becomes less spoken. We rejected the quasi-totality of these "improvements" which we saw as inappropriately naturalising and "whitening" Déwé's work.²³

Conclusion: The Role of the Translator

In translating *L'épave*, we saw our role as cultural mediators as including an ethical call to respect and defend, where necessary, the integrity of text and author from re-appropriation by Western editorial sources. But in order to be defenders of the ST and its author, we first had to be "expert" readers, which in turn, required a considerable degree of cultural knowledge and sensitivity. Our own experience of living in New Caledonia, together with the opportunity to work with the author,²⁴ facilitated our task greatly. For the translator's art, to state the obvious, involves first and foremost, the ability to recognize the multiplicity of ST variables: ST genre, specific valence and connotation of the ST term at the level of sentence, text and work; prosodic factors, rhythm and voice and to calibrate their receivability for representative sections of the target audience(s). Only then it is possible to choose wisely between potential TT terms and renderings, eliminating those that are inappropriate and opting for the best available solution in terms of the above variables, case by case, without being swayed by theoretical or ideological prejudice. As has been our experience in translating other colonial and post-colonial Caledonian literary texts, achieving balance in Steiner's sense of the word, negotiating the fine line of the foreignisation/domestication continuum, respecting both indigenous author and target audience, is much more like a slalom course (which has the

²² Stefanson, 'Entretien avec Déwé Gorodé', p. 84.

²³ In Chapter one, for example, we retained a dozen or so suggested edits out of around one hundred.

²⁴ We met with Déwé on four different occasions, individually, for work sessions that lasted three to four hours.

translator(s) constantly zig-zagging, often at breakneck speed, from one end of the continuum to the other) than a safe journey down a politically correct middle of the road, or indeed a high wire tight-rope act above the Scylla and Charybdis of foreignisation and domestication. Translating such an uncompromisingly hybrid post-colonial text as *L'épave* demands an equally uncompromising yet hybrid translation approach.

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Appendix 1

The Foreignisation/Domestication (F/D) Continuum

Exoticism/Transfer With italics; with or without gloss; footnote	Cultural Borrowing/ Transliteration	Calque / Literal translation	Communicative translation	Cultural Transplantation / Naturalisation	
				Maori/Pasifika + M/P English	Standard NZ English
Kanak ST terms, eg. Popwaale;			White / European	Pakeha/pakehi	Pakeha/ White/European
Kanak ST terms, eg adii			Traditional (Kanak) Money		
Kanak formal features: Tense usage; Use of deictic; Imagery Authorial style: genre + register mixing; fragments					
Original metaphor					
Local French, Slang & Colloquialisms, eg <i>Poken</i>					Local French, Slang & Colloquialisms
Kanak (voice) Slang & Colloquialisms eg. <i>Aauu!</i>				Kanak (voice) Slang & Colloquialisms	
la case /ka:z/	"kaze"	hut	thatched roof hut / house; traditional house; round-house thatch house x 1 / thatched case x 1	whare/fare	house, home
la grande case		Great Hut / Big Hut	Chief's Hut; Chief's/Chiefly House	whare-miti	
la pirogue w'engâ /w ____ / (paici)			outrigger canoe	_____	canoe
la tribu		tribe	Kanak/tribal village; customary lands; local people	_____	village, home
le clan		clan	extended family		one's people
patate douce kûmwâla (paici) p.40		sweet potato	sweet potato	kumara	kumara →sweet potato

Bold Font: translation choices/strategies adopted in translating *L'épave*. Strikethrough: inappropriate. Non bold: choices that might be appropriate for other texts.

Appendix 2

Elle l'observe lui aussi maintenant, l'orateur qui marche devant elle au bord de la falaise surplombant le trou aux ailerons, un lieu parfois infesté de requins. Un faux-pas et il glisse et s'agrippe à un bout de rocher. Il la supplie de lui tendre la main. Pour la première fois, elle lit la prière dans son regard. Pour la première fois, elle voit des larmes dans ses yeux. Et elle le reconnaît.

Tout le voile se déchire instantanément du fond de sa mémoire. Et elle revoit la scène du viol de son corps et de son enfance par l'orateur, alors adolescent, sous l'œil complice du pêcheur qui use et abuse d'elle comme d'une poupée sur la roche noire de *l'épave*.

Elle en oublie les ailerons qui tournent plus bas et se sauve en entendant un grand plouf derrière elle. Elle tombe nez à nez avec son homonyme qui lui crie déjà comme une accusation: « Où est-il? Où est-il? » Elle lui indique la mer sous la falaise où elle court, le cœur battant, comme à chacun de leur rendez-vous. Léna se retourne pour la voir sauter et entendre son hurlement se perdre dans les flots.

Sur la plage, elle retrouve les deux enfants venus avec leur grand-mère, Tom et Léna. Le petit Tom, le petit-fils de l'orateur. Et sa petite Léna. Avec les autres, ils y viendront souvent par la suite. Et une fin d'après-midi de leur adolescence, ils mettront un temps fou pour répondre à ses appels. Et à revenir du bosquet de l'épave de la grande pirogue où sur la pierre noire, ils apprennent à s'aimer.

(*L'épave*, pp. 166–167)

She observes him now, the orator, walking in front of her at the edge of the cliff looking over the shark hole, a spot sometimes indeed infested by sharks. He makes a false move and slips, grabbing hold of the edge of a rock. He begs her to pull him up. For the first time, she reads supplication in his face. For the first time, she sees tears in his eyes. And she recognises him.

The veil across the depths of her memory is suddenly torn aside. She sees once again the scene of the rape of her young child's body by the orator, an adolescent at the time, under the complicit watching eye of the fisherman, he too, using and abusing her like a doll on the black rock of the wreck.

Léna forgets about the sharks swimming around below and runs off to the sound of something heavy falling into the water behind her. She comes face to face with her namesake who calls out to her accusingly, 'Where is he? Where is he?' She points to the sea below the cliff and old Léna runs towards it, her heart beating as it does at every one of their rendezvous. Léna turns round just in time to see her jump and hear her scream die away in the waves.

On the beach, she finds the two children, Tom and Léna, who came down with their grandmother. Little Tom, the grandson of the orator and her own little Léna. They will come here often with the others. And one afternoon, when they are adolescents, they will take an age to answer her calls. They will take forever to return from the grove of the wreck of the great canoe. Where, on the black stone, they are learning to love.

Trans. Deborah Walker and Raylene Ramsay.