

Popular Culture Association in the South

Adapting Shakespeare for "Star Trek" and "Star Trek" for Shakespeare: "The Klingon Hamlet" and the Spaces of Translation

Author(s): Karolina Kazimierczak

Source: *Studies in Popular Culture*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Spring 2010), pp. 35-55

Published by: [Popular Culture Association in the South](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23416154>

Accessed: 16/02/2015 15:33

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Popular Culture Association in the South is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Studies in Popular Culture*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Adapting Shakespeare for *Star Trek* and *Star Trek* for Shakespeare: *The Klingon Hamlet* and the Spaces of Translation

In Leo Braudy's words, "a remake is always concerned with what its makers and (they hope) its audiences consider to be unfinished cultural business, unrefinable and perhaps finally unassimilable material that remains part of the cultural dialogue."¹ This statement goes firmly against those critical voices which diagnose the practice of rewriting as post-modern urge to imitate "dead styles" of the past,² or warn against culture "forgotten behind the rewrite."³ Describing remake as partaking in an un-ending cultural dialogue, continued "not until it is finally given definite form, but until it is no longer compelling or interesting,"⁴ Braudy alludes to an inherent referentiality or intertextuality of cultural production, where any given text can (or, in fact, must) be read in relation to other texts, as permutation of other texts.⁵ This sense of textual kinship, grounded in some "unfinished cultural business," underlies any rewriting or adapting procedure: within the medium of film (as Braudy indicates), as well as within the literary field, and in any cross-exchange between the literary, visual, and performing arts. It is also what seems to underlie the translation, as it moves from one linguistic and semantic system to another in hope (forever uncertain) of capturing what made the original compelling and interesting, and in search (never accomplished) for – to use Walter Benjamin's term – the original's "after-life."⁶ In this essay I want to explore this phenomenon of textual – or intertextual – afterlife, brought about in a series of interpretive moves, linking the practices of translating and rewriting, in a bold attempt at adapting

32.2 Spring 2010

Shakespeare for *Star Trek* and *Star Trek* for Shakespeare. I will refer here to a curious case of the translation of two of Shakespeare's plays – *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing* – into the Klingon language, a language of a fictitious alien species originating in the *Star Trek* television series and films.

These projects, aiming at translating two of the canonical texts of modern English literature into a language linked to one of the biggest popular culture franchises, emerge at the very center of critical theory's questioning of translation and its political and ethical engagements. Since Benjamin's definition of "the task of translator,"⁷ the translation has lost its position of an innocent copy, a truthful representation of some original text. It is no longer viewed as recreation of the original, but rather as its displacement, which leads from, but always moves away from, the meaning of the original. The translation lives by the difference of meanings,⁸ and of languages, and in uncovering this essential foreignness, it opens the space for the interaction of the self and the other. This interaction remains fragile and uncertain, as the translation inevitably seeks to substitute the original meaning with its own linguistic and cultural categories, thus leading to the erasure of the foreignness and the ultimate alienation of the other. At the same time, by confronting the familiarity of translator's own meaning with the alienness of the original, it also leads to alienation of that which is familiar in one's own language, and to the alienation of the self.⁹ The Klingon translations of Shakespeare's works – through sometimes playful stylistic devices, presenting the translated texts as reconstructions rather than different language versions of the original, and locating them in a broader textual tradition or narrative reality – become interesting illustrations of those challenges and ambiguities inherent to the translation process: the spaces of translation. At the same time, by staging Shakespeare's early modern plays in the futuristic costume of alien civilization, they reveal – and creatively rework – certain representations of language, culture and their interrelations linked to the *Star Trek* films and series. All along, they raise questions about the notion of familiarity and alien-ness and the processes of cultural re-appropriation as enacted in and through language, thus contributing to the debates on cultural and language politics, emerging at the intersections between translation theory and postcolonial studies. They also illustrate cre-

Studies in Popular Culture

ative links between the official and popular culture and the role of popular texts in both enacting and reworking established cultural imaginaries.

In the following parts of this essay I will explore some of those points, while engaging in a close reading of the Klingon translations of *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, in the context of both Shakespearean tradition and the broader *Star Trek* narrative. I will start by looking at the links between Shakespeare's oeuvre and various incarnations of *Star Trek* narrative as both context and inspiration for the Klingon translations. Following the trope of a daring "cultural re-appropriation" of Shakespeare's work in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, I will examine the richly layered intertextual play involved in presenting the Klingon versions of *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing* as reconstructions or restorations, and I will question the consequences of such a bold reinterpretation for the understanding of translation as "an authentic copy." Finally, addressing briefly the issue of the apparent interplay of high and popular culture enacted in the Klingon translations, I will look more closely at the links between language and its cultural context: the colonial context of Shakespeare's plays and the science-fiction / fandom context of the Klingon translations recreating, to a certain extent, some of the colonial representations. In this final part of the essay I will illustrate the complexities of alienation enacted in these projects, and indicate their consequences for the understanding of the processes of cultural and linguistic re-appropriation. Throughout these discussions I will attempt to elucidate the double role of popular culture in both subverting and re-enacting some prominent cultural representations and practices.

— — —

Translating Shakespeare for *Star Trek* and *Star Trek* for Shakespeare, the Klingon versions of *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing* exercise a curious double bind of adaptation. They bring evidence of the afterlife of the *Star Trek* mythology, while at the same time illuminating the links of this mythology with the afterlife, or "unfinished cultural business," of Shakespeare's work. It has been remarked by some critics that Shakespeare's oeuvre seems particularly susceptible to the "use" and "abuse" of countless adaptations, remakes and reinterpretations.¹⁰ This tendency appears linked to Shakespeare's curious and particular position in the cultural space of the (not exclusively) English-speaking world. This particularity resounds already in a moniker popularly attributed to signify both his person (however uncer-

32.2 Spring 2010

tain his identity might be) and his cultural legacy: the Bard. To speak of “the Bard” is necessarily to speak of William Shakespeare. Shakespeare’s position, it seems, is characterized by certain dialectics. On one hand, he is perceived as a canonical source of cultural heritage; on the other hand, he appears as a sort of cultural icon and even a part of the ideational furniture of everyday life. His presence in popular imagination emerges as a network of, often disjointed or distorted, allusions and references. As such Shakespeare becomes a textual “fair play” for continued rewritings, borrowings and transformations from language to language, from medium to medium. The *Star Trek* franchise in its over 40-year-long history has often contributed to this phenomenon, freely borrowing ideas, quotations and imaginaries linked to Shakespeare’s authorship.¹¹ It has been argued that this ransacking of the Shakespearean oeuvre for plot devices and easily recognizable quotations was meant to serve as a tool for cultural legitimation of *Star Trek* as a popular (therefore less “respectable”) text, providing it with “a veneer of cultural sophistication.”¹² This argument seems to oversimplify the question of intertextual connections of this science fiction franchise with other texts, picturing it in terms of the stark opposition between the popular and legitimate culture. As such it fails to account for the complexity of multilayered textual play enacted in some of the *Star Trek* episodes and films, and especially in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*.

Nowhere in the whole franchise is Shakespearean influence, this “unfinished cultural business,” more visible than in the sixth of the *Star Trek* films. It starts with the casting of Christopher Plummer and David Warner, two renowned Shakespearean-trained actors, in the roles of the leaders of the Klingons, a warlike alien species and the original villains of the franchise. Interestingly, this casting strategy seems to have gone against the earlier practices of the production team, which tended to associate Shakespearean references with the characters and deeds of the Federation officers. As the comments of the writer and director, Nicholas Meyer, suggest, the Shakespearean background of the actors led to the decision of incorporating a significant number of “Bardic” references into the screenplay, particularly in the part of infamous General Chang.¹³ However, “the Shakespearean connection” of *Star Trek VI* cannot be judged as entirely accidental and dictated solely by the casting of the leading characters. It is inscribed much more deeply into the narrative structure of the film and

Studies in Popular Culture

starts with its very title, subtitled *The Undiscovered Country*. This expression originates in Hamlet's famous soliloquy starting with the words: "To be or not to be" (Act III, Scene I). The meaning of this metaphor differs, however, from its original use: in *Hamlet* it refers to the unknown of death; in *Star Trek* it represents the unknown of the future. And it is brought forth in this context by the Klingon leader, Chancellor Gorkon, played by David Warner. Recalling Shakespeare's words, Gorkon alludes to the uncertainty of the political situation which establishes the dramatic center of the film: the end of the war between the Klingon Empire and the United Federation of the Planets, the end of the status quo of past decades, and the unsure prospect of an intergalactic peace. What is also alluded to in Gorkon's comment, and in other Shakespearean references attributed to the Klingons, is that those galactic villains represent, in fact, "a cultured and civilised race," "a life-form not dissimilar to ourselves."¹⁴ There is, however, a curious twist to this new representation of the Klingons as well-read and Shakespeare-loving. While quoting liberally from various Shakespearean sources, the warlike aliens from *Star Trek VI* end up claiming the Bard as their own cultural property.

Chancellor Gorkon's (in)famous words: "You have not experienced Shakespeare, until you have read him in the original Klingon" have called for many different readings. Kay H. Smith interpreted them from the perspective of the cultural politics of the cold war era as a sign of displacement of the conflict between two intergalactic powers.¹⁵ Paul Cantor entertained the idea that they may signify a disturbing identification of the dying culture of the warlike Klingons with the virtue of heroism and values of heroic literature. But in the end he decided to reduce their meaning and interpret them as a mark of postmodern referentiality and inclination for pastiche.¹⁶ The audience of *Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country* may have simply seen the Klingon leader's comment as a joke: on a narrative level, Gorkon's joke about the sense of cultural superiority articulated by the Federation officers, on an extratextual level, the writers' mockery of Shakespeare's iconic status and his uncertain identity. But what would have happened if Gorkon's words were to be read literally? What would it mean for Shakespeare to be read as an alien author? What would it be to experience his work in "the original Klingon"? These questions, so readily dismissed by some critics as signs of postmodern pastiche, resonated strongly with a

32.2 Spring 2010

group of *Star Trek* and Klingon fans, giving birth to the Klingon Shakespeare Restoration Project, a bold attempt at “cultural re-appropriation” of the great playwright’s oeuvre undertaken by the members of the Klingon Language Institute.¹⁷

Inspired by the half-serious, half-playful reference to Shakespeare’s authorship from *Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country*, and by the broader scholarly aspirations of the KLI, this project aims at translating or – in line with Gorkon’s words – restoring Shakespeare’s entire oeuvre into Klingon, “an artificial language originally created as nothing more than a prop.”¹⁸ The involvement of the members of the Klingon Language Institute with Shakespeare and Klingon led to the production of two texts: *The Klingon Hamlet*, translated by Nick Nicholas and Andrew Strader and first published in 1996, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, or to use its Klingon title *paghmo’ tIn mlS* (literally: “The Confusion is Great Because of Nothing”), translated by Nick Nicholas and first published in 2001.¹⁹ As with many other activities of the KLI, the task of “restoring” those two Shakespeare plays to their “original” Klingon was influenced by and grounded in scholarly attitudes and practices. According to Lawrence M. Schoen, it was a result of the KLI’s long efforts to study, teach and, consequently, use “the warrior tongue.”²⁰ Originating in a linguistically informed knowledge of language, the translated texts are presented as valid representations of the original, the outcomes of a legitimate translating procedure, not unlike other translations of Shakespeare. At the same time it should be noted that those texts are positioned in a project that re-addresses the issue of Shakespeare’s influences within the *Star Trek* universe as a textual source for the language. In the case of the Klingon renditions of *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, the involvement with *Star Trek* textual reality is even stronger and more direct.

Not only does *The Undiscovered Country* serve as an inspiration for those translations, it also provides them with an elaborate “make believe” narrative context which takes Gorkon’s words at face value and presents the Bard as a Klingon playwright, Wil’yam Shex’pir, who “lived at a time of crisis for the Klingon Empire.”²¹ In this bold move of “cultural re-appropriation,” much more radical than its cinematic source, the translators playfully redefine the tradition of Shakespearean scholarship, firstly offering alternative “Klingon” readings of Shakespeare’s characters and plots. And so a

difficult relationship of Benedick and Beatrice, now B'enerdik and B'eterirsh, serves as a model example of Klingon courting behaviour, while Hamlet's, or Khamlet's, story of revenge becomes "a chilling portrayal of malaise and decay"²² and a study of "cultural dispossession": "while he retains a sense of Klingon honour, Khamlet is culturally dispossessed, given to rationalising and talk instead of action ... His development through the play is seen as a voyage back to his true Klingon roots, until, at the conclusion of the play, he dies in honour."²³

This playful redefinition and re-appropriation of Shakespearean tradition is carefully developed within the translated text, weaving the characters and events of those classic texts with elements of *Star Trek's* extended universe. *The Klingon Hamlet* relocates the main events of Shakespeare's play to Kronos, the Klingon Home World, with Claudius (or tlhaw'DIyuS) turned into the Klingon Emperor, and Fortinbras of Norway (now vortIbraS) pictured as "the most insubordinate head of the House of Duras."²⁴ Other places and characters undergo similar reimagining. The *Star Trek* context of the translated text becomes visible also in the sometimes very imaginative translations of particular lines or expressions. While the famous "What a piece of work is a man!" from Act II of *Hamlet* is literally (and unsurprisingly) rendered as "A Klingon is an impressive specimen," a playful exchange between the two Clowns in the first scene of Act V is reworked into a carefully designed word-play, making use of both a reference to *Star Trek's* recurring humorous plot of "the trouble with tribbles"²⁵ and a more sophisticated linguistic pun. To quote both the original and the literal translation of this scene:

--What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

--The gallows maker; for that frame outlives a thousand tenants.

--I like thy wit well, in good faith: the gallows does well; but how does it well? it does well to those that do ill: now thou dost ill to say the gallows is built stronger than the church: argal, the gallows may do well to thee ...

--Which of these is the most useful? the engineer, the communications officer, or the technician?

--A tribble merchant. He is useful to regulate the tribble populationHe buys (**je'**) hungry tribbles. If you don't feed (**je'**) an entity (**Dol**), you'll observe a funeral (**nol**). You can't trade (**bech**) tribbles for food. Therefore, you'll suffer (**Mech**) from a large

32.2 Spring 2010

tribble population...

As the Appendix to *The Klingon Hamlet* explains, the humour of the translated version is based on the “dialectical puns derived from the standard ‘Dol’ and ‘nol’ (‘entity’ and ‘funeral,’ respectively), as well as ‘bech’ and ‘mech’ (‘trade’ and ‘suffer,’ respectively), sounding virtually identical in the [alleged] dialect.”²⁶ Examples of similar reinterpretation or re-appropriation of Shakespeare’s words can be found throughout the translated versions of *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

But the re-appropriation of Shakespeare’s authorship goes beyond the text and incorporates the whole tradition of the Bard’s scholarship, as the authors of those “restored Klingon versions” present “so-called Shekisperian Criticism” as a “well-organised campaign” of fabrications and Shakespeare’s original works as “crude forgeries.”²⁷ In this fictive context of “the Klingon restored version,” *The Klingon Hamlet* and “The Confusion is Great Because of Nothing” seem to make an important point of the problematic relationship between the translation and its original, as it playfully undermines the apparent foundations of any translating procedure: the belief that the translated text is a reliable representation – an “authentic copy” – of the original. According to postmodern theory, this belief in translation’s fidelity and translator’s transparency is already and always illusory, as the translation inevitably substitutes the categories and meanings of the original with its own linguistic and cultural notions. But the embedding of the translated text in the re-appropriation of Shakespeare’s authorship – not only as Klingon-like, but as Klingon in origin – takes the practice of confronting the meaning of the original with that of the translated text, enacted in any translation, a step further. By means of the fictitious introduction, both texts seem to replace the original with the translation not implicitly, but in a very literal way. As the subtitle to both publications states, these are not only Klingon versions of Shakespeare’s texts, these are “restored versions,” returning Shakespeare’s texts to the proper form. The Klingon translation becomes a means of the reinstatement of Shakespearean original.

This notion of translation supplanting the original seems reminiscent of Emily Apter’s discussions of the scandalous cases of pseudotranslations, the literary fabrications which claim to be renderings of non-existent, imaginary sources.²⁸ In those translations with no source-text, the fantasy of translation’s fidelity can be finally exposed. What is equally revealed is an illusory dominance of the original. The pseudotranslation, the “reproduction

Studies in Popular Culture

of absent original,” shows how the ambiguity of the relationship between a text and its translation is enacted on both sides of this dyad: in the fallibility of translation and in the absence of the original. The Klingon versions of Shakespeare’s works can perhaps be perceived as the examples of such pseudotranslation, but only in a most curious way. For they are not translations without the original, but the translations pretending to be the original texts. They exercise a double mystification: they present themselves as the originals and the originals as translations, which – through a “well-organised campaign” of fabrications – managed to falsely acquire the status of the origins. Attributing their own mystifying procedure to the original texts and building their fictive legitimation, the Klingon translations seem to disturb the rightful order between Shakespeare as the source-text and *Star Trek* as its reworking. In fact, what they disturb – just as pseudotranslation does – is the reader’s understanding of the relationship between the original and the version: translation or adaptation. This picturing of Shakespeare’s plays as “crude forgeries” of the Klingon original texts serves as a playful reminder that there is no end and also no beginning to the intertextual referencing and mirroring.

Juxtaposed to this playful redefinition of Shakespearean tradition is the actual presentation of the texts, which mirrors the format of the comparative translations and provides the English and Klingon texts side by side in apparently perfect structural correspondence. This structural likeness is particularly visible in *The Klingon Hamlet* that, according to its translators, manages to recreate iambic pentameter of the English original, or should we say “forgery.” To quote just few examples emphasized in Appendix II:

- / - - / - / - - / - /
bijatlh ‘e’ mev! peqIm! DaH cholqa’ bIH!
Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again!
/ - - / - / - - - / -
taH pagh taHbe’. DaH mu’tlheghvam vIqeInIS.
To be or not to be; that is the question.²⁹

In both those instances the Klingon “restored versions” seem to make a claim implicit in all translations: that a translated text is an accurate or valid representation of the original. In the words of the members of the Klingon Language Institute, this claim of fidelity comes dressed in the costume of *Star Trek*’s textual reality:

32.2 Spring 2010

If Humans and Klingons are to understand this play – and by implication the world in which the players inhabit – then surely the key is to be found in the language. Accuracy, a highly valued Klingon trait, is thus of critical importance.³⁰

By contrasting the fictive context of Shakespeare's Klingon authorship with a respectful, scholarly, informed attitude to a corpus of his works, the Klingon Shakespeare Restoration Project becomes an interesting illustration of the politics of translation, and particularly its links with the processes of cultural re-appropriation. It also brings into light the complex and often problematic relationship between high culture texts and practices and their popular re-enactments.

— — —

Stating as its source *Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country*, the project readdresses the issue of Shakespeare's influences within the *Trek* narratives. Just as Shakespearean and other literary references included in the series and feature films did, it poses the question of the relation between Shakespeare as representation of high culture and *Star Trek* as the embodiment of popular culture, and at the same time questions the validity of such juxtapositions. If – as several critics claim³¹ – the introduction of Shakespearean allusions is to grant *Star Trek* a “veneer of sophistication” or “cultural legitimization,” does the inclusion of *Star Trek* references into a translation of Shakespeare's plays in turn deprive the translated texts of their rightful place in the literary canon, of their high culture status? *The Klingon Hamlet*, with its images of Hamlet and William Shakespeare, bearing the features recognizable as typical for the Klingon characters from later TV series and films, and with the disclaimers stating that “Star Trek” and “Klingon” are registered trademarks of Paramount Pictures, seems to be making Shakespeare not only a part of the *Star Trek* universe, but also a part of its franchise. *The Klingon Hamlet* – like almost all Klingon publications – is a licensed product of Paramount Pictures,³² and the same could perhaps be said of Wil'yam Shex'pir, the Bard's Klingon alter ego. But the issue of textual referencing between those two texts is much more complex. Shakespeare is not, and in fact cannot be made into a part of the *Star Trek* universe. He is already a part, by virtue of his partaking in the greater text of Western culture. *Star Trek*, both textually as a fictive projection of the civilization of the future having its roots in the past and present of the Western world, and extratextually as a contemporary popular text, belongs

Studies in Popular Culture

to the very same tradition. And, in line with Kristeva's definition of intertextuality,³³ this greater text of Western culture is, in turn, a part of both Shakespeare's corpus and the *Star Trek* narrative. In the end the introduction to the "restored Klingon versions" of *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, offering an elaborate reading of Shakespeare's extraterrestrial legacy, appears to be nothing other than a parody with its tradition (once again Western) of unsettling the relation between the official and the popular. As such it seems to work to counter those readings of *Star Trek* and Shakespeare which search to underline the opposition between high and low in culture.

Paradoxically, just as in the case of the dialectical reading of the relationship between the original and its translation, it seems to work also to counter the intentions of the translators who – to a certain degree – seem to share the notion of the validity of such orderings. As Sarah Ekstrom, the coordinator of the Klingon Shakespeare Restoration Project, explains its origins: "For some viewers the line [from *Star Trek VI*] produced hearty chuckles and knowing nods. Among others it served as inspiration. This volume is the finished product crafted by just a few from among the inspired."³⁴ The translations of *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing* are thus the result of a more serious, "inspired" reaction to interpretational possibilities opened by *The Undiscovered Country*. One cannot but notice, however, that – despite its subversive qualities – the introduction to those texts seems to contribute rather to those "hearty chuckles" and "knowing nods." It also undermines the claims of Lawrence M. Schoen, the director of the KLI, who presents the translations as an evidence of the development of the language from a television prop into a popular culture icon, and – more implicitly – of its elevation to the status of functional language, no longer just a part of the *Star Trek* franchise:

The volume you hold should be ample evidence of Klingon's evolution, from the sound stage to popular culture, from a back lot at Paramount Pictures to Klingon and *Star Trek* fans throughout the world. Working with only a thin grammar and a glossary of some two thousand words the membership of the KLI has studied the language, taught the language, engaged in word play from puns to palindromes, composed original poetry and fiction, translated books of the Bible, and now perhaps the most well known of Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet*.³⁵

32.2 Spring 2010

And so the inclusion of the *Star Trek* narrative frame into the Klingon translation of Shakespeare's two plays both subverts and reinforces the oppositional orderings between high culture text and their popular re-enactments or reinterpretations. At the same time, it calls forth the question of the links between language and its cultural background, be it Shakespeare's early modern English verse with its colonial connotations, or invented alien idiom with its roots in science fiction franchise and its fandom.

Presenting the translated texts as elements of *Star Trek*'s reality seems to weaken the argument of the emancipation of the Klingon language from the textual context in which it originated. It appears that, despite the attempts of its propagators to employ it in many different cultural contexts, the language cannot escape its association with the phenomenon of *Star Trek*. One could ask, however, if such a divorce of the language and its textual source is even possible. Are not all languages always bound by their contexts, geographically, historically and politically located? It should not come as a surprise, then, that the Klingon language would be perceived as a language of a fictitious people, one of many populating the world of *Star Trek*. It is an inherent element of the *Star Trek* mythos, informed by this mythos, and in turn contributing to it. It is natural that this "mythical" or textual locality should penetrate translation made in this language. In this respect, the "Klingon restored versions" of Shakespeare's plays, particularly *The Klingon Hamlet*, demonstrate a curious parallelism with ethnically localized adaptations of Shakespeare's works, such as (as discussed by Catherine Silverstone) the case of *The Maori Merchant of Venice*.³⁶ This parallelism is not to be read in any instance as a relation of similarity. If there is a comparison to be made between those texts, it is not the one between the representations of the Maori language and culture and those of the *Star Trek* universe and the Klingons. The correspondence of these two cases resides purely in an enactment of certain textual techniques which calls for a deeper consideration.

The Maori Merchant of Venice is a cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's play, which – in the words of its creators – uses "Maori language and cultural elements as a vehicle to be able to express the dynamics that Shakespeare came up with."³⁷ Silverstone draws attention to several aspects of the linguistic and cultural dynamics enacted in this translation / adaptation, considering the complex relationship between the lan-

Studies in Popular Culture

guage of Shakespeare, which also happens to be the language of cultural colonization of the Maori people, and *te reo*, the Maori native language. She emphasizes the introduction of the qualifier “Maori” into the English title of the film, which differentiates this particular version from other renditions of the play, and at the same time displaces Shakespeare’s original title of *The Merchant of Venice* and his authority:

the use of the word Maori to supplement the English title partially displaces the primacy of Shakespeare from the enterprise: the promise of the title is that Shakespeare’s Merchant will be remade by Maori and in Maori. This process of displacement is further promised through the renaming of Shakespeare’s characters with Maori names: Hairoka for Shylock, Pohia for Portia, Anatonio for Antonio, Patanio for Bassanio.³⁸

The importance of the Maori context is also enacted through the casting of Maori actors and introduction of objects and locations associated with the Maori culture. All those elements are, however, juxtaposed with the images of another cultural setting commonly associated with Shakespeare and his authorship: that of Elizabethan England. As Silverstone concludes, “*The Maori Merchant*, with its representation of Maori actors in Renaissance costumes, counterpoised against more familiar signifiers of Maori culture, seems to play parody with the notion of cultural authenticity and ‘exoticism.’”³⁹ In other words, it accentuates the difference between the original and the adapted text, between the language and culture of Shakespeare and the language and culture of the Maori people, thus revealing the mechanisms of alienation present in any cultural translation.

Paradoxical though it may seem, the Klingon translation / adaptation of *Hamlet* appears to mirror *The Maori Merchant of Venice* in all those instances, starting with the displacement of Shakespeare’s authority in the very title of the volume. It is *The Klingon Hamlet*, not “Shakespeare’s Hamlet rendered in the Klingon language.” In fact, the author’s name is not to be found anywhere on the cover or on the title page of this publication. It has been replaced by the two trademarked labels: “Klingon” and “Star Trek.” The title of the translated text seems thus to encourage a culturally specific reading of the play as located within the *Star Trek* universe and attributed to the fictitious Klingons. This interpretation is further supported by the transliteration of characters’ names according to the Klingon language spelling convention, turning Claudius into tlhaw’DiyuS and Ophelia into ‘ovelya.

32.2 Spring 2010

The most explicit clue for the Klingon reading of the text comes, of course, in the form of the already discussed introduction.

The Klingon Hamlet mirrors the adapting procedures of *The Maori Merchant of Venice* also in its curious blending of a culturally located interpretation with the established Shakespearean tradition. This mixing of two textual conventions is conveyed in the visual imaginary connected to the work: in the cover illustration presenting the hero of the play and in a portrait of its author. The cover illustration, created by Phil Foglio, displays Hamlet standing on top of the battlements of a castle, holding a skull in an iconic pose associated with the soliloquy “To be or not to be.” In case the image does not recall this association, the scene is captioned with the famous phrase rendered both in English and in Klingon. The cover title pronounces that the text presented in the volume is a “Klingon Hamlet” and the illustration strives to support this claim through the physical appearance of the hero. Hamlet’s head, and the skull which he is holding in his right hand, are marked by the forehead ridges typical for the later imaginings of the Klingons. In his left hand he carries a bat’leth, the Klingon’s favorite weapon, and this element has clearly been added to redress the otherwise un-Klingon-like melancholic character of this scene. These images are contrasted with other visual clues referring in turn to Shakespearean tradition. And so Klingon Hamlet stands on the battlements of a seemingly medieval castle, and he is clothed in a Renaissance costume. What sets his clothing apart from other Shakespearean costumes is a subtle incorporation of the Imperial Trefoil, a symbol of the Klingon Empire, into its decoration. A similar blending of those two contexts is visible in a portrait of William Shakespeare, or rather Wil’yam Shex’pir, drawn by Gennie Summers. This picture combines the Klingon facial features with Renaissance costume complete with a moustache and a beard typical for more traditional representations of the Bard.

The images of Hamlet, or Khamlet, and Wil’yam Shex’pir seem to recall *Star Trek*’s long-standing tradition of the play-within-the-play episodes, especially the later introduction of holographic technology and a holodeck space, which allowed the characters to enact intertextual borrowings in full costume.⁴⁰ At the same time, by overemphasising the difference between the two contexts, they serve as a parody of both Shakespearean tradition and the representations of the fictive Klingon culture. And so, perhaps unconsciously, the creators of *The Klingon Hamlet*, and also “the

Studies in Popular Culture

Klingon restored version” of *Much Ado About Nothing*, appear to be alluding to the spaces of difference and alienation governing the process of translation.

In Blanchot’s words, translation is “the very life” of the difference between the languages, and the translator, its “secret master.”⁴¹ He or she reveals the foreignness of two languages: the language of the original and the language of its translation, the language of the author and his or her own language. In doing so, the translator makes visible “what makes this work such that it will always be *other*.”⁴² This interplay between the self and the other, between one’s own meaning and the other’s, is a paramount feature of translation, which should never be perceived as an achieved work, but rather as a trace: a trace of history, a cultural trace, but most of all a trace of the other. For a translation can only, and only perhaps, be realized in “the possibility of anterior presence, without guarantees” of the other and his/her meaning.⁴³ This meaning is to be found in “a trace” of the other, which is never the same as “a sign,” and this terminological turn suggests how fleeting and ungraspable that meaning is. Of course, in view of Lévinas’ writings, it must remain such if we are still to speak of the relation of foreignness or otherness. To look into the forms of the other and find oneself is to equate him or her with the self, “[t]o translate the neighbour is to turn him/her/it into a category of our own language and so to deny him/her/it otherness.”⁴⁴ Translation is therefore always and inevitably also alienation. “What I translate is upset by the way I translate,” exclaims Lévinas, indicating how this process affects those who could never be understood.⁴⁵ Paul de Man reminds us that “this alienation is at its strongest in our relation to our own language,” its meaning stripped of its familiarity through the comparison with the foreign.⁴⁶ To translate is to alienate both the other and the self.

The Klingon versions of Shakespeare’s works seem to recall some of those arguments. In those texts a reader is confronted with several essential questions. Whose meaning is enacted in those translations? Whose otherness is emphasized? Whose language is alienated? In brief, who is “the other” in this particular “cultural translation”? The Klingon translations seem to offer several possible answers to this important issue, giving evidence of the complex play of alien-ness and othering enacted in these projects. The first and most obvious answer is that the other is in this case to be identified with an alien in its most literal sense: as an imaginary, warlike, nonhuman

32.2 Spring 2010

people, the Klingons. And this interpretation gives perhaps the most accurate insight into the process of othering enacted in every translation. Translated into the linguistic categories of the self, presented as either the self's likeness or its absolute opposite, is not the other always necessarily imaginary? That would be the argument of Lévinas, Derrida, Spivak, and the post-colonial studies.⁴⁷ But the space of difference in Klingon translation is open for other interpretations. The mark of the foreignness may be fixed on an imaginary culture in an imaginary future, but it is the imaginary envisaged by Gene Roddenberry, the creator of the *Star Trek* franchise. And it is also this vision of the world, where the feudal, aggressive, expansionist, but heroic civilization of the Klingon Empire is confronted with and overcome by the rational, liberal, democratic and – one may add – sanitized culture of the Federation, that is alienated in these texts. Another space of difference called forth in *The Klingon Hamlet* and the Klingon version of *Much Ado About Nothing* is the difference of language itself, perceived on the metalinguistic level, not as much as a difference of meaning, but as a foreignness of a linguistic system. The Klingon language was famously constructed to “appear alien.” It is also this vision of linguistic “alien-ness” created by Marc Okrand that the Klingon translations uncover. The process of alienation is not necessarily limited to the *Star Trek* context of this translation. It may well be that – compared with the popular context of science fiction genre and fictitious culture of the Klingons – it is Shakespeare, his works and their cultural context, that appear “alien” to the eyes of the reader. Finally, as Paul de Man remarked, every translation brings forth the alienation of the translator's own language.⁴⁸ It can be argued that, in the end, those who are really alienated in the Klingon versions of Shakespeare's texts are Klingon users and translators themselves, confronted with various possible identities and various forms of otherness (as science fiction fans, linguistic scholars, Shakespeare aficionados, or geeky enthusiasts of obscure languages). And what is ultimately displaced in this process of “restoration” is the translators' own language (both English and Klingon!), their categories (of literary and scholarly work, of popular and high culture) and their imaginaries (of Klingon culture, Shakespeare's tradition, and the Klingon users' community).

— — —

Studies in Popular Culture

The “Klingon restored versions” of *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing* mark a particular re-incarnation of Shakespeare’s afterlife and also, one may add, that of the *Star Trek* franchise. By adapting Shakespeare for *Star Trek* and *Star Trek* for Shakespeare, they provoke reflection on the dynamics and politics of the processes of translation, adaptation and re-writing. In a playful form of Shakespeare’s Klingon identity, they bring forth the problems of the contested relationship between the original and its version, of the enactment and effacement of the difference in a translated text, of the inescapable alienation of the self and the other in translation. But at the same time, in the words of Lawrence M. Schoen’s Preface to *The Klingon Hamlet*, they remind us that reading is ultimately an exercise in “wilful suspension of disbelief,”⁴⁹ in accepting the author’s reality as actuality. If “translation is the most intimate act of reading,”⁵⁰ it is also necessarily a play of “make believe”: belief in the author’s presence, the translator’s transparency, and the illusion of absolute translatability. The Klingon translations give evidence of how the popular culture, with its re-enactments or reinterpretations of the official or high culture texts and practices, helps to uncover the mechanisms of cultural and linguistic alienation and re-appropriation, while posing the boldest challenges to its audience’s ability to suspend disbelief.

Karolina Kazimierczak
University of Aberdeen, Scotland

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without generous help from Klingon fans. I am indebted to the members of, thlIngan Hol and the Klingon language mailing lists, and of the Internet messageboard: Klingon Imperial Forum, for kindly accepting my presence among them; and to other Klingonists for sharing their insights and experiences. I want to thank my supervisors, Professor Lucy Suchman and Dr Yoke-Sum Wong from the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University for their guidance during my doctoral research and help in shaping the arguments for this essay.

32.2 Spring 2010

¹ Leo Braudy, "Afterword: Rethinking Remakes," in *Play It Again, Sam. Retakes on Remakes*, ed. Horton McDougal (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), 331.

² Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 1, no. 146 (1984).

³ Milan Kundera, *The Art of Novel*, trans. Linda Asher (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 150-51.

⁴ Braudy, "Afterword," 331.

⁵ See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 36; 66.

⁶ See Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator. An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*," in *Illuminations* (London: Fontana Press, 1992), 72.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁸ See Maurice Blanchot, "Translating," in *Friendship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 57-61.

⁹ See Robert Eaglestone, "Levinas, Translation, and Ethics," and Henry Staten, "Tracking the 'Native Informant': Cultural Translation as the Horizon of Literary Translation," in *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, ed. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Kay H. Smith, "'Hamlet, Part Eight, the Revenge' or, Sampling Shakespeare in a Postmodern Age," *College Literature* 31, no. 4 (2004): 141.

¹¹ Shakespearean references in *Star Trek* franchise start with the titling of episodes, as in the titles of *The Original Series* episodes "Dagger of the Mind," "All Our Yesterdays" (borrowed from *Macbeth*), "By Any Other Name" (referring to *Romeo and Juliet*) or "How Sharper Than a Serpent's Tooth" (taken from *King Lear*). The franchise also makes liberal use of the famous lines from Shakespeare's work included in the dialogue, as in a scene from *The Next Generation* episode "Hide and Q" where Captain Jean-Luc Picard refutes Q's accusations against humankind with *Hamlet*'s words "What a piece of work is a man!" Finally, several episodes borrow from Shakespeare's oeuvre most directly by making the characters perform fragments of his plays. In *The Original Series* episode "The Conscience of the King" a travelling troupe of actors performs on board of the Enterprise scenes from *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*. Also, in one of the episodes of *The Next Generation* ("The Defector") Captain Picard interprets the role of Henry V; and in another ("Emergence") – he instructs one of the crewmembers, the android Data, in his rendering of Shakespeare's Prospero. For a more detailed account of Shakespearean and other high culture references in *Star Trek* narrative see: Larry Kreitzer, "The Cultural Veneer of Star Trek," *Journal of Popular Culture* 30, no. 2 (1996).

Studies in Popular Culture

¹²Kreitzer, "The Cultural Veneer of Star Trek," 1. See also Ilsa J. Bick, "Boys in Space: 'Star Trek,' Latency, and the Neverending Story," *Cinema Journal* 35, no. 2 (1996).

¹³Nicholas Meyer, interview included in the DVD Special Edition of *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, (Paramount Pictures, 2004).

¹⁴Kreitzer, "The Cultural Veneer of Star Trek," 9.

¹⁵See Smith, "Hamlet, Part Eight, the Revenge."

¹⁶See Paul A. Cantor, "Shakespeare in the Original Klingon: Star Trek and the End of History," *Perspectives on Political Science* 29, no. 3 (2000), HTML version retrieved from: <http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=3614982>.

¹⁷The Klingon Language Institute is an organization involved in the study and propagation of the Klingon language. For further information on the KLI see the website: <http://www.kli.org/>.

¹⁸Lawrence M. Schoen, "Preface," in *The Klingon Hamlet*, ed. Mark Shoulson, Will Martin, and d'Armond Speers (Flourtown, Pennsylvania: Klingon Language Institute, 2000), ix.

¹⁹See William Shakespeare, *The Klingon Hamlet*, ed. Mark Shoulson, Will Martin, and d'Armond Speers, trans. Nick Nicholas and Andrew Strader (Flourtown, Pennsylvania: Klingon Language Institute, 2000), and William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing. paghmo' tIn mIS*, ed. David Trimboli, trans. Nick Nicholas (Flourtown, Pennsylvania: Klingon Language Institute, 2001).

²⁰Schoen, "Preface," ix.

²¹Nick Nicholas, "Introduction," in *The Klingon Hamlet*, ed. Mark Shoulson, Will Martin, and d'Armond Speers (Flourtown, Pennsylvania: Klingon Language Institute, 2000), xiii.

²²*Ibid.*, xv.

²³Shakespeare, *The Klingon Hamlet*. "Appendix I," 193.

²⁴In the *Star Trek* universe the House of Duras is a powerful and treacherous family, involved in ruthless political struggles on the Klingon home world, Kronos. The members of the family were first introduced in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "Sins of the Father" and became favourite Klingon villains of the series, later appearing also in episodes of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and *Enterprise*, and in the seventh feature film: *Star Trek: The Generations*.

²⁵In *Star Trek* universe tribbles are small furry animals whose population – due to an enormous breeding rate – is very hard to control. The on-going *Star Trek* joke, first introduced in *The Original Series* episode "The Trouble with Tribbles," and then revisited in *Deep Space Nine* episode "Trials and Tribble-ations," states that tribbles – found rather endearing by other humanoids – are generally detested by Klingons.

²⁶ *The Klingon Hamlet*. "Appendix I," 210.

²⁷ Nicholas, "Introduction," xiii.

²⁸ See Emily Apter, "Translation with No Original: Scandals of Textual Reproduction," in *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, ed. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²⁹ *The Klingon Hamlet*. "Appendix II: Notes of the Scansion of *Khamlet*," 215.

³⁰ Lawrence M. Schoen, "Preface," in *Much Ado About Nothing. paghmo' tIn mIS*, ed. David Trimboli (Flourtown: Klingon Language Institute, 2001), vii.

³¹ See Bick, "Boys in Space"; Kreitzer, "The Cultural Veneer of Star Trek." Editor's note: Rhonda V. Wilcox counters this view in "The Aesthetics of Cult Television," *The Cult TV Book*, ed. Stacey Abbott (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 36.

³² Interestingly, the Klingon version of *Much Ado About Nothing* seems to be an exception from this rule, as it doesn't bear any reference to Paramount Pictures, apart from a typical disclaimer of *Klingon* and *Star Trek* being registered trademarks.

³³ 'The text is therefore a *productivity* [...] it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another. [...] One of the problems for semiotics is to replace the former, rhetorical division of genres with a *typology of texts*; that is, to defined the specificity of different textual arrangements by placing them within the general text (culture) of which they are part and which is in turn, part of them.' (See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 36.)

³⁴ Ekstrom, "Foreword," xi.

³⁵ Schoen, "Preface," ix.

³⁶ Catherine Silverstone, "Speaking Maori Shakespeare: The Maori Merchant of Venice and the Legacy of Colonisation," in *Screening Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnet and Ramona Wray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

³⁷ Cited in *ibid.*, 131.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁰ For an interesting interpretation of the *Star Trek*'s 'holodeck episodes' as a re-enactment of early modern textual practices represented in a genre of masques see Jean E. Graham, "Holodeck Masquing: Early Modern Genre Meets Star Trek," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34, no. 2 (2000). For other accounts of the play-within-the-play device in the *Star Trek* franchise see Sarah Hardy and Rebecca Kukla, "A Paramount Narrative: Exploring Space on the Starship Enterprise," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 2 (1999), and Rhonda V. Wilcox, "Unreal TV," in *Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader*, ed. Gary R.

Edgerton and Brian G. Rose (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 211-212. Editor's note: See also Wilcox, "Shifting Roles and Synthetic Women in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*," *Studies in Popular Culture* 13, no. 2 (1991).

⁴¹ Maurice Blanchot, "Translating," 59.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translating into English," in *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, ed. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 105.

⁴⁴ Robert Eaglestone, "Levinas, Translation, and Ethics," and Henry Staten, "Tracking the 'Native Informant': Cultural Translation as the Horizon of Literary Translation," in *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, ed. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 136.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴⁷ Without recalling any dubious similarities between the fictitious Klingon culture and the post-colonial context of indigenous cultures, it is interesting to note how the Klingon translators seem to make use – perhaps unconsciously – of certain colonial representations of familiarity and alien-ness. These representations may have their source both in Shakespeare's work, representing the worldview of the age of great discoveries and search for the "New World," and in the *Star Trek* narrative, recalling the notion of discovery and first encounter with the stranger in its imaginary of space, the final frontier.

⁴⁸ Cited in Eaglestone, "Levinas, Translation, and Ethics."

⁴⁹ Schoen, "Preface," ix.

⁵⁰ Spivak, "Translating into English," 94.