

# LIP-SYNCOPATING *RAUSCH*

metaperformativity and the contrapuntal translation  
of illocutionary violence in the poetry of Gottfried Benn

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This paper seeks to illustrate the importance of metaperformativity in my broader theory of contrapuntal translation. In order to do so, it explores the concept of ‘lip-syncopation’, one of the theory’s local translation techniques. In literal terms, lip-syncopation can be understood as the deliberate flaunting of the technologically determined norm of ‘lip-syncing’ in audio-visual dubbing. In its rudimentary form, this involves the creation of a divergence between the visible movements of the body – its rhythmic gestures and articulations – and any concomitant vocal utterances (spoken or sung), as part of a performance in which one or other of these dramatic elements remains invariable. Popular examples of this effect can be found in contemporary ‘mashup’ videos, made with social networking apps like TikTok, Dubsmash and MadLipz. The misalignments of rhythm, tone, symbolism and cultural reference tend to perform satirical, critical or transgressive functions. Within my own translation theory, however, the concept is not limited to these kinds of audio-visual parodies. It is applied instead to a technique that can be used to extend an interpretative performance into a contrapuntal dimension of intercultural hermeneutics. As such, what I mean by lip-syncopation is slightly closer to the sense ascribed to the term ‘lip-sync’ when referring to drag acts. However, one needs to imagine a radical extension of the divergence far beyond an exaggeration of the gestural and sartorial markers of gender identity.

Specifically, I intend to show how an analogous form of this comic metaperformativity – articulatory misalignment allied to a pointed dissonance of cultural reference – can be used as a local translation technique in lyric poetry, and thereby employed as a critical mechanism in a broader strategy of contrapuntal translation.

As an illustration, I will conclude with a close reading of the lip-syncopation effects in Michael Hofmann's (2012) English translation of Gottfried Benn's (1916) poem "*Karyatide*". Gottfried Benn was a German poet who worked as a pathologist before World War I, becoming a specialist in venereal diseases during the period in which he made his name as a poet with a rather morbid and nihilistic brand of expressionism. He espoused Nazism in the 1930s, but renounced it in the forties, developing into an increasingly wry postwar poet. However, before analysing the specific techniques employed by Hofmann when translating a characteristic example of Benn's atavistic early expressionism, the theoretical foundation and the basic terminology of this kind of analysis will need to be laid out in a little more detail.

### **What is Contrapuntal Translation Theory?**

My theory of contrapuntal translation is posited on the 'synoptic hypothesis' of textual interactivity<sup>1</sup>: "New multimodal technologies of textual composition, edition, publication, broadcast and performance will make it increasingly common for multiple versions of texts to be received, modified and composed together."

If we accept this premise, we must also accept the obsolescence of the traditional assumption that a translation replaces (rather than accompanies) the original in the context of reception; thus the primacy of what Christiane Nord calls a translation's 'instrumental function' (Nord 47-52) can no longer be taken for granted<sup>2</sup>. The hypothesis reflects the general sociological observation that a hyperconnected textuality is altering how contemporary cultures perceive the structural deixis of intertextuality, and that this is as much a socio-cognitive effect, with an organic basis, as it is a technological reality. What was previously 'distal', in deictic terms, is now treated as 'proximal', not 'there' but 'here', not 'then' but 'now'. In this psycho-social context, the so-called 'Source Text' of a translation can no longer be treated as distal, not as a source at all in fact, but as a salient presence: a voice with which translations

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1 An early influence on this hypothesis was Jerome McGann's work on 'radiant textuality' (McGann 2001).

2 In this regard, my theory resembles the 'constructivist' theory of Clive Scott, who insists "that translation should preoccupy itself with readers *familiar* with the source language" (Scott 1), leading him to promote 'stratified', multimodal forms of translation, incorporating intralingual and intersemiotic elements. However, I would reject many of his preoccupations, especially the acute subjectivism of his focus on the phenomenology of reading.

can constantly and organically interact.

One of the first steps of contrapuntal translation theory is therefore to replace the term 'Source Text' with the term 'baseline'. This is a conscious play on words. In English, 'baseline' (*point de référence*) is a homophone of the musical term 'bass line' (*ligne de basse*): the foundation of the harmonic structure of musical counterpoint. Charles Masson, in his 1699 treatise on musical composition, concludes the opening chapter with a definition of counterpoint, in which he says this of the bass line, "*La Partie qui chante audeffous des autres dans la Mufique [la Baffe] est la baze & le fondement des autres Parties, puisqu'on les bâtit sur elle*" (Masson 31, original spellings). Masson, or more likely his printer, goes to considerable effort to distinguish between 'Baffe' and 'baze', but the analogy is obvious and the cognate etymology implicit.

Contrapuntal translation theory understands translating in analogous, but less architectonic, terms: as a form of composition that seeks to grow new polyphonic layers, or 'descants', out of the baseline text, which grounds the semantic structure of the composition just as a bass line grounds the harmonic structure of a piece of music. Where a traditional concept of translating might aim for 'equivalence' between corresponding units of translation in source and target texts, the contrapuntal approach treats this kind of close correspondence (between simultaneous units in the baseline and descant) as analogous to 'consonance' in musical harmony. However, as Masson points out, successful harmony "*confifte à fçavoir pratiquer les confonances & les diffonances, parce que les unes & les autres entrent dans la Compoſition.*" So contrapuntal translation sees occasional 'dissonance' between units of translation not as failure or loss, or even as tolerable divergence in a target-oriented strategy, but as a crucial aspect of dynamic interaction, within an organic flow of tensions and resolutions, without which the translation would fail to open up the polyphonic space that defines counterpoint as an approach.

This is not quite enough for the analogy to work, however. We also need to account for the interplay of syntax and rhythm. The rigid verticality of Masson's model of counterpoint – a homophonic interplay of consonance and dissonance – is extremely dated, and it is inapplicable to any form of translation that allows for syntactic reformulation. Luckily, any modern description of counterpoint would

stress the importance of rhythmic displacement, i.e. syncopation between voices, as the key feature distinguishing homophony from polyphony. It is only this rhythmic flexibility, and the resulting potential for vertical misalignment, that allows different musical parts to be heard both together and separately: the definitive feature of modern counterpoint. Theodore Adorno describes the effect like this:

counterpoint has always insisted on the mutual independence of voices that resound simultaneously. If one is the mere shadow of the other, or even just too similar, the counterpoint in which each voice claims to be independent becomes a fraud. It loses the oppositional power on which the integration of the contrapuntal structure depends. [...] Conversely, however, the distinct voices must come together again in a unity; in other words, they must form a fit. By virtue of the consistent distinction between them, each must become visible when the other fades into the background." (Adorno 138-139).

In response to this need for mutual independence and integrated opposition, a contrapuntal approach to translation often promotes syntactic variation, even where it is not conventionally considered necessary, for reasons of dynamic interaction. And it pushes the complexity of rhythmic interplay further still. Where poetry is concerned, for example, it encourages genuine syncopations of rhythm. The musical analysis, in *Figure 1.*, of a section of my own version of Mallarmé's "Soupir", written for simultaneous performance, serves as an illustration of this syncopated polyphony<sup>3</sup>. However, while literal rhythmic interaction remains very important, the main goal of contrapuntal translation theory is to allow this idea of counterpoint to grow beyond the musical realm of sonic interaction and to apply an analogical concept of syncopation to the symbolic, cultural and stylistic aspects of language and intertextuality. It seeks to encourage the appreciation of the polyphonic effects of this extended concept of syncopation – local displacements and divergences of sense, reference, style, etc. – in both the reception and the composition of translations.

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3 The linked video file also allows you to hear what the syncopated polyphony sounds like in performance, while following the baseline text in a karaoke-style visualisation: *Clip 1. [Soupir-Counterpoint-Karaoke.mp4](#)*

Figure 1. Musical Analysis of a Contrapuntal Translation of Mallarmé's "Soupir" (1866).

Stéphane Mallarmé, "Soupir" (1866), translated by Sam Trainor, 2017.  
 (Extract). After the reading by Daniel Mesguich in *Mallarmé – Poésies*,  
 Paris: De vive voix, 2005. The English has been transposed up an octave  
 to make it easier to read, or 'hear', in musical terms.



Mon

2 Up goes my soul, oh sis - ter calm, toward your brow,  
 âm - e vers ton front où rêve, O calm - e soeur,

3 where Au - tumn dreams, flecked with rus - set  
 Un au - ton - e jon - ché de tâch - es de rous-seur, Et

4 freck-les, and to-ward the rov - ing heav-en of your ang - el's eye,  
 vers le ciel er - rant de ton oeil an - gé - li - que, Mont-

5 the way a foun - tain of white wa - ter, cons - tant, in a gloom -  
 e, comm - e dans un jar - din mé-lan-co - li - que, Fi - dèle, un

6 - y gar - den sighs to-ward the wide Blue Yon - der.  
 blanc jet d'eau sou-pir - e vers l'A-zur!

The theory positions itself, with regard to some of the other main strands of translation philosophy, as a methodology that might allow the different hermeneutic approaches of Antoine Berman and Lawrence Venuti to be resolved. In essence, it provides an extra-dimensional method via which Venuti's 'minoritizing' and 'foreignizing'<sup>4</sup> translation strategies can be expanded into a polyphonic space capable of containing and encouraging diverse elements of a Bermanian process of *translation*. The premise of Berman's concept is the need for a multifaceted hermeneutic response to bridge a culture-gap, within a heterogeneous and diachronic process of transfer (*translation*), which no single instance of translation-proper (*traduction*) can independently achieve. For Berman, the role of the translation critic is crucial in establishing this process:

Si la traduction est « moyenne », « insuffisante », « laide », « gauche », « mauvaise », « exécration », « fausse », « erronée », « aberrante », tous prédicats impressionnistes qui ont leur vérité [...], alors il appartient au critique [...] de préparer l'espace de jeu d'une retraduction [...] Cet espace de jeu est lui-même pris dans un espace plus vaste, celui de la *translation* d'une œuvre étrangère dans une langue-culture. Cette translation n'advient pas qu'avec la traduction. Elle advient aussi par la critique et de nombreuses formes de transformation textuelles (ou même non textuelles) qui ne sont pas traductives. *L'ensemble constitue la translation d'une œuvre*. Il y a une dialectique entre les translations non traductives et les traductions. On peut considérer qu'une œuvre n'est vraiment « transplantée » et « implantée » (ce qui ne veut pas dire : intégrée, naturalisée) que lorsqu'elle est traduite *stricto sensu* (et non, par exemple, adaptée). Mais une traduction ne se déploie et n'agit vraiment dans cette langue-culture que si elle est étayée et entourée par des travaux critiques et des translations non traductives. (Berman 7)

In Berman's model, this dialectic between translation-proper and the other metatextual responses that constitute *les translations*<sup>5</sup> *non traductives* exists in a

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4 Unlike Schleiermacher, an important influence on Berman, Venuti has tended to reject the primacy of what Nida calls 'formal correspondence', and Ladmiral 'sourcier' approaches to translation, in order to counteract the hegemonic processes of 'domestication'. So, while Berman and Venuti both clearly oppose cultural naturalisation, and would also agree on the need to foreground the interpretative processes of translation, Venuti has always looked more favourably on Nida's 'dynamic equivalence' than Berman, especially where translations are seen as 'minoritizing', in the sense of drawing from cultural or linguistic sources that are seen as socially marginal. My argument here is that the inclusive conception of translation as an allopoetic, polyphonic activity of diverse interpretative expansion, including a strong promotion of local syncopations (including the kind of minoritisation Venuti espouses), tends to harmonise the major elements of Venuti's and Berman's hermeneutic theories.

5 In keeping with the basic system of italicising all non-English words, every time *translation* appears in italics it is to be understood as the French term, as it is used by Berman, and not the English word.

hermeneutic arena he calls an *espace de jeu*, which is both broader than and superordinate to that of translation (*'stricto sensu'*). However, as we have seen, the logic of this hierarchy is posited on an obsolescent textual deixis which presumes the impossibility of any genuine compositional interaction between a text and its *translations*. The contrapuntal approach, on the other hand, begins with the assumption that the potential for this interaction already exists. It is an allopoetic strategy which rejects the possibility of literary autonomy for any individual translation product. Its ultimate ambition is to open up a polyphonic space capable of incorporating the Bermanian *espace de jeu de la translation*: now conceived not as a diachronic process of comprehensive transfer, via which a culture-gap can be gradually bridged, but as a field of diverse intercultural communication which occupies the culture-gap without closing or resolving it.

The culture-gap in question is of particular interest when there is a marked ideological gulf between the compositional social contexts of a baseline text and its descants. It is one thing to deal with the linguistic problems of translating the scene in the *Iliad* in which Thersites is beaten by Odysseus for criticising Agamemnon's leadership. It is quite another to cope with the fundamental ideological problem of the implicit righteousness of Odysseus's act in the baseline text, when its discriminatory justification is anathema in the translator's culture. A twenty first century liberal readership finds it hard to accept that a person should suffer humiliating insults and public corporal punishment simply for daring, as a congenitally 'deformed' commoner, to address the assembly in the same terms as the noble, and perfectly able-bodied Achilles. When faced with such a problem, the traditional consensus of translation ethics would see commentary of the atavism as beyond the scope of translation-proper (*traduction*), but as an important topic in the broader process of cultural transmission (*translation*). It is therefore likely to be confined to a paratext. However, one of the principal aims of contrapuntal translation theory is to show how syncopation in translation – moments of significant misalignment within the contrapuntal interactions between a baseline text and its descant(s) – can open up a polyphonic critical dimension that allows serious cultural disparities, or dissonances, of this sort to coexist, whilst remaining

in harmonic tension<sup>6</sup>. In summary, contrapuntal translation theory seeks to arrange Berman's diachronic *translation* as a synchronic polyphony. It therefore challenges his dichotomy of *traduction* versus *translations non-traductives*.

Michael Hofmann's translation of Benn's "*Karyatide*" provides a perfect example of one of the ways in which this critical dimension of contrapuntal translation theory can be opened up in poetic practice. But before analysing specifically how Hofmann achieves this, and the antagonistic intercultural context in which he intervenes, we need to establish the link between the defining feature of Benn's early expressionist poetry – a violent, ecstatic form of transcendentalism, which he called *Rausch* – and the extension contrapuntal theory's concept of syncopation into the headier philosophical realms of 'syncope'.

### ***Syncope and Illocutionary Violence***

As we have seen, the importance of an extended model of syncopation is a key feature of contrapuntal translation theory. It is arguably the dimension that differentiates it from all other theories of translation, and underpins the majority of its defining characteristics. In this sense, the theory has been influenced by developments of the concept of *syncope* in contemporary French philosophy. In particular, when it comes to the politics of performance, it shares a good deal of its frame of reference with Fred Dalmasso's concept *syncopolitique*, a model of radical political performativity that is itself influenced by French philosophical work on *syncope* by Jean-Luc Nancy (1976) and by Catherine Clément (1990). Dalmasso defines *syncopolitique* like this:

la syncopolitique n'est pas un appel à l'interruption, mais une occupation de l'écart, une manifestation passive du manque, de la disparition qui ne serait pas « le symbole d'un vide absent » mais celui d'une transformation violente à venir. (Dalmasso, 241)

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6 The influence of Edward Said's contrapuntal approach to post-imperial cultural analysis must be acknowledged here. He says, "this global, contrapuntal analysis should be modelled not (as earlier notions of comparative literature were) on a symphony but rather on an atonal ensemble; we must take into account all sorts of spacial or geographical and rhetorical practices – inflections, constraints, inclusions, prohibitions – all of them tending to elucidate a complex and uneven topography." (Said 384).



However, it is important that the ambiguity of the word *syncope* in French (1. fainting, 2. off-beat music) does not exist in English. The English language differentiates between the medical term ‘syncope’ and the musical term ‘syncopation’. Only the latter concept of rhythmic misalignment – an ‘occupation of the gap’, as Dalmasso puts it – is directly applicable to contrapuntal translation theory. However, the more violent idea of a creative ecstatic break, which Dalmasso has picked up from Catherine Clément, is particularly germane to the early poetry of Gottfried Benn, and to his expressionist notion of *Rausch*. Clément explicitly describes creative *syncope* as a way to expand consciousness:

Comment s’élargit le champ de conscience ? Grâce à une attention dispersée [...] Paul Klee témoigne de ce passage à vide [...] il l’appelle attention “multidimensionnelle” [...] “polyphonique”. [...] Ehrenzweig parle de “scanning” inconscient : le terme anglais scanning [...] signifie d’abord scander les vers en poésie [...] et ensuite, balayer. [...] L’artiste se trouve dans une position comparable à celle du héros de la *Théodicée* [Leibniz] [...] que nous voyons passer [...] de perceptions parfaites [...] à **une syncope brutale, extatique**. L’acte du “scanning” inconscient se situe aux lisières du désordre ; un ordre imperceptible, incontrôlable et incontrôlé, s’engendre à la fois doucement et avec une grande violence. (Clément 1990, my emphasis)

This is directly comparable with Gottfried Benn’s concept of *Rausch*, which drives his early poem “Karyatide”. It is a concept that carries a problematic quality of ideological otherness for the contemporary translator. The word is probably cognate with the English word ‘rush’ (a quick movement or sudden surge), and Benn’s use of it comes closest to the specific sense (A. 2.b.) of ‘rush, *n*2’ in the OED: “A rushing sensation in the body; a surge of euphoria, excitement, or energy, esp. one induced by drugs or some other stimulant”. This kind of ‘headrush’ is very similar to the ecstatic syncope described by Clément. And Benn’s conception pushes it (as one might expect of someone under its influence) into similar transcendental realms. Martin Travers explains:

Benn was to bring [...] epiphany-like instants of perception under the rubric of *Rausch* (“intoxication”, “euphoria” or “elation”), a concept that possessed for him physical, mental and, ultimately, epistemic characteristics. It was a crucial psychic mechanism, which allowed atavistic mentalities to acquire actuality, a *via ductus* for “pre-logical forms of consciousness that provide their bearers with a brief second of mystic participation” (Travers 81)

A core element of *Rausch*, when put into practice, is its attempt to harness what might be called 'illocutionary violence'. Not only does Benn want to describe or capture *Rausch*, he actually wants it to happen in and via his language. My urge to label this as 'illocutionary violence' is clearly informed by the linguistic philosophy of John Austin, in particular by the theory of Performative Speech Acts (Austin 1962). However, I do not intend to use the term merely to name a category of violent 'Illocutionary Acts', such as threats, curses, insults, incitements to violence, etc. Though it often accompanies them. Nor do I intend to name an extreme type of 'Illocutionary Force': a hostile desire to inflict damage with words. Though cruel intentions can also be relevant. What I mean by 'illocutionary violence' is a distorted amplification of illocutionary force itself. It is an implicit urge, in the throes of violence, to transcend the limits of linguistic performativity, and to force language to do what it normally cannot: to make things happen or come into being in the environment by the sheer power of an utterance, or to control other people with a pseudo-magical force of adjuration. It is an intrinsically metaperformative act.

This transgressive urge is precisely what Benn tries to embody, in the form of *Rausch*, in his early poem "*Karyatide*".

### **Lip-Syncopation and Metaperformative Counterpoint in Hofmann's "*Caryatid*"**

Benn's "*Karyatide*" is a dithyrambic apostrophe: an exhortation to a Greek statue to come to life and break free of its role as a pillar holding up an ancient temple roof, to become a wild, free, sexual woman. As such, it is a violent amplification of the classical invocation of the muse, framed by Benn as an attempt to perform a kind of transcendental translation (like Pygmalion) in which the poetic persona breathes life – via this supposedly transmissible effect of *Rausch* – into a frigid cultural object.

The first stanza of the poem not only dramatizes the attempt to transmit *Rausch* to the statue (and to the reader), it also pivots rhythmically on two cognate words: the verb *rauschen* ('to rush'), to name one of the violent actions the persona wants the statue to perform, and the invented emphatic adjective *überrauschten* ('over-intoxicated') to describe the blood of ithyphallic satyr Silenus, which is supposed to inspire the statue to become flesh.

When, in 2012, Michael Hofmann retranslated this poem into English, it was during a period of renewed controversy about the return of the so-called Elgin Marbles to Greece. There were debates on TV and articles in the papers, and there was a play produced on the Edinburgh Fringe called *Caryatid Unplugged*, by Evi Stamatiou, in which the Caryatid in the British Museum, having been brought to life just as Benn's poem intends, attempts to negotiate the difficulties of exile in contemporary Britain. Interestingly, the play included a comic scene involving a translator (appearing via speaker-phone), who fails to deal with a culturally specific reference to a strapping young man (*palikaraki*) in a folk-song performed by Caryatid:

CARYATID: *Τι το χεις λερωμένο, βρε παληκαράκι μου*

TRANSLATOR: Repeat please...

CARYATID: *Τι το χεις λερωμένο, βρε παληκαράκι μου*

TRANSLATOR: How did it get that dirty, my (*tries to find the appropriate word*)... Beautiful? (*pauses*) Amazing? Fantastic? One and only? Warrior? This word cannot be translated, really... Huge penis maybe, John. (Stamatiou 203)

So Hofmann's translation of "*Karyatide*" was produced in a cultural milieu that was very much at odds with that of the poem's original composition. Benn composed his poem during World War I in a German imperialist culture whose young artistic elite was strongly influenced by Nietzschean philhellenism, for which Benn was to become the Nazi movement's champion in 1934, when he published his influential essay "*Dorische Welt. Eine Untersuchung über die Beziehung von Kunst und Macht*" (Dorian World. A Study of the Relationship between Art and Power) (Benn 1934). In stark contrast, the context of Hofmann's translation was one in which the ethical dimensions of cultural transmission (including, in Stamatiou's play, the staging of a failure to translate the words of a Caryatid made flesh) were highly prevalent in the public arena, and questions related to both gender politics and European imperialisms were crucial to these debates. Seen in this context, Hofmann's ironic caricature of the metaperformative nature of Benn's Rausch makes perfect sense. And it therefore comes as no surprise that Hofmann's translation should provide a fine example of lip-syncopation, with an apparently satirical intention, as an implicit

intervention in ongoing debates about cultural appropriation, thus bringing us into the realm of Dalmasso's syncopolitique. It is in this way, I would suggest, that Hofmann's off-beat version goes beyond what is normally expected of translation-proper. When read in parallel with the two other published English versions, by Michael Hamburger (1960) and David Paisey (2013), Hofmann's can be seen to add a contrapuntal dimension that brings out the polyphonic possibilities of a quasi-Bermanian process of *translation*.

Original, Gottfried Benn (Benn 1916):

Entrücke dich dem Stein ! Zerbirst  
Die Höhle, die dich knechtet ! **Rausche**  
**Doch in die Flur**, verhöhne die Gesimse – :  
Sieh : durch den Bart des trunkenen Silen  
Aus seinem ewig überraschten  
Lauten einmaligen durchdröhnten Blut  
Traüft Wein in seine Scham !

Translated by Michael Hamburger (Benn 1960):

Leave stone behind, rise higher! Burst  
the socket that enslaves you! **Rush**  
**out to the meadows!** Mock the cornices –  
look at the drunk Silenus: through his beard  
from his loud blood forever drowned in roars,  
shivered by alien music and unique,  
wine drips into his sex!

Translated by David Paisey (Benn 2013):

Abstract yourself from stone! Explode  
the cavern that enslaves you! **Rush**  
**away into fields!** Despise the entablature –  
look, through the beard of drunken Silenus  
from his eternally over-addicted  
loud, unmatched and roaring blood  
wine drips into his crotch!

Translated by Michael Hofmann (Benn 2012):

Renege on the rock! Smash  
the oppressor cave! **Sashay**  
**out onto the floor!** Scorn the cornices –  
see, from the beard of drunk Silenus  
from the unique uproar of his blood  
the wine dribble into his genitals!

For reasons of brevity, I have reproduced only the first stanza of the various versions of the poem above, and I shall limit myself to a close reading of a single clause. However, it is a clause that epitomises Hofmann's contrapuntal approach. In a structural echo of the metatheatrical storm monologue in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (III.ii), Benn launches into his intemperate dithyramb with a string of vehemently futile imperatives, exhorting the static figure to perform a sequence of violent actions. The third of these reads "*Rausche / Doch in die Flur*". Hamburger's and Paisey's perfectly adequate, but rather bland translations of this clause are, respectively: "Rush out to the meadows" (Benn 1960, 233) and "Rush away into fields" (Benn 2013, 43). Both have predictably translated '*rausche*' with the cognate English verb 'rush', creating a typical mimetic articulation of the sort preferred by audiovisual translators producing the dubbing text for a lip-synced close-up. Both, however, have pointedly avoided doing the same thing with the word '*Flur*'.

Hofmann, on the other hand, gives us the remarkably arch sentence: "Sashay / out onto the floor!". Anyone who has ever studied translation between French and English is likely to be familiar with the dance metaphor *chassé-croisé* used to describe a technique of syntactic inversion, often employed when translating the description of precisely this kind of physical movement: *la statue partit en dansant* / the statue danced away. In my opinion, despite being self-consciously 'gauche' (as one of Berman's '*prédicats impressionistes*' puts it), not only is Hofmann's much glitzier clause not a bad translation, it is actually a brilliant bit of lip-syncopation, conceived as a *sashay-croisé* – a comic inversion of the expected pattern. Hofmann flips the lip-sync effect on its head – he *flip-syncs* it<sup>7</sup> – while camping up the metaperformativity. The word 'sashay', with which he replaces the obvious solution 'rush', recalls the popular catchphrase from the TV talent show RuPaul's Drag Race: 'Sashay away!'<sup>8</sup>. Following hot on the heels of this ostentatious *clin d'œil*, Hofmann's flagrantly ironic use of the *faux ami* 'floor' (the sort of thing that might floor a translation critic like

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7 This effect is analogous to spoonerism or metathesis. The word 'sashay' in English is, of course, derived from the French '*chassé*' via a similar process of metathesis.

8 2012 is generally accepted to be the year in which RuPaul's Drag Race went 'mainstream'. Sam Dashenas, writing in *Gay Times*, says this: "Although RuPaul and Michelle Visage continuously claim that drag will 'never be mainstream,' Drag Race season four [January-April 2012] is when the show started to make its presence *known* in the mainstream." (Dashenas 2022).

Berman) inevitably makes the reader think of a dance floor – a space as ideally suited to this physical movement as it is to the metaperformative act *par excellence*: a drag queen act. In doing so, he counterpoints the vehement tone and romantic imagery of the baseline text – in which the poetic persona strives to make a feminised architectural feature become flesh (with his ardent incantation) and to escape into an undelineated natural space – with the much more ironic tone and imagery of a drag-queen being cajoled into gliding extravagantly over an artificially delineated space dedicated to a frivolous kind of popular performance.

This may simply be a bit of target-oriented camp – a way of capturing Benn's *Rausch* with a form of euphoric *syncope* that is more familiar to a contemporary readership – but I feel it must be read as a rhetorical translation procedure: an example of bathos, perhaps even what Lisa Samuels and Jerome McGann call a 'deformance' (Samuels & McGann 35). As such it carries an implicit criticism of the ideological premises of Benn's creativity: its sexism and imperialism – the Pygmalion urge to possess and control the female embodiment of a violent desire for transcendental incarnation – and that post-Nietzschean blend of atavistic zeal and nihilism that the contemporary reader knows will inevitably feed into the Nazi philosophy of art. This is a perfect illustration of how contrapuntal translation can use an effect of both literal and metaphorical syncopation to open up a polyphonic space within the culture-gap. It is also an example of Dalmasso's *syncopolitique* in action: *l'occupation de l'écart*. We might even call it *syncopoétique*. More generally, the drag-like caricature of Benn's corny metaperformativity – brought to the fore in this lip-syncopation of his illocutionary violence – is a syncopoetic feature of many of the rhythmic and referential patterns of Hofmann's contrapuntal translation as a whole: ("Scorn the *cornices!*"). This effect allows an extra-dimensional quality to evolve, one that can only really be appreciated by hearing the interactions between Hofmann's version (the descant) and the original (the baseline) – as part and parcel of the diachronic process of Berman's hermeneutic *translation* – as if they were a synchronic polyphony.

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## Figures

**Figure 1.** Musical Analysis of a Contrapuntal Translation of Mallarmé’s “Soupir” (1866).  
[Soupir-solfege.jpg]

## Audiovisual Content

**Clip 1.** Soupir-Counterpoint-Karaoke.mp4