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FOREIGN FAMILIARITIES

Untranslated Terms of Endearment in *The Book of Mother and Love in the Big City*

In this essay I want to examine the English translations of two recent and critically acclaimed novels, one French and the other Korean: Violaine Huisman's *The Book of Mother* and Sang Young Park's *Love in the Big City*.¹ More specifically, I want to assess the aesthetic and ethical implications of two gendered and sexualized terms of endearment – “Maman” and “hyung” – that have been left untranslated in the English texts.

It is important to note that my focus lies on how those untranslated words function *within* the translations of Huisman's and Park's works, and the effects they have on making sense of what the novels mean. I will not do double readings to compare the translations with the source texts, nor will I attempt to analyze the strategies behind the stylistic choices of the two translators, Leslie Camhi and Anton Hur. Instead, I will direct my attention to the potential significance “Maman” and “hyung” add to the novels, particularly through the aporias and lacunae their foreignness present to readers of the translations. Conceptually this approach draws on what Reine Meylaerts has called “heterolingualism” and what Luise von Flotow describes as “translation effects” – two terms that despite certain differences both relate to how (non)translation, the mixing of languages and cross-cultural literary circulation can produce unpredictable nuances between different versions of literary works and impact how texts are read.² And crucially, both terms also highlight the complex processes by which social and political meanings are ascribed to translated texts. Considering that “Maman” and “hyung” both pertain to gender norms and conceptions of sex, the latter is undoubtedly important.

Connecting the idea of “translation effects” to the tripart model for analyses of translation and literary circulation presented in *Northern Crossings: Translation, Circulation and the Literary Semi-Periphery* (2022) – distinguishing the micro, meso and macro levels of cross-cultural literary traffic – I will also chart how the significance of “Maman” and “hyung” is reflected in the novels' publishing trajectories and reception.³ Both were longlisted for the International Booker Prize in 2022, for instance,

which explicitly marked (and marketed) them as *literature-in-translation*. Much like the untranslated words within the texts, the novels' circulatory patterns thus emphasize their dependence on contrasts and crossings between linguistic and cultural frames. Both aspects are important to keep in mind when considering what "Maman" and "hyung" mean for Huisman's and Park's novels – and what they imply for reading (non)translations of words and stories enmeshed in matters of sex and gender.

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Sang Young Park's *Love in the Big City* was written as four novellas, but published as a novel of four parts.⁴ Combining a flaneur-type narrative with traits of autofiction, it tells the story of Young: a queer French-major at a Seoul university who parties hard, juggles Tinder dates, reads European novels and cares for his sick mother. Step by step, the story also delves deep into Young's troubled relationship with Gyu-ho – an older man who might be the love of his life – and his reflections on what it means to "have Kylie," as he puts it; a sort of code for being HIV-positive.

As indicated by the novel's title, *Love in the Big City* is also a story about the possibilities of love in modern metropolitan life. More specifically, it details some of the risks and prospects of gay love in the big cities of East Asia. Apart from Seoul, the characters find themselves in Shanghai and Bangkok – each counting 10 to 25 million inhabitants, depending on how one delineates their metropolitan areas – all the while with distinct ideas of how life might be lead in Paris and New York. More than mere settings, the cities are portrayed with regard to how their nightlife, geography and social norms affect what (and who) the characters do. And likewise, the connections between how characters act and where they come from play a crucial role throughout the narrative. In the opening scene, for example, set at a rather conservative wedding, the narrator comments on a person's "thick Gyeongsang Province accent" – signaling that he is not from Seoul and, to the narrator at least, prudishly boring. As a means of comparison, the narrator then recounts late nights drinking soju in the gay bars of Itaewon, eating Kyochon fried chicken, discussing trips to Jeju Island, and hooking up with strangers "in those dark streets of the city."⁵ The names of places, drinks and foods, in other words, localize both characters and scenes on a spectrum of possibilities, especially when it comes to love, pleasure and sex.

As elements of the novel's realist world-making (or its "writing of culture" through "imaginary ethnography," as Gabriele Schwab puts it), it is crucial that Park's references to love and life in different cities are culturally specific – like the Gyeongsang accent and the Itaewon gay bars.⁶ And it is equally important that Anton Hur's English translation retains the Korean names and allusions. For while understanding them is by no means exclusive to Korean readers, the fact that the references are left un-commented produces a foreignizing effect that marks the English translation as just that: a translation of the Korean text. And in doing so, Hur's (non)translation also emphasizes the cultural specificity of the story itself. It quite simply accentuates that the story unfolds in Seoul, Shanghai and Bangkok, and that the love lives it revolves around are tangled up in the social and sexual norms of those particular cities.

Simultaneously, however, *Love in the Big City* is also rife with Western products, trademarks and icons of popular culture that are used to similar world-making effects.

For example, in the first part of the novel it is mentioned repeatedly that one of the principal characters smokes Marlboro Reds, shaves with Gillette razors and reads *Cosmopolitan* magazine – sometimes in tandem and often as precursors for late nights out in Seoul.⁷ Similarly, in the third part Starbucks coffee and Kylie Minogue’s pop song “All the Lovers” are key components of a climactic scene where the narrator has unprotected anal sex, leaving him sore, satisfied and, as it turns out, HIV-positive.⁸ Though perhaps primarily a reflection of the global reach of Western capitalism, these recurring invocations of Western (and more specifically American or Anglophone) culture also lay bare the cosmopolitan aspects of Seoul’s gay scene.

Stressing the cosmopolitanism of the world Park portrays is not to say that the impact of the specifically Korean is reduced or removed, however, but rather that it encompasses both the local and the global. In that sense, the novel’s thematic of gay love, sex and queerness can be framed under the rubric of “the Global Gay” – an intermittently but intensely debated notion in sexology, social science and queer translation studies. In brief outline, the main concern has to do with a clash between essentialist and constructivist perspectives on gay identity formation, and questions on how to gauge the relationship between (homo)sexuality, sexual identity, globalization and language.⁹ On the one hand, scholars like Dennis Altman have argued that capitalist globalization extends Western conceptions of gay life to other cultures, and that one must be attuned to the effects of hegemonic discourses on how people “incorporate [gay identity] into their sense of self.”¹⁰ On the other, Altman has been criticized for downplaying the agency of non-Western individuals and cultures, essentially erasing the possibility of sexual subversiveness on the grounds of the hegemon.¹¹ And those criticisms have in turn been revealed as lacking in their attunement to language – a factor that, as Brian James Baer points out, “must be taken into account in any discussion of the agency of subaltern subjects.”¹²

In political terms, the levelling of references to Korean and Western culture in *Love in the Big City*’s portrayal of gay life thus connects forcefully to complex issues of representational politics and perceptions of subaltern agency. Similarly, from a world literary perspective the same dynamic between cosmopolitanism and cultural specificity highlights questions of exchange and power inequalities in the transcultural literary sphere.¹³ Those exchanges and inequalities are not least apparent in the novel’s publishing trajectory, as its success in Korea in 2019 laid the grounds for Hur’s translation and its simultaneous release in Britain and the US in 2021, by Titled Axis Press and Grove Atlantic. Significantly, in parallel to the novel’s nomination to prestigious translation awards, Grove Atlantic called it Park’s “English language debut,” stressed its mix of Korean and Western influences and connected it to Asian world literary authors like Sayaka Murata, Han Kang and Cho Nam-Joo – thus exemplifying the “localizing practices” in international publishing whereby translated literature is marketed through a dynamic between conceptions of foreign and domestic literary styles, trends and figures.¹⁴ Furthermore, on the textual level of Hur’s translation the interchange between Western trademarks and retained Korean names might be said to echo Venuti’s argument in *The Translator’s Invisibility*, that conceptions of the domestic and the foreign are interdependent (and to a certain extent reversible).¹⁵

It is in the connection of these two perspectives or backgrounds – the politics of the “Global Gay” and the dynamic between cosmopolitanism and cultural specificity

in world literature – that Hur’s retention of the Korean familial endearment “hyung” is particularly interesting. In dictionaries it is often translated as “older brother” and described as used by Korean males to address an older male figure with whom they have a close relationship. Importantly, usage is extended beyond actual brothers and blood-relatives and grounded on a cultural norm of expressing respect for one’s elders (even when those elders are themselves quite young). “Noona” is the equivalent word for males expressing respect and closeness to an older female; “unni” and “oppa” if the speaker is female.¹⁶ All four are retained in *Love in the Big City*, without explanatory notes from the translator or comments on their connection to Korean social norms in the story itself. But arguably, to a certain extent it is possible to deduce their stylistic and societal significance from individual scenes. In the first part of the novel, for instance, Jaehee (the character with a love for Marlboro Reds and Gillette razors) goes to a clinic for a consultation on abortion. When the conservative physician lectures her on safe sex, she loses her temper in a violent outburst directed at both him and others. After that, she addresses a female nurse a “unni” in a faltering attempt at an apology, clearly signaling the word’s respectful and submissive tone. Analogously, Jaehee calls her boyfriend “oppa” when she tries to divert his attention from her excessive drinking or one of her many lies.¹⁷ Both quantitatively and in terms of its centrality for the narrative, however, “hyung” stands out.

The word first appears in the second part of *Love in the Big City* – titled “A Bite of Rockfish, Taste the Universe” – when the narrator receives a letter and a parcel with his old diary from a long-lost lover. “Hello. It’s hyung,” the letter begins, triggering a series of recollections on their fraught relationship, ended five years earlier.¹⁸ Although both sexually and emotionally intimate, throughout these recollections the lover remains anonymous, designated only as “he” or “hyung.” While in part a reflection of the narrator’s attempts to keep his earlier life at a safe distance, naming the lover as “hyung” is also tied to their age difference and how their relationship is entangled with conservative social norms. On the one hand, the latter is signaled by the narrator’s self-conscious insecurities. When they first meet, reading Barthes and Spinoza at a seminar on “the Philosophy of Emotion,” he is hesitant to talk openly about his sexuality, and later wonders if the soon-to-be-lover’s comment on his diction is meant as a cue that he is “faggy” or “sound[s] gay.”¹⁹ The pejorative tone of these reflections is also tied to the narrator’s mother, and her condemnation of his homosexuality. When she first sees him kissing a boy, she tries to have him hospitalized at a psychiatric ward, and upon his release she both invokes religion (citing Leviticus 20:13, arguing that sodomy be met with the death penalty) and blatantly states that it is a “shameful thing.”²⁰ On the other hand, the boyfriend called “hyung” is continually cast as more assured of himself than the narrator – even declaring that he knew from the first moment they met they would end up in bed together. But he is also meticulous with *not* giving any public displays of the sexual nature of their relationship.²¹ As these points align, “hyung” seems the perfect designation of the older lover: intimate and endearing, yet (officially) stripped of any sexualized nuance.

Significantly, the older lover also criticizes the narrator’s political views and perceptions of gay culture. For while the narrator “loves all the divas” – Beyoncé, Britney, Kylie – and argues that “[a]ll gay guys do,” the lover only hears expressions of American imperialism and how the US controls everything, “from the world economy to global

culture.” And while the narrator tries to circumvent their differences, stating that he wants to “fold every inch of [his] body and soul” into his lover’s “heat and heartbeat,” it proves impossible.²² Their differences are too great, the disconnects in how politics, social norms and cultural expression form their identities as gay men and lovers too palpable, and they drift apart.

Of course, the particularities of Seoul’s gay scene are inscribed in Park’s Korean original, including its conflicts with Western conceptions of sexuality and queerness. But they are stressed by Hur’s retention of “hyung,” and exemplify the unpredictable and politically impactful “translation effects” described by von Flotow.²³ For when the word appears in the English translation, Anglophone readers are not only called upon to recognize that the story takes place in Seoul, but also that the novel thematizes the complexities of “the Global Gay” – and that expressions of queer sexuality reads differently in Korean than in English. Even within the cosmopolitan setting of the “Big City” and despite the novel’s profound investments in Western culture, in other words, the untranslated endearment marks the foreignness and particularity of the story. Or to paraphrase José Santaemilla: the retention of “hyung” in *Love in the Big City* is a reminder that translating the language of sex and gender is never neutral, but a political act of both ideological and epistemological consequence.²⁴

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Violaine Huisman’s *The Book of Mother* is an autobiographical account of life with her mother, Catherine. Diagnosed as manic-depressive, she is constantly troubled, often fighting (or having sex) with her ex-husbands, and intermittently putting her children at risk through excessive drinking and bad driving. “Cigarette dangling from her left hand,” Huisman recalls, she’d drive on sidewalks and scream at pedestrians, acting as if “the rules of the road were purely theoretical.” But Catherine is also outspoken and charismatic, sublimely beautiful, and loving with an intensity that at times seems to outweigh the dangers she causes to herself and others. This complexity is reflected in Huisman’s ironic and subtle prose – consider her description of “being used to [Catherine’s] sporty driving habits” – as well as in the sympathy with which she tries to reconstruct “the precise moment of [her mother’s] collapse.”²⁵ When portraying Catherine’s tendency to curse at her daughters, for example, calling them ingrate little shits and screaming for them to fuck off, Huisman does not dwell on the trauma of a violent parent, but on the hilarity of her mother’s diatribes. The sheer excessiveness of Catherine’s outbursts against her and her sister, Huisman writes, was a reminder that they “weren’t responsible for all of her suffering.” And even more to the point, she also describes how becoming a mother in a sense was a trauma for Catherine; that given her illness and her past, when giving birth to her daughters “she could only respond violently, unpredictably, and destructively, but also with all the love that was missing from her own childhood.”²⁶

Huisman’s novel is divided into three parts. The first recounts her childhood memories of her mother, including the episodes outlined above. The second portrays Catherine’s childhood and youth, centering on her desire to break free from the working-class environments of her upbringing and her own suffocating mother. In detail it depicts Catherine’s promising career as a dancer, and most importantly her

seduction by Antoine; a wealthy and worldly member of the Parisian bourgeoisie and later father to Violaine and her sister. The third part, finally, deals with Catherine's old age and death, and how her daughters try to make peace with their memories of her. It turns to a close on a note of sympathy and grief, as the adult Violaine finds a poem she wrote to Catherine as a child, around the time of her forced hospitalization. Its last words are "How deeply I love you!"²⁷

The second part of *The Book of Mother* is narrated in the third person and reads like a short biography, mixing fictionalized accounts of Catherine's inner life with more neutral descriptions of the sort of environments and important events that Virginia Woolf described as the foundational "granite" of classical biographical writing – dates of birth, names of schools, tax records of relatives and addresses of childhood homes.²⁸ While crucial to the characterization of Catherine, however, particularly in light of Huisman's ambition to portray "le personnage de la femme derrière la mère," for my interests in this essay the first and third parts of the novel are more illuminating.²⁹ For it is in those parts that Huisman writes about "Maman" – the gendered term of endearment Leslie Camhi has left untranslated in the English edition published by Virago Press.

It should be noted, first of all, that "Maman" functions as a proper name in Huisman's narrative, substituting "Catherine" whenever Violaine and her sister talk about their mother. By the same token they say "Papa" rather than "Antoine." In the novel's first part the words often occur in pair, particularly in the sections that recount Huisman's memories of her parents' tumultuous relationship after their divorce. For example, regarding the ritualized forms of her father's visits – involving his praising their beauty and intelligence, telling and retelling stories of his life, and failing to understand his ex-wife's feelings – she declares that her "desires and needs were of no concern to Maman and Papa." They argued a lot and the visits, although ostensibly motivated by Antoine and Catherine's shared custody of their daughters, was really about their conflicted love for each other. "I often had the impression," Huisman writes, "that the main reason Papa came by was to get Maman all wound up, like a clock. He slammed the door as he left, triggering, like a spring, the cuckoo. Cuckoo!" She then goes on to declare that "Maman never fainted during Papa's visits; she always waited until he had left to collapse in our arms."³⁰

Of course, Huisman's use of "Maman" and "Papa" as proper names for her parents is commonplace: it is a mode of expression employed by most children and emulated by a host of writers. But while this might pass without notice in the source text, in the English translation "Maman" and "Papa" stand out – not least as reminders that Huisman's story takes place in France, among the Parisian bourgeoisie bohème. They thereby transcend the function of proper names and also become signifiers of a particular place and culture. Or more pointedly: the untranslated familial names become signposts to Huisman's vernacular in the sense of *domestic language* or *mother tongue*, and thus frame the portrait of Catherine in a setting with distinct ideologies and dominant modes of expression.³¹

An effect, in other words, of Leslie Camhi's choice *not* to translate "Maman" is an emphasis on Catherine as a specifically French mother, rather than an English-speaking "Mom." It keeps her connected to the world of precise properties and proportions that Huisman draws out of her childhood memories, with the dilapidated house in Corrèze

and the “fine apartment in the 7th arrondissement,” as well as French parental norms and Parisian ideas of how a woman of the upper classes should behave.³² However, stressing the distinction between “Maman” and “Mom” is not to say that Catherine is an archetype or representative of French motherhood. Any such claim inevitably falls short, as most mothers in France are not manic-depressive alcoholics and few share Catherine’s “sporty driving habits.” And, one might add, the novel is not called “The Book of *Maman*.” The point is rather that in *The Book of Mother*, the dual function of “Maman” as proper name and cultural signifier marks Catherine as particular, foreign or different – even as the meaning of the word itself is a near universal as one is likely to come. While mothers are everywhere, the novel seems to claim, “Maman” is exclusive to France and the environments of Huisman’s childhood.

One could interject, of course, that other writers, artists and translators have employed similar schemes and marked “Maman” with distinct meanings, particularly in situations where the foreignness of the word is somehow familiar and easily understood. In Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, for instance, where both Dolly and Anna are repeatedly called “Maman” by their children, the word parallels with imported names of drinks and foods as a shorthand for the Frenchification of upper-class culture – crucial for Tolstoy’s orchestration of the ideological clashes between Zápdaniks and the Slavophiles in 19th century Russia. Similarly, in the subtitles to the third season of Netflix’ *Emily in Paris*, the word is retained in several dialogues between the PR-matriarch Sylvie Grateau (played by Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu) and her son. And perhaps most importantly in relation to *The Book of Mother*, *Maman* is also the name of Louise Bourgeois’ colossal steel spider-sculpture, created in 1999 and first presented at the Tate Modern in 2000, then at the Guggenheim and other institutions. Bourgeois dedicated it to her own mother – who like the spider was a weaver – and argued that it was a sympathetic rendition of a kind creature.³³ In connection to Catherine and her fraught relationship with Antoine, one might also recall that arachnid females are famed for devouring their mates as a means of nourishing their young.

Beyond such circumstantial evidence of intertexts, however, exploring any empirical grounds for the particularities of French motherhood is perhaps best left to sociologists or ethnographers. But judging by the novel itself, the distinguishing traits of “Maman” – that is, of both Catherine’s idiosyncrasies and the specifics of Huisman’s childhood – has to do with a psychoanalytically inflected conception of sex and the female body that foregrounds trauma as an integral part of maternity. For one, such a conception is crucial to Huisman’s biographical project as a whole, since it shapes the outline and causality of her narrative. For instance, Catherine’s depressions and violent outbursts are explained as results of the emotional “tragedy” she suffered as a child. Huisman states that Catherine’s own mother “of course” was the cause of it: “She had opened a hole in her daughter’s heart by giving birth to her, and had left it gaping.”³⁴ The ironic clarity of that *of course* is important, at once mocking and taking for granted the faux-Freudian idea of mothers as the root of all evil, endlessly popularized in books, films and TV-shows.

Coupled with sex and bodiliness, the complex of trauma and maternity is also key to Huisman’s descriptions of Catherine’s bond to her own daughters, and her conflicted relationships to men. The former is exemplified by the following passage from the first part of the novel, well worth quoting at length:

We would have like nothing better than to be kept apart from her life as a woman, for there to be boundaries discretely maintained. But she couldn't help making a display of her life as a woman, the same way she was always going around naked at home and pissing with the bathroom door wide open. The shape of her vulva intrigued me from an early age, and years later I learned that my sister had also wondered if it were normal for a woman's genitals to stick out like that, or if that was something peculiar to Maman, who was so hairless that she barely had any bush and so it was possible to see, very clearly, her clitoris coming up out of her vulva. It looked like an upside-down cock's comb.³⁵

The idea of a lack of "boundaries discretely maintained" is particularly important. On the one hand for the relationship between mother and daughters; echoing, as it does, the hole in Catherine's heart, left there by her own mother's shortcomings in regards to maternal comfort and care. But on the other, the lack of boundaries also ties in with a complex contrast between sex, maternity and female corporeality. For while the detailed depiction of Catherine's hairlessness and protruding genitals is essential for the "display of her life as a woman," it also foregrounds Huisman's ambition to portray "la femme derrière la mère" – and its attendant distinction between "woman" and "mother." In that sense, the question of what is "peculiar to Maman" is not just an issue of distinguishing Catherine from other women, but of keeping "Catherine," "woman" and "Maman" from bleeding into each other. And perhaps even of trying to make sense of how maternity and female sexuality can be kept apart.

The complexity of the issue (for it is, indeed, complex) is highlighted towards the end of the novel's third part, where the adult Violaine tries to come to terms with her mother's suicide. Pondering the note she has left behind – tucked between Stefan Zweig's *Burning Secret* and the child-rearing manual *How to Parent* – Huisman realizes that ever since giving birth, Catherine had been torn between the "two impossible poles" of mother and whore. She goes on to quote a passage from Catherine's autobiographical long-poem *Saxifrage* (published IRL by Éditions Séguier in 1993), where she cries out "My ass, my ass, it's not for sale anymore."³⁶ But even as her mother wrote those lines and told the men who had abused her "to go fuck themselves," Huisman writes, "she couldn't stop performing for men, responding to the relentless-ness of their gaze." She couldn't stop taking pride in how "they stared at her ass, her beautiful ass."³⁷

The novel's final analysis of Catherine's tragedy and life as both woman and mother, then, hinges on the Madonna/Whore-complex, again stressing the psychoanalytical inflection of what is "peculiar to Maman." But significantly, where Freud first discussed the complex in relation to sexual neurosis in male patients (naming it "psychic impotence"), for Catherine it's the basis for her whole sense of self.³⁸ Exemplifying what in psychiatric parlance is called "self-objectivation," it is as if the foreign yet all-too-familiar male gaze on her body is internalized and manifested as the grounds for her identity.

From a feminist perspective, the Madonna/Whore-complex can be understood a means of policing women, based on a representational nexus of sexuality, sin and maternity in Juedo-Christian theology. According to Clarice Feinman, what the com-

plex is meant to describe has less to do with neurosis and trauma than the conception of women as owning both the ability to “produce children,” and to “inflame men’s passions.”³⁹ Furthermore, recent studies have shown that self-objectivation is connected to “female endorsement” of the Madonna/Whore-complex, and that it is more common in societies shaped by patriarchal ideologies.⁴⁰ One could argue, then, that the psychoanalytical inflection of Huisman’s portrait of her mother has everything to do with ideology; that the Freudian causality of the narrative not only ties trauma to tragedy and neurosis, but to feminism and an unmasking of the patriarchy. In that sense the aesthetics of Huisman’s novel is inseparable from its ethics. By extension, one could argue that the question of what is “peculiar to Maman” is not solely directed at Catherine or the Parisian particularities of Huisman’s childhood, but at ideologies of motherhood in a more general sense. For Catherine’s fraught dependence on “mother” and “whore” as “inextricable and reversible terms” is not just her own, but tied to paradoxical and neurotic notions of maternity in Judeo-Christian tradition. In that regard Huisman’s ambition of portraying “la femme derrière la mère” does not just pertain to understanding Catherine, but to distinguishing “woman” from “mother” and “whore” – and of extricating a sense of self beyond the pressures of maternity and sex.⁴¹

And though it might be pushing things too far, one could also claim that the connections between motherhood, ideology and the individual self all depend on the word “Maman” – that at least when left as-is in an English text and marked as untranslatable, it stops being a child’s proper name for her parent and becomes something much more meaningful and complex.

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With the tripart model for analysis of translation and literary cross-cultural circulation presented in *Northern Crossings*, both “Maman” and “hyung” are at the micro level of individual works, exemplifying source language retention in the translated texts.⁴² And as previously mentioned, both words illustrate what Reine Meylaerts calls “heterolingualism,” which describes “the use of foreign languages ... in literary texts,” as well as the sort of “translation effects” Luise von Flotow has described in reference to the ideologically impactful nuances that translations can produce.⁴³ Regardless of the preferred typology, however, it is important to stress that neither “Maman” nor “hyung” are foreign in the original. Rather, it is when left untranslated – and perhaps recognized as *untranslatable*, defined by Barbara Cassin as semantic “symptoms of the differences of languages” – that their entrenchment in specific linguistic and cultural norms is laid bare.⁴⁴

Interestingly, with both *The Book of Mother* and *Love in the Big City* something similar happens on what the writers of *Northern Crossings* call the meso level of literary circulation; describing the actions of translators, publishers and other cultural mediators of the international book market.⁴⁵ First of all, both Violaine Huisman and Sang Young Park are themselves such cultural mediators, working in distinctly cosmopolitan literary spheres. Huisman has lived in New York for two decades, organizing multidisciplinary arts festivals at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, though returning at

times to the Paris of her youth. And Park, living in Seoul, has worked as a journalist and contributed to world literary magazines like *Words Without Borders*. Given the autobiographical impulses in both of their novels, these cosmopolitan accents are worth noting.

Secondly, the publishing trajectories of *Love in the Big City* and *The Book of Mother* run along similarly cosmopolitan lines. Both novels were produced by publishing houses of international acclaim – Huisman’s by Gallimard, founded in 1911; Park’s by Changbi, a publishing house and literary periodical founded in the 1960’s that since the turn of the millennium has had considerable international success with writers like Han Kang – and both were met with critical praise and awards in their respective home countries. Park’s novel became a bestseller, adding to his fame as recipient of the Munhakdongne New Writers Award. And notably, *Fugitive parce que reine* (as Huisman’s novel is called in French) won both the Prix Françoise Sagan and the Prix Marie Claire. The English translations were published under similarly favorable conditions. For one, they were launched simultaneously in Britain and the US – *Love in the Big City* by Grove Atlantic and Titled Axis; *The Book of Mother* by Scribner and Virago Press – and both were nominated for prestigious awards.

The context in which Park’s and Huisman’s novels were written, published and translated, in other words, exemplifies patterns of world literary consecration recognizable from the work of Pascale Casanova, Gisèle Sapiro and others, and hinges on acts of translation and cultural exchange at the institutional level of publishers, criticism and literary awards.⁴⁶ And as mentioned, in this regard it is crucial that both translations were longlisted for the International Booker Prize. Originally founded in 2005 as a biennial award for the entirety of an author’s work, it was restructured in 2015 through a merger with the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize. Since then it is given annually to single literary work written in any language that has been translated to English and published in Britain. And according to Jonathan Taylor, chair of the Booker Foundation, the rationale behind the award is geared towards having an impact on patterns of cultural exchange on the meso-level of the British book market. In 2015, he even stated his hope that the International Booker Prize would lead to “greater interest and investment in translation” and highlight the importance of “small publishers concentrating on translated fiction.”⁴⁷

As only works issued in Britain are eligible for the International Booker Prize it can be seen as typical for the increasingly Anglocentric hierarchies of the international book market (apart from English being the only “hypercentral language” of our times, consider, again, the designation of *Love in the Big City* as Park’s “English Language Debut”).⁴⁸ But at the same time, the award’s stress on *translated literature* also highlights to Anglophone readers that the works in question originate from somewhere else – in the present case, that Park and Huisman write about Korea and France, not Britain (or the US). In that sense, being nominated or awarded the International Booker Prize produce effects similar to the retention of individual foreign words in a translated text. Or to paraphrase Meylaerts, a nomination to an award for translation carves out a heterolingual space *surrounding* the literary text.⁴⁹ It follows that awards like the International Booker Prize also have an effect on the macro-level of the international book market as a “system of interconnected literatures,” since it marks and makes visible the

exchanges, interactions and inequalities the system relies on and perpetuates.⁵⁰ Or to put it differently: a nomination-sticker on the cover of a translated book might be a micro-level trace of mechanisms at the meso-level, but from the point of view of the reader the effect also has to do with emphasizing how that particular book is connected to a different culture in another part of the world. Much like writing “Maman” or “hyung” in an English text.

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In the article “Translingual Events: World Literature and the Making of Language,” Stefan Helgesson and Christina Kullberg discuss what they call a “theory of world literary reading” that focus on the manifestation of “linguistic tension.” Against a backdrop of on the one hand the dialect continuum as “fluid zones of variable speech,” and “languages as bounded entities” defined by the nation state on the other, they stress the dynamism of translingual writing, arguing that both texts and readers are moving and unfixed in relation to cosmopolitan and vernacular groundings. “When a translingual event is produced by and in the encounter with a literary text,” they write, “it is not immediately apparent what should count as foreign or familiar – this polarity may shift or even become irrelevant as one engages with the textual material.” Furthermore, Helgesson and Kullberg highlight that “cultivating an attentiveness to translingualism can become both an aesthetic resource and a reading strategy.”⁵¹

To a certain extent, the functions of the untranslated endearments in *The Book of Mother* and *Love in the Big City* can be aligned with Helgesson’s and Kullberg’s theory. Most importantly, the cultural particularities of both novels, signaled in part by the heterolingual foregrounding of “Maman” and “hyung,” are fused with cosmopolitan impulses – evident in the publishing trajectories of both novels, their internationally recognizable genre patterns, and the transnational aura that surrounds both Park and Huisman – in a way that highlight modes of exchange and interaction between the foreign and the familiar. As such, at both the micro and meso levels of description *The Book of Mother* and *Love in the Big City* fit well with the idea of translingualism “as a primary condition” for world literature that individual texts and reading practices can “either work with or disavow.”⁵² Both novels are, quite simply, *world literary*, and ask to be read as such.

Helgesson and Kullberg emphasize the consequence of *translingualism*, and direct their argument to questions of how world literature connects to language politics and standardization, particularly through what Casanova calls the “Herder effect” (concerning the interchange between promoting vernacular literatures and the emergence of standardized languages).⁵³ Regarding the idea of “cultivating attentiveness” and that translingualism is both an “aesthetic resource” and a “reading strategy,” however, one might also stress the importance of *the event*. At least in connection to *The Book of Mother* and *Love in the Big City*, this is more than a Derridean quip. Rather, it is a recognition that it is the retention of source language words that mark the texts as translingual, and elicit the reading practices where the interchange between the foreign and the familiar take center stage. And whether those interchanges make visible the patriarchal ideologies of motherhood and psychoanalysis (as in Huisman) or the

complexities of how “the Global Gay” connects to Korean queerness (as in Park), one could even argue that the translators’ holding on to “Maman” and “hyung” is what makes it happen; that the non-translation of individual words is as once aesthetically and ethically *eventful*.

Notes

- 1 Violaine Huisman, *The Book of Mother* (2018), trans. Leslie Camhi (London: Virago Press 2021); Sang Young Park, *Love in the Big City* (2019), trans. Anton Hur (New York: Grove Atlantic 2021).
- 2 Reine Meylaerts, “Heterolingualism in/and Translation: How Legitimate are the Other and His/Her Language? An Introduction,” *Target* 18:1 (2006), 1–15; Luise von Flotow, “Translation Effects: How Beauvoir Talks Sex in English,” in *Contingent Love: Simone de Beauvoir and Sexuality*, ed. Melanie Hawthorne (Richmond: University of Virginia 2000), 13–33.
- 3 Catharina Edfeldt, Erik Falk, Andreas Hedberg, Yvonne Lindquist, Cecilia Schwartz & Paul Tenngart, *Northern Crossings: Translation, Circulation and the Literary Semi-Periphery*, (New York: Bloomsbury 2022), 19f.
- 4 See the Korea Society’s “Author Talk: Sang Young Park,” (November 16th, 2021) available on Youtube.com: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvogDMKYVo4>
- 5 Park, *Love in the Big City*, 2f, 5, 15, 31, 42.
- 6 Gabriele Schwab, *Imaginary Ethnographies: Literature, Culture, and Subjectivity* (New York: Columbia University Press 2012).
- 7 Park, *Love in the Big City*, 3, 7, 27.
- 8 Park, *Love in the Big City*, 141f.
- 9 Tyler H. Sutton, “The Emergence of a Male Global Gay Identity: A Contentious and Contemporary Movement,” *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology*, 15:1 (2017), 51–58. See also Frédéric Martel, *Global Gay: How Gay Culture is Changing the World* (2012), trans. Patsy Baudoin (Cambridge: MIT Press 2019).
- 10 Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press 2001), 86.
- 11 Jon Binnie, *The Globalization of Sex* (London: Sage Publications 2004), 68ff. See also Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé & Martin F. Manalansan eds., *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York: New York University Press 2002).
- 12 Brian James Baer, “Beyond Either/Or: Confronting the Fact of Translation in Global Sexuality Studies,” in *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer: Theory, Practice, Activism*, eds. Brian James Baer & Klaus Kaindl (New York: Routledge 2018), 38.
- 13 Beyond the world system theory approaches by scholars like Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova and Johan Heilbron, consider Christina Kullberg’s and David Watson’s theorization of the vernacular as “a protean category” necessary to balance the tendency to “equate world literature with cosmopolitanism,” as well as the “Series introduction” to Bloomsbury’s *Cosmopolitan-Vernacular Dynamics in World Literatures*. Christina Kullberg & David Watson, “Introduction: Theorizing the Vernacular,” in *Vernaculars in an Age of World Literatures*, eds. Christina Kullberg & David Watson (New York: Bloomsbury 2022), 2; and Stefan Helgesson, Christina Kullberg, Paul Tenngart & Helena Wulff, “Series introduction. The Cosmopolitan-Vernacular Dynamic: Conjunctions of World Literature” in (among others), *Vernaculars in an Age of World Literature* (2022).

- 14 Cecilia Schwarz, "Profiles of Italy: Localising Practices of Swedish Publishing Houses," in *World Literatures: Exploring the Cosmopolitan–Vernacular Exchange*, eds. Stefan Helgesson, Annika Mörte Alling, Yvonne Lindquist & Helena Wullf (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press 2018), 310–323. See also "Book: Love in the Big City" at the Grove Atlantic webpage, <https://groveatlantic.com/book/love-in-the-big-city/>; and the equivalent site at Tilted Axis, <https://www.tiltedaxispress.com/love-in-the-big-city>
- 15 Regarding this "echo," consider Venuti's reading of the English *Standard Edition* of Freud, and the idea of uncovering "the domesticating movement involved in any foreignizing translation by showing where its constructions of the foreign depends on domestic cultural materials." Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York & London: Routledge 1995), 29.
- 16 See "hyung," "noona," "unni," and "oppa" in *Urban Dictionary*, available online: <https://www.urbandictionary.com>
- 17 Park, *Love in the Big City*, 25f. 34f.
- 18 Park, *Love in the Big City*, 50.
- 19 Park, *Love in the Big City*, 57, 60.
- 20 Park, *Love in the Big City*, 69ff.
- 21 Park, *Love in the Big City*, 82, 94.
- 22 Park, *Love in the Big City*, 89ff.
- 23 von Flotow, "Translation Effects: How Beauvoir Talks Sex in English" (2000).
- 24 José Santaemilia, "Sexuality and Translation as Intimate Partners? Toward a *Queer Turn* in Rewriting Identities and Desires," in *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer: Theory, Practice, Activism*, eds. Brian James Baer & Klaus Kaindl (New York & London: Routledge 2018), 12.
- 25 Huisman, *The Book of Mother*, pp. 2–3. Parenthetically it could be noted that the sympathy with which Huisman depicts her at times rather unsympathetic mother was stressed in the French reception of the book, particularly in connection to Huisman's associative writing style. See Raphaëlle Leyris, "Violaine Huisman rend son humanité à sa mère," *Le Monde* (25th January, 2018). Available online: https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2018/01/25/violaine-huisman-rend-son-humanite-a-sa-mere_5246733_3260.html
- 26 Huisman, *The Book of Mother*, 4–5.
- 27 Huisman, *The Book of Mother*, 211.
- 28 Virginia Woolf, "The New Biography" (1927), in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume IV: 1925–1928*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press 1994), 473f.
- 29 Quoted from an interview with Huisman in the TV-show *La Grande Librairie* (France Télévision), broadcasted on May 18th 2018. Available on YouTube: "Fugitive pace que reine: Violaine Huisman, pour l'amour d'une mère," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5UVGJk1BJI>
- 30 Huisman, *The Book of Mother*, 19.
- 31 Cf. Kullberg & Watson, "Introduction: Theorizing the Vernacular," 5.
- 32 Huisman, *The Book of Mother*, 11, 21.
- 33 See "Collection Online: Maman," <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/10856>
- 34 Huisman, *The Book of Mother*, 37.
- 35 Huisman, *The Book of Mother*, 27.
- 36 Catherine Cremnitz, *Saxifrage* (Paris: Éditions Séguier 1993).
- 37 Huisman, *The Book of Mother*, 190.
- 38 Sigmund Freud, "Über die allgemeinste Erniedrigung des Liebeslebens" (1912), available online via Project Gutenberg: <https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/freud/klein1/Kapitel19.html>

- 39 Clarice Feinman, *Women in the Criminal Justice System*. 3rd Edition (Westport & London: Praeger Publishers 1994), 3f.
- 40 Rotem Kahalon et al. "The Madonna-Whore Dichotomy is Associated with Patriarchy Endorsement: Evidence from Israel, the United States, and Germany," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 43:3 (2019), 348–67.
- 41 Huisman, *The Book of Mother*, 190.
- 42 Edfeldt et al., *Northern Crossings* (2022), 19f, 124.
- 43 Meylaerts, "Heterolingualism in/and Translation: How Legitimate are the Other and His/Her Language? An Introduction," (2006); von Flotow, "Translation Effects: How Beauvoir Talks Sex in English" (2000).
- 44 Barbara Cassin, "Philosophising in Languages," *Nottingham French Studies*, vol.49:2 (Summer 2010), 18.
- 45 Edfeldt et al., *Northern Crossings* (2022), 22f.
- 46 See Pascale Casanova, "Literature as a World," in ed. Theo D'haen, *World Literature: a Reader* (Routledge: London & New York 2012), 275–288; Gisèle Sapiro, "The Transnational Literary Field between (Inter-)nationalism and Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of World Literature*, 5 (2020), 481–504.
- 47 Sarah Shaffi, "'Reconfiguration' of Man Booker International Prize," *The Bookseller*, 7/7 2015, <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/man-booker-306625>
- 48 See Johan Heilbron, "Towards a Sociology of Translation: Book Translations as a Cultural World-System," *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2 (1999), 429–44; "Book: Love in the Big City" at the Grove Atlantic webpage, <https://groveatlantic.com/book/love-in-the-big-city/>; and the equivalent site at Tilted Axis, <https://www.tiltedaxispress.com/love-in-the-big-city>
- 49 Meylaerts, "Heterolingualism in/and Translation: How Legitimate are the Other and His/Her Language? An Introduction," (2006), 4.
- 50 Edfeldt et al., *Northern Crossings* (2022), 12.
- 51 Stefan Helgesson & Christina Kullberg, "Translingual Events: World Literature and the Making of Language," *Journal of World Literature*, 3 (2018), 137f.
- 52 Helgesson & Kullberg, "Translingual Events: World Literature and the Making of Language," 137.
- 53 Helgesson & Kullberg, "Translingual Events: World Literature and the Making of Language," 140, 137.