

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LITERARY TITLE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSLATION THEORY

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“Once the title is there, the only thing left to produce is a text that justifies it ... or doesn’t.” Gerard Genette, *Paratexts*

Regardless of its quality as a work of fiction, Stieg Larsson’s *Millennium Trilogy* provides two interesting issues for literary criticism in general, and specifically, comparative literature. First, in introducing the mysterious cyber hacker Lisbeth Salander, the Swedish author created one of the most fascinating and distinguished female heroines in contemporary pop culture, which equally attracted the interest of women’s, feminist, and gender studies. Second, its worldwide reception constitutes the novels as a paragon of a particular strand of translation theory. The title of Larson’s first novel in the original Swedish edition is *Män som hatar kvinnor*, which, when translated into English, means as much as “Men who hate women.” Nevertheless, neither the first edition in the English, nor the first one in the German language, to name two different major literary markets, followed Stieg Larsson’s original concept. Not only does the English version change the focus of the title, but it has also, especially because of the popular original Swedish film and the Academy Award-winning film adaption by David Fincher, superseded *Män som hatar kvinnor*, as the title which most often refers to the novel. In order to explain this change from the Swedish title to *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, one has to examine the titles of the whole trilogy. Whereas the Swedish novels do not have unified titles, the second and third ones being entitled *Flickan som lekte med elden* (“The girl who played with fire”) and *Lufslottet som sprängdes* (“The grandiose fantasy that was blown up”), the English titles aim to allow the public the immediate identification of each of the novels as part of the series. Considering that the English title of the second part of the trilogy, *The Girl who Played with Fire*, is a direct translation of the original Swedish title, it is obvious that the English publishers and translators used the title of this novel as a model for the two other ones. The various titles of the first novel being mentioned above, it remains to be said that the Anglophone community refers to the final chapter of the trilogy as *The Girl who Kicked the Hornets’ Nest*. Therefore, the reason for this interpretation rather than translation of the titles seems to be a marketing decision on the part of the publishers. The same applies to the German titles *Verblendung* (“delusion”), *Verdammnis* (“damnation”), and *Vergebung* (“forgiveness”), which, instead of being introduced by a relative clause beginning with “The girl who”, consist of one noun with the prefix “Ver-”. Thus, the English editions permanently shift the focus to the novels’ main protagonist, Lisbeth Salander, whereas the German ones try to allude to the thematic content of the trilogy’s plot. Interestingly enough, German publishers did not follow the same strate-

gy when editing the works of Henning Mankell, one of Larsson's immediate precursors in Scandinavian crime fiction. The titles of his series of novels portraying the cases of Inspector Kurt Wallander are fairly direct translations without any unifying elements. Then again, it appears that after the success of the *Millennium Trilogy* another phenomenon has arisen: namely, that titles of crime fiction refer back to Larsson's novels. An illustrative example is the latest novel by the British author Simon Beckett, whose novel *The Calling of the Grave* was published as *Verwesung* ("rot").

All of these observations, concerning the reception of Stieg Larsson's bestselling works, raise issues about the validity of the translation of titles on the one hand, and the validity of the notion of the literary title on the other hand. This essay seeks to give a detailed examination of the notion of the title and its implications for the translation of titles into foreign languages. Thereby, the term "title" shall be analysed exclusively in the context of fictional works within different genres. I will begin with a theoretical analysis of the effects that an original title has on the text that it precedes, which will be based on Gerard Genette's chapter on titles in his influential treatise *Seuils (Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation)*. In addition, Genette's thoughts on titles shall be complemented by and contrasted to those of David Lodge and Umberto Eco as they incorporate the positions of both the literary critics and the author of fiction. Ultimately, this essay aims to discuss the findings on the notion of the title with the help of translation theory, especially from Umberto Eco. In doing so, I will refer to the introductory case of the *Millennium Trilogy* as well as other examples from both English and German literature, thus, fulfilling Eco's demand, who frequently feels irritated when reading essays on the theory of translation that, even though brilliant and perceptive, do not provide enough examples, and are hence, "as bad as a book on dinosaurs that lacks any attempt to reconstruct the image of a dinosaur" (*Mouse or Rat* 1).

As early as in his very first sentence of the corresponding chapter, Gerard Genette articulates the complexity and importance of the examination of titles in literary criticism: "To a greater extent than perhaps any other paratextual element, the title raises problems of definition and requires careful analysis" (55). It is also of central importance for this essay to track Genette's defining remarks, as they will help to narrow down its specific research interest. Genette begins with a useful comparison of the theoretical position of Leo H. Hoek and Claude Duchet, two of the founding fathers of the discipline of titology, which gives an overview of the state of research in Genette's time. Quoting Hoek, Genette states:

[T]he title as we understand it today is actually (and this is true at least of ancient and classical titles) an artificial object, an artifact of reception or of commentary, that readers, the public, critics, booksellers, bibliographers, ... and titologists (which all of us are, at least sometimes) have arbitrarily separated out from the graphic and possibly iconographic mass of a "title page" or a cover. (55)

Since Genette's as well as Hoek's agenda was to examine the general form, meaning, and function of titles, it is, therefore, not surprising that the translator does not appear in their argumentation; yet, the translator will enter this discourse in this essay.

Nevertheless, it becomes clear that the title occupies an important space not only on a book cover or a title page, but also in the intentions and strategies of various parties. In this respect, David Lodge commences his chapter on titles in *The Art of Fiction* in the following way: “THE TITLE of a novel is part of the text—the first part of it, in fact, that we encounter—and therefore has considerable power to attract and condition the reader’s attention” (193). This, obviously, is in contrast with Genette’s theory. Whereas Lodge explicitly says that the title is indeed “part of the text,” Genette’s general concept of paratexts says that we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text (1). These different views might be due to an assumption that David Lodge makes later on in his treatise. “Perhaps titles always mean more to authors than to readers, who, as every writer knows, frequently forget or garble the names of books they claim to admire” (195). Certainly, the literary critic takes a special

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position within the body of the readership and, as, among others, Genette’s dedication to the analysis of titles demonstrates, would definitely not undervalue the meaning of titles, but still there seems to be a tighter, and ostensibly emotional bond between fiction authors and their chosen titles. Eventually, however, I would argue in accordance with Genette that, whether one perceives paratexts as part of the text or not, they fulfil a function for the text and extend its meaning; namely, “to *make present*, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption in the form ... of a book” (1). It appears that this especially applies for titles, as the public, readership, or academia mostly refer to a text by its title.

The next step is to carve out several different constituent elements of the title. Genette briefly summarises Hoek and Duchet’s debate about these elements. As a reiteration of this dispute would go into too much detail for the framework of this essay, I will confine myself to the three concluding elements and examples¹ that Genette invokes: these are “title” (*Zadig*), ‘subtitle’ (*ou La destinée*), and ‘genre indication’ (*Histoire orientale*)” (56). Genette continues, arguing that in the contemporary period, only the ‘title’ is compulsory and that there is a tendency to blend the different elements thereof (57-59). Later on, he also introduces the comprehensive form of the “*overarching title*” (60-64), e.g. ‘The collected works of’ or ‘Volume One.’ Concerning these four categories, I would argue that with two exceptions, only the ‘title’ and the ‘subtitle’ are of vital importance for contemporary translation theory. Terms to describe both ‘genre indications’ and ‘overarching titles,’ and therefore also their respective translations, have become more and more idiomatic throughout the history of literary and translational tradition. Thus, the task of the translator is limited, as it seems to be unreasonable to break with tradition. If one translator does so, however, this would be the first exception to my claim that only ‘title’ and ‘subtitle’ are relevant for transla-

tion theory; the other one being blended forms of the two central and the two marginal categories. An interesting example on that account is German author Patrick Süskind's postmodern novel *Das Parfum. Die Geschichte eines Mörders*, whose official English title is *Perfume. The Story of a Murderer*. The presumably intentional translation of 'Geschichte' as 'story' deprives the title of the German double meaning of 'Geschichte,' which encompasses the notion of 'story' as well as the notion of 'history.' Considering that *Das Parfum* is one of the metahistoriographical novels that were typical for Postmodernism, the cutting of that implication definitely produces a loss of semantic meaning. Returning to the course of Genette's Paratexts, the French critic, after discussion of the different elements, provides a similar but more detailed historical outline of the development of titles than David Lodge in *The Art of Fiction* or Umberto Eco in his *Postille al nome della rosa (Postscript to the Name of the Rose)*. Thereby, Lodge and Genette basically remain in their Anglo-American or French traditions, whereas Eco touches upon various literatures such as the German, Italian, Russian, French and English ones (Nachschrift 10). Genette treats this aspect rather with a historical objectivity; Lodge, on the other hand, immediately starts to make claims that in specific periods, exclusively specific titles were used.

The titles of the earliest English novels were invariably the names of the central characters (*Tom Jones*) ... Later novelists realised that titles could indicate a theme (*Sense and Sensibility*), suggest an intriguing mystery (*The Woman in White*), or promise a certain kind of setting and atmosphere (*Wuthering Heights*). [I]n the nineteenth [and twentieth] century [authors] began to hitch their stories to resonant literary quotations (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*) ... The great modernists were drawn to symbolic or metaphorical titles (*Heart of Darkness, Ulysses*)—while more recent novelists often favour whimsical, riddling, off-beat titles, like *The Catcher in the Rye* ... (193)

It strikes me that such an attribution is inept. Especially the classification of *Ulysses*, undoubtedly accurate in its periodical aspect, seems to be odd. How is one to decide, if the title of Joyce's novel is rather a "symbolic or metaphorical title" than a "literary quotation" of Homer's *Odyssey*? Moreover, Umberto Eco reveals several titles that he considered for the novel that later became *The Name of the Rose* in the *Postscript*. Those include a "promise of a certain kind of setting and atmosphere" and "the name of the central character" (10), which also demonstrates the choice of the title is not at all dependent on literary periods; which is, of course, just another argument against the concept of periods itself. Nevertheless, I thought it useful to include Lodge's scheme within this essay because it supplies a valid list of types of titles whose translation would involve different strategies. While it is possible to simply take over characters' names, unaltered, one needs greater knowledge and insight to produce a valuable translation of symbolic or metaphorical titles. Having discussed the basic definitions, this essay shall now examine the appearances and functions of titles with the help of Genette's six categories approaching these issues.

As the first four categories only have minor influence on the translation of titles, they shall be summarized in aggregate form for the sake of completeness. The first

point of discussion will unite place and time and the second senders and addressees. The only point of discussion regarding place is that in antiquity the title had no site reserved for it, and was hence, transmitted orally, which has changed over the course of time, and especially since the title page became a commodity; as a result, the present state is that the title has four obligatory locations which are the front cover, the spine, the title page and the half-title page (64). By itself, the location of the title needs no further investigation in the context of translation. I think it is worth mentioning, however, that without the development of the location and representation of the title on book covers and title pages the title would not feature as prominently as it does. Thus, it would not have the same semantic and representative value for the reception of a book and consequently not the same importance during the text's translation. Concerning the time of the title's appearance, Genette states that, in theory, "the title appears upon publication of the original ... edition" (66). Yet, he acknowledges that there can be some slight variations. In the following discourse Genette identifies several of those deviations (66-73). There are pre-titles that might "stress various thematic aspects unavoidably sacrificed by the definitive title" (66) and nicknames that authors give their works in private use.

Furthermore, Genette points to titles, which the publisher, the public, or the law had imposed upon the work, and of which it is known that the author does not approve of them and prefers an alternative. The knowledge about these kinds of titles might not directly influence translators. Nevertheless, it may well be that the lost thematic aspects are a useful aid for the translation of the actual title, or if the official title sets a difficult problem for the translator, one of the former alternatives could serve as the title to be translated. A change of the official title constitutes a special case because of a new authorized edition or "as a reaction to a successful adaptation made under a new title" (69). I would argue that in these cases a change of title in the foreign language will depend on both the success and popularity of the original and the new edition/adaptation, and is therefore, not strictly a concern of translation theory. If the original is unknown, but the new edition/adaptation remarkably successful, a change of title will provide wider access to audiences. This is what happened recently to Vikas Swarup's novel *Q&A* whose official English and also German title, after the huge success of the film, became *Slumdog Millionaire*. If, on the other hand, the original's status is quasi sacrosanct, it is very unlikely that a definitive change of title will occur. Genette refers to not a complete transition, but "a reduction—actually, an erosion—of the title" (70), especially when it comes to so-called synopsis-titles as in the first edition of *Robinson Crusoe* (71). These are either due to public reception, omissions by the publisher, or even the intensions of the author. In the end, the translator can choose to follow that trend or not, if s/he has a free choice. A final type of titles is that which incorporates a date or dates. This can either be the date of the book's publication or the date of the book's setting. As, for example, Orwell's *1984* shows: these titles are mostly kept in their original state. Nevertheless, in the past, dates could easily become at least a slight challenge for translators whose countries used a calendar differing from the Gregorian calendar, and such dates can still pose a problem for the cultures that continue to utilize another calendar system. Also, depending on the circumstances, of course, the title may either actually indicate a real date, or a *thematic* one (73; 81-85).

For the communicational situation of the title, Genette suggests a traditional model with “a message (the title itself), a sender, and an addressee” (73). The critic’s first thoughts are devoted to the sender. The title’s (legal) sender, of course, is not necessarily its actual producer” (73). After all, the legal contract “signed by both these parties² mentions the title (and not the text!); and it is shared in the broader legal sense ... because the position and social function of the title give the publisher stronger rights and obligations to the title than to the ‘body’ of the text. (74) Hence, “the responsibility for the title is always shared by the author and the publisher” (74). This notion can also be found in Lodge’s chapter, in which he writes that “[n]ovels have always been commodities as well as works of art, and commercial considerations can affect titles, or cause them to be changed” (195), as well as in Eco’s *Postscript*. Therein, Eco states that he had to abandon his dream to entitle *The Name of the Rose* ‘Adso of Melk,’ as nowadays publishers are not very keen to have the name of a central character as the title of a novel (*Nachschrift* 10). In the context of this essay’s agenda, at least for first translations, the translator has to be introduced into this scheme of responsibility. Whereas a new translation of canonical works such as *A Tale of Two Cities* would be unlikely to receive a new title, the English translator of *Män som hatar kvinnor* in collaboration with the publisher, first had to come up with *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. The only uncertain element in this trilateral model is the author. For example, at the time his trilogy was first published, Stieg Larsson had already died. It is also important to note, that some authors, for various reasons, might not be interested in the translation of their works. In contrast to this, Umberto Eco explicitly says that he has always collaborated with his translators even with those who translated into languages he does not know, and he even occasionally permitted them to change details from the original text if the translator faced insurmountable difficulties (*Mouse or Rat* 2). All of the considerations that flow into the choice of the definitive title finally aim at the addressee whose part in the process is a passive, but, nevertheless, influential one. This addressee is, of course, the public. Genette notes, however, that the “public is not the totality or the sum of readers” (74). Whereas at a theatre or cinema, the public is indeed the sum of all people in the audience, the public for a book is nominally “an entity more far-flung than the sum of its readers because that entity includes, sometimes in a very active way, people who do not necessarily read the book (or not at least in its entirety), but who participate in its dissemination and therefore its ‘reception’” (74). As examples Genette gives, amongst others, the employees at the publishing house, critics, booksellers and reviewers. This produces a conflict between publishers and authors, which in the end also involves the translator. The publisher wants “to get others to read what they themselves have not

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always read" (75); the author, on the other hand, conceives the reader as "a person who reads the book *in toto*" (75). Strictly speaking, that would exclude some publishers from the readership of their own authors. Eventually, it comes down to economical interest against art. In this respect, the title plays a significant role. "[T]he text is an object to be read, the title ... is an object to be circulated—or, if you prefer, a subject of conversation" (75). Obviously, the title of a novel is known to more people than have actually read the whole text. One of the crucial functions of the title therefore is to advertise the book, "to ensure the text's presence in the world" (1).

Exactly this notion of representing the text in the world mirrors in the first and last of the three functions that Charles Grivel carves out for titles. These functions are "(1) to identify the work, (2) to designate the work's subject matter, (3) to play up the work" (Genette 76). This trinity provides a useful starting point but also contains several flaws. I would like to mention a selection of Genette's objections (76), complemented by my own thoughts, which are relevant for translations. First, needless to say that neither all functions are fulfilled at the same time, nor are they listed in hierarchical order. I have the impression that especially the third function has become more and more important for translations. This can be seen, for instance, from definitive title changes after successful adaptations, the unification of titles of the *Millennium Trilogy*, or even the unification of titles by an author, as amongst others the German translation of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. The novel's German title *Alles Was Wir Geben Mussten* clearly echoes the one of *The Remains of the Day*, which is *Was Vom Tage Übrig Blieb*. Second, it may well be interesting to have a look at the translations of works that have the same title in their original language. As Genette says: many titles do not rigorously fulfil the first function as they share the same homonymous title (76). An analysis would therefore show whether and, if so, how the translator broke with the original title to designate the uniqueness of the work and a second step would then be to examine the implications of the change. Third, the designative function of a title has to be questioned because "the relation between a title and the 'subject matter as a whole' is highly variable" (76). This becomes obvious in the treatises of Lodge and Eco as well. On the one hand, Lodge writes that choosing a title is "an important part of the creative process, bringing into sharper focus what the novel is supposed to be about" (194). Considering that the thematic framework of his novel *Changing Places* is the exchange of a British and an American professor; this also applies to his own work. On the other hand, Eco states that he especially chose the title *The Name of the Rose* because the symbolic meanings of a rose are so diverse that in the end it would have no meaning at all; thus, the reader is deluded and the function of the title fulfilled: it must muddle the reader's ideas, not regiment them (*Nachschrift* 11). In both cases the German translations, *Ortswechsel* and *Der Name der Rose*, were very faithful to both the semantic meaning and the designative function of the chosen titles. It would need a broader study though to clarify in how far the authors' intentions named above are maintained by translations. The choice of the original title obviously depends on the author's aesthetic concept, a worthwhile diachronic study of which could also show whether this concept underlies any variations. Finally, another problem arises with either the text's genre indications or purely singular titles (Genette 77). As the agenda of this essay excludes genre indications I will not ponder them any further. To solve

the problem of singular titles Genette suggests the introduction of a new function. I would criticize, however, that the introduction of a new category would only lead to a further complication of matters, as more and more exceptions would be found, and this would result in a sheer endless chain of new functions; a critical involvement with the original model seems to be adequately enough.

The only issue that remains to be discussed is the relation between title and text. After tackling the terms coined by Hoek, Genette eventually distinguishes between thematic and rhematic titles. Discussing the two types, Genette says that he would not contrast between two functions, but rather speak of the same function that they fulfil differently (89). Both share the descriptive function to “describe the text by one of its characteristics, whether *thematic* (this book talks about...) or *rhematic* (the book is...)” (89). *Thematic* titles are not only these which introduce the theme but also those which are “everything in the ‘subject matter’ that is not the theme, or one of the themes, is empirically or symbolically related to it or them” (81). After this definition, Genette gives several examples for *thematic* titles (82-85), which I shall not list as they predominantly correspond with David Lodge’s catalogue (193). Genette then briefly mentions the debate about the ambiguity of the title, which I illuminated with the help of the examples provided by Lodge and Eco, in the previous paragraph. Genette’s argument is then concluded with his ideas on titles and their subtitles, which can represent different types of *thematic* titles (84f). Exactly this difference of categories is also an interesting aspect for translation studies. Whereas the original Swedish title alludes to one of the themes in the novel, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* unequivocally is inspired by its central character. In such cases, it is definitely a valid task to analyze the change of effect and its implications for the reception of the work. As *rhematic* titles mostly are either genre indications or display a genre innovation³ (Genette 86) they shall not be discussed further. It may well be considered though to examine these hybrid types of titles that both contain one *rhematic* and one *thematic* notion. For instance the title of Henry James’ *Portrait of a Lady* begins by “designating the genre and therefore the text, then go[es] on to designate the theme” (Genette 89). The challenge for the translator would be the same as the one I demonstrated using the example of Patrick Süskind’s *Das Parfum. Die Geschichte eines Mörders*. Apart from their descriptive function, Genette also detects a connotative capacity of titles. This is basically what I argued for in the translations of the *Millenium Trilogy* and the German edition of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, and thus, seems to play a major role in the translation of titles. First, “[t]here are titular styles peculiar to certain authors: ... all have family resemblance” (Genette 90). So, as I suggested, there is a unity in the oeuvre of one author; or, as is the case for the translations, a family resemblance wants to be achieved. Second, there are also quotation titles such as Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*, which, “provide the text with the indirect support of another text, plus the prestige of a cultural filiation” (Genette 91). This, of course, complicates the translator’s task as he has to decipher the intertextual or intercultural reference and consider it for his own transmission.

Eventually, Genette evaluates the last function of the title which is the function of “tempting, of inciting one to purchase and / or read” (91). As I argued above, economical reasons have a major influence on the choice and especially on the translation of a title. Thus, I would go so far as to say that particularly translated titles are endangered

to walk right into the trap: “if the title is indeed the procurer for the book and not for itself, what one must necessarily fear and avoid is the possibility that its seductiveness will work too much in its own favor, at the expense of its text” (Genette 94). Hence I would like to end this part of the essay, precisely in order to affirm the importance of titles, with the same postulation as Genette ends his analysis of functions: “let’s not polish our titles too much—or, as Cocteau neatly put it, let’s not spray too much perfume on our roses” (94).

Before I will apply Eco’s theoretical framework to the translation of titles I first want to explain my motives for choosing Eco by a short digression into general translation theory. In his constitutive essay *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, Roman Jakobson identifies three different kinds of translation:

- (1) Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
- (2) Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.
- (3) Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems. (429)

In the context of this essay *rewording* can be neglected and *translation proper* is the one kind that makes up the basis for analysis. Indirectly, however, *transmutation* could have an influence on the translation of titles as it has been shown above how adaptations can lead to a change of the definitive title. To put it simply, within *translation proper* there are two different extreme positions. One, represented for instance by Vladimir Nabokov, postulates to be absolutely faithful to the original text:

The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language, has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text. The term “literal translation” is tautological since anything but that is not truly a translation but an imitation, an adaptation or a parody. (77)

According to Lawrence Venuti, the other position acknowledges the “autonomy of translation, its status as a text in its own right, derivative but nonetheless independent as a work of signification” (11). Venuti then refers to Walter Benjamin and his essay *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* (*The Task of the Translator*) in which Benjamin states that “a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux” (22). I, however, agree with Umberto Eco when he says that in some cases a translator can only be truly faithful to the source text by being literally unfaithful (*Mouse or Rat* 5), and that, nevertheless, a translation of *David Copperfield* should not only tell “the original story but will also be able to suggest by its style that the events and the dialogues take place in nineteenth-century London and not during the Roman Empire or in a sort of Star Trek universe” (*Mouse or Rat* 4). Thus, I prefer Eco’s image of the translator as an impartial negotiator between the original text and

the destination text with all their cultural, economical or even academic frameworks (*Mouse or Rat* 6). Eventually, “[n]egotiation is a process by virtue of which, in order to get something, each party renounces something else, and at the end everybody feels satisfied since one cannot have everything” (*Mouse or Rat* 6). In the last part of this essay I primarily want to highlight some linguistic problems of translating titles using the techniques of negotiation proposed by Eco in *Losses and Gains*, the second chapter of *Mouse or Rat*.

The chapter opens with the notion of *accepting losses*. Eco writes that especially vernacular and vulgar expressions are prone to being subjected to losing semantic meanings. Concerning the translation of his own novel *Baudolino*, Eco states that if the translators, wanted to save the double play between vernacular expressions and their immediate translation, they had to find a dialect equivalent in their own language—but in doing this they would have de-Italianised Baudolino’s language. These are situations in which a loss is unavoidable. (*Mouse or Rat* 38)

The only way to avoid this loss is to refrain from attempting to translate the title at all. This is true for Scottish author Irvine Welsh’s novel *Skagboys*. As it would have been impossible to capture the regional meaning of ‘skag’, which is “a poor, scruffy person”, as well as its general one, “heroine,”⁴ German translators simply kept the original title. Irvine Welsh also provides a useful example for the translation of vulgar titles. Eco says that some languages are “pretty indulgent with curses related to sexual and scatological affairs; and others are definitely more demure” (*Mouse or Rat* 39). He then classifies English and Italian in the former and German in the latter category. Hence, it is not surprising that Welsh’s novel *A Smart Cunt* was entitled *Der Durchblicker* (“The one who understands”), which keeps the notion of smartness but gets rid of the vulgar expression.

Then there are expressions and words for which the translator, as well as the author, have to accept that parts of the title have to be cut. Eco names this category *copyright by mutual consent*. These are words for which there is simply no corresponding term in the target language (*Mouse or Rat* 43–47). A prominent example is Bernhard Schlink’s novel *Der Vorleser*. As there is no concept for someone who reads something out loud in the English language, the translator decided to accept the cut, and entitle the English version *The Reader*. Thereby, however, the title loses the most important feature of the novel. The protagonist Michael Berg reads out several works to his older partner Hanna Schmitz. Only later in the novel it is revealed that Hanna is illiterate and that her shame drove her into working for the Nazi regime. Finally, Hanna is fighting her inability, by learning to read and write, with the help of Michael recording his readings on tape. From a linguistic point of view though, this loss is inevitable and could only have been compensated with a clumsy paraphrase.

Compensation is the next of Eco’s categories. “Sometimes a translator, in order not to miss an important detail, has slightly to enrich the original text” (*Mouse or Rat* 47). Although one cannot strictly speak of an original text when it comes to the Grimms’ version of the folklore *Rotkäppchen* (*Little Red Riding Hood*) it serves well enough to illustrate the matter. In order to do justice to the suffix “-chen”, which is a diminutive, both the English and French version had to compensate with the addition of the words “little” and “petite” respectively.

This notion corresponds with the one of adding and improving; that is that occasionally a translator “in order to avoid a possible loss, ... says more than the original” (*Mouse or Rat* 50). The German translation of Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* keeps the original title but then adds *Neue Helden* (“New heroes”). Trainspotting being a particularly middle-class activity, the novel develops a social critique by following the lowest of the working-class, actually young men at the very margin of society, for whom there are no more trains at which they could look or which could take them out of their social misery, so that they then seek salvation in drug use. In German, a linguistic concept of trainspotting, first of all does not exist, and second of all, would not be associated with the bourgeoisie. So, to keep the original title again has the effect of not losing a specific meaning by translation; to add *Neue Helden*, however, echoes the depiction of a disregarded social class that becomes the focus of attention.

Eco concludes his essay by saying that all these techniques

tell us that the aim of a translation, more than producing any literal ‘equivalence,’ is to create the same effect in the mind of the reader ... as the original text wanted to create. Instead of speaking of equivalence of meaning, we can speak of *functional equivalence*: a good translation must generate the same effect aimed at by the original. (*Mouse or Rat* 56)

In the case of the linguistic examples given above it definitely applies that translators tried to generate the same effect as the original; this is not surprising, as a title itself is nothing other than a linguistic unit. Analysis becomes more interesting though, when titles are deliberately cut, extended, or translated completely unfaithfully without any linguistic reason. I would even argue that there are some examples for these procedures that in the end, nevertheless, produce the same effect. The cutting of the local specificity in Ian McEwan’s novel *On Chesil Beach* to German *Am Strand*, for example, does not diminish the symbolic meaning of a beach. The only readers that could be appalled by this cut are those familiar with the Dorset shoreline. In the end, commercial consideration might be the cause for many mutations but I think that, even if this applies, the question why a title, which is not directly translated, is considered to be more appealing to the public is worth consideration. Thus, whereas this essay focused on addressing some problems for the translation of titles, further studies would have to examine various issues. First of all, it would have to evaluate whether the translation of the title or, more specifically, an unfaithful title has any effects on the translation of the whole text. Second, further study will have to follow the example of Umberto Eco and include more than two languages in its corpus to gain a broader image of translation practice which would also include comparisons between the translations, and not only between the original and its translation. I would also suggest interdisciplinary research with film studies, as the phenomenon seems to be the same if not more versatile than in literature. Not only can *transmutations* into film lead to a definitive change of title or do the translations of film titles signify the same functions and deviations as literary ones, but films also open up another level for analysis. For instance, the titles of films like Marks Foster’s *Finding Neverland*, which is based upon a play entitled *The Man who was Peter Pan* and was translated into German as *Wenn Träume Fliegen Lernen*

(“When dreams learn to fly”), have three different stages of perception and thus allow even further investigation. First and foremost, however, film presumably has a bigger cultural impact on societies nowadays than does literature, so that it is of interest to examine the cultural and social implications that influence the change of a title, for commercial reasons or not. Perhaps this union of literature and film will reveal that domestic despotism against women is more openly addressed or less a taboo in Sweden or that English readers simply prefer strong female characters. Either way, titular changes as from *Män som hatar kvinnor* to *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* might tell us more about societies than how one can attract people to spend money on artistic products.

END NOTES

1. In brackets.
2. The author and the publisher.
3. E.g. Odes, Elegies, etc; genre innovation: e.g. *Méditations*, *Unfashionable Observation*
4. Both meanings from: <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/171688?redirectedFrom=skag#eid>>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2012

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