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*At the crossroad of unexplored paths:  
cultural back-translation and fantasy*

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MPhil in Literary Translation

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Date: 09/09/2022

Julie Wüthrich

## **Abstract**

### **At the crossroad of unexplored paths: cultural back-translation and fantasy**

**Julie Wüthrich**

Cultural back-translation is the translation into language B of a text written in language A that takes its cultural basis from culture and language B. The peculiar translation trajectory involves a cultural return that differs from regular translations, as the audience will already be familiar with the work's setting and cultural items. This implies a clear and familiar culture to return to: applying cultural back-translation to speculative fiction might sound implausible, as its subgenres are defined by important creative and invented components that more or less distort the real-life cultures they take inspiration from. As no research has been done on this yet, this paper seeks out and examines the existence of this phenomenon when applied to fantasy literature. After reviewing the terminology of the scattered research of cultural back-translation, this paper draws on multiple sources, from academic books to social media comments, to showcase the link between fantasy, translation, and cultural back-translation, then focuses on the analysis of Aliette De Bodard's *The House of Shattered Wings* and an interview with its French translator Emmanuel Chastellière as a case study. It is argued here that as counterintuitive as it might seem, fantasy works can be analysed through the lenses of cultural back-translation and present a similar effect of familiarisation on the target audience, as well as an under-explored creative potential.

## **Acknowledgements**

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A great thank you to my family for their mental support and listening to me ramble about my research topic during our calls. (Yes, mom, you truly did not raise a quitter.)

Lastly, many thanks to the 2021-2022 Literary Translation Mphil class for being overall awesome and always there for me—with a special shoutout to my Study Buddies Katharina and Silvia to whom I owe 80% of my motivation and confidence in my work during these past few months.

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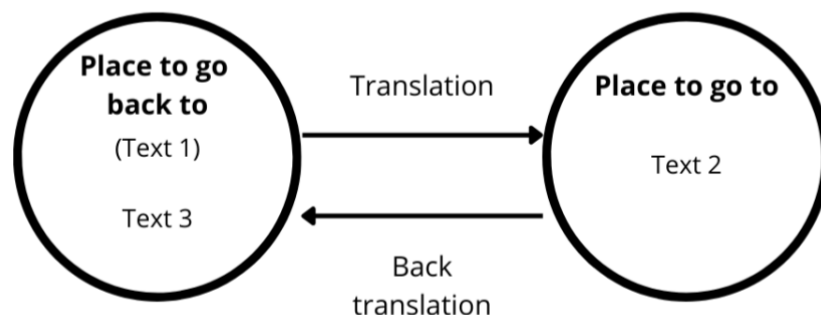
## **Abbreviations**

CSE: cultural specific element

Mr: Mister

## Introduction

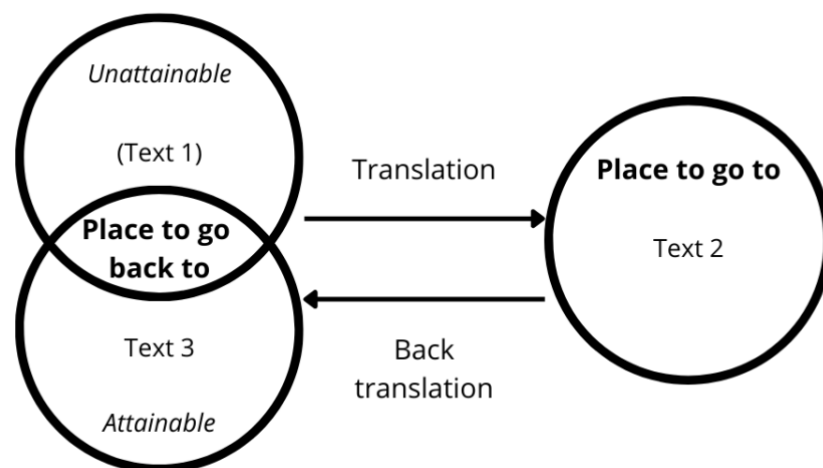
Back-translation is the retranslation of a translation back into its source language. It is mostly used in research, such as cross-cultural research (see Brislin 1970 or Li, Cheng-Chih et al 2009 among others) or as a way to assess the quality of non-literary translations such as medical or technical translations (see Shigenobu 2007 or Ozolins, Hale, et al 2020). Literary back-translations, on the other hand, are rare. Research on the topic in translation studies remains scarce. In her paper *Literary Back-Translations*, Véronique Lane details the special status of literary back-translations, both as translations and within the field of translation studies. According to her, '[t]he very concept of back-translation is difficult to define because doing so calls into question how we conceive of translation itself' (Lane 2020, 2), and literary back-translations challenge common understandings of source text and target text. Unlike regular translations, literary back-translations always involve two 'sources' and two 'targets': two source texts and two target texts, both separate from their source and target cultures and audiences. Using 'source' and 'target' for back-translations ends up being quite confusing—the source text of a back-translation is a target text, but the target culture of a back-translation is the source culture of the source text of the source text and so on. The problem is less apparent in back-translations for research or quality assessment, as the focus is on the texts themselves; but it becomes far more prominent in literary back-translations. It might be easier, then, to conceive literary back-translations' trajectories in terms of a "place to go to" and a 'place to go back to' with three texts inside these linguistic and cultural 'places'.



(Table 1: the process of back-translation)



As shown above, back-translations go through a reverse trajectory that Lane says ‘generates a malaise because it goes against our teleological conception of translation’ (ibid, 6). Regular translation involves a ‘place to come from’ and a ‘place to go to’; but here, ‘place to come from’ would not have been suitable. While back-translations are, by definition, translations, their return journey—what makes them ‘back’ translations—forces us to envision a different concept. Another thing to note is that Text 1 is here in parenthesis as it is never actually involved in the process of back translation. Back-translation is the translation of Text 2 into Text 3—Text 1 is remote, lost during the first translation into Text 2, unattainable as Text 3 will always be its own text, never a perfect ‘found in translation’ replica of Text 1. There is a return to a place; not a return to a text. Perhaps it would be more accurate to amend the graphic as such:



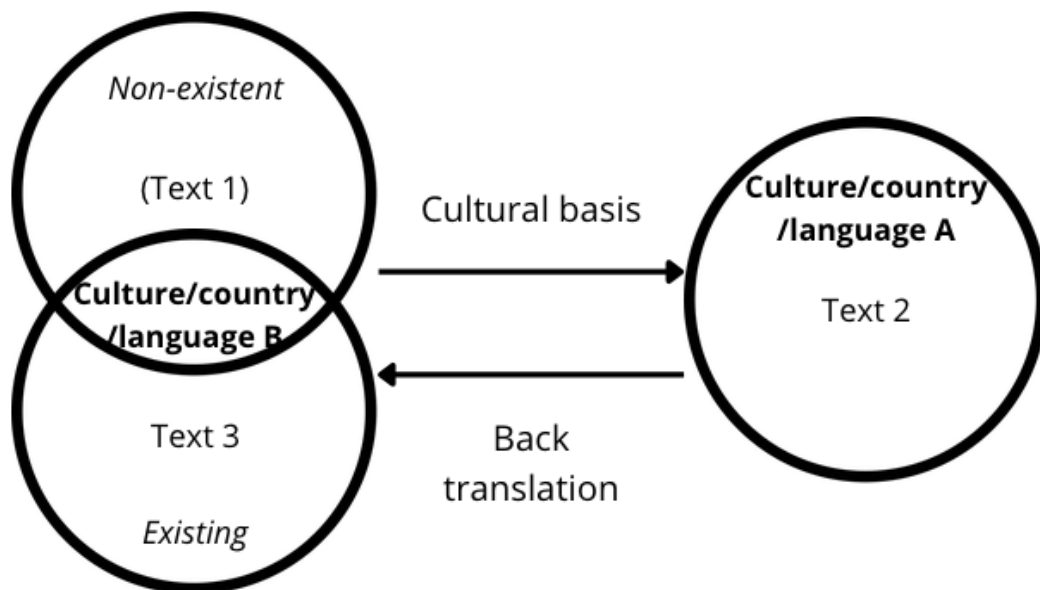
(**Table 2:** the process of back-translation, showing the difference between Text 1 and Text 3)

In certain types of back-translations, Text 1 does not even actually exist. The return is truly only linguistic and cultural. These back-translations bear many names—rootless back translations, textless back translations, cultural back translations, watermark translations—and refer to the back-translation of Texts 2 in which the main culture depicted is that of Text 1 and 3. Linguistically, Text 2 is in the ‘Place to go to’; but its

cultural basis is that of the 'Place to go back to', making the back-translation's return more significant. There is unfortunately still very little research on this type of back translations (see Chapter 1), especially in English-speaking circles. There is also no research when it comes to studying it when applied to fantasy literature. Fantasy is a genre that is often conceived as containing supernatural, fully invented elements—which cause challenges of their own during regular translations—and thus being remote from reality, but this is not always the case (see Chapter 2). Globalisation and immigration and access to foreign languages and cultures have meant an increase in the number of literary works and fantasy works that take inspiration from cultures and languages other than the one they are written in; and with it the chance of said works being translated into the languages that inspired them. As such, this dissertation aims to uncover and explore the existence of this special type of back-translation when put in relation and applied to the fantasy genre, and to set the grounds for future research on its potential. After reviewing the terminology of the scattered research of cultural back-translation, this paper showcase the link between fantasy, translation, and cultural back-translation, then focuses on the analysis of Aliette De Bodard's *The House of Shattered Wings* as a case study, with a comparison with its French translation and an interview with its translator.

### Cultural back-translation: a nebulous research topic

I started this dissertation wanting to research about, in my own words, ‘the translation into language B and for the audience of country B of a novel written in language A and for the audience of country A, the story of which takes place in country B and, in-universe, in language B’. Or, to give an example, ‘the French translation of a book written in English for an Anglo-American audience but set in France with French characters technically speaking French’.



(Table 3: graphic of my initial topic idea)

As my long-winded explanation might foretell, the first problem I faced was one of terminology and vocabulary. To my knowledge, as the topic is still quite under researched (after researching to the best of my ability, I am assuming the total number of postgraduate theses, articles and books on the topic to be less than two hundred in any language), there is no complete literature review on the topic and its terminology. As Tu and Li (2019, 138) point out, while there has been research since the 1990s on the topic, the lack of clear definition nor terminology for it lead various academics to each coin their own terms, which means there is no general theory nor standardised terminology for the phenomenon. This is the second problem I encountered, which I will go more in depth about in this first part. Guo and Ge (2014) and Tu and Li (2017 and 2021) make the most

complete reviews of the literature on the topic and of the various terms used for the translation phenomenon and its preceding source text. However, these papers apply only to the Chinese context; and of these reviews, only Tu and Li 2017 is in English. This is the third problem I faced during my research: that of language and, ironically, of translation. While I found over a hundred articles on the topic (see Appendix II), only twenty-two of them were in English. The rest were mostly in Chinese and Turkish, two in Hungarian, and one in French. On a personal level, this means except for the English and French articles, I read most of the research with the dubiously reliable help of machine translation. On an academic level, this means that other scholars' knowledge of previous research on the topic is limited to the articles they can read, mostly those in their native language and in English. As such, I found that the problem of disparity in terminology, definitions, and understanding of the concept is more significant than the one Tu and Li (2019, 138) raise as it spans not only over time, but also over countries and languages. The simple question of which term to use is a very difficult one to answer. However, while terminology and definitions are far from normalised, all scholars (see for example Li 2012, Öztürk Kasar 2012, Guo 2017 or Avşaroğlu and Karadağ 2019 among many others) on the topic seem to agree on the following points:

1. The phenomenon is a sort of 'back-translation'.
2. The work being 'back-translated' is a sort of translation that does not have a written source text.
3. The work being 'back-translated' revolves around a culture/language/country different from the language used for writing, and presumably different from the culture in which the work is being published.
4. When 'back-translated' into the language the work deals with, the fact that the textual context will now match the linguistic context and audience creates implications that make it different from a regular translation.

In this chapter, I hope to bridge the gap between the various parallel terminologies that have been developed by scholars for the same topic and round up—as I can—all the literature written so far for future researchers to be aware of. It is possible that there are more terms in other languages than the ones I will list here, that I have simply been unable to find; or that I have missed more articles that came out on the topic recently.

Additionally, while I have gathered the titles of as many articles on the topic as I could find, I have been unable to read them all—such as several Chinese master’s theses or Turkish academic conferences, that I could not access. For the purposes of this paper, I will limit myself to the papers I have been able to read, to the best of my and Google Translate’s ability, at the time of writing this, and remain aware of this lack in my research.

### ***A scattered terminology***

There are two important terms needed in order to talk about ‘the translation into language B and for the audience of country B of a novel written in language A and for the audience of country A, the story of which takes place in country B and, in-universe, in language B’: one for the specific type of source text, and one for the translation phenomenon itself.

- a. *Wang Hongyin’s terminology: rootless back translation, textless back translation and foreign language creation*

In 2009, in his book *Introduction to Literary Translation Criticism*, Chinese scholar Wang Hongyin built on the pre-existing research about the Chinese translation of Lin Yutang’s *Moment in Peking*, a novel written in English by a Chinese author and taking place in Beijing from 1900 to 1938 (see Liang 1994, Wu and Li 2004). Due to the unique cultural return happening to the novel when translated into Chinese, Wang considered the Chinese translation of *Moment in Peking* to be a specific type of back translation, that he called ‘rootless back translation’ (‘无根回译’).

Originally, the novel was based on Chinese culture and life in old Beijing, but the original text was written in English. The return that happens with the translation into Chinese is only a cultural return, not a language return. That’s why it is called "rootless back-translation": that is, a back

translation that is not based on an original text in the target language<sup>1</sup>.

(Wang Hongyin 2009, 236)

He then revised the concept later on and called it ‘textless back translation’ (‘无本回译’), considering that ‘rootless back translation’ was not accurate as the translation was not rootless but rather textless: it lacked a source text but not specific cultural foundations—in this case, Chinese culture (Wang 2015, 2). As for the source text, Wang called it ‘foreign language creation’, first written as ‘异语书写’ [writing in a foreign language] in 2009, then either ‘异语写作’ [foreign language writing/production] or ‘异语创作’ [foreign language creation] in both his following articles and other scholars’ (see Wang and Jiang 2012, Guo and Ge 2014, Wang 2016, Wang 2017 among others). According to Wang,

If we call writing that describes the content of the native culture in one language as "native language writing", then using another foreign language to describe the scene of native literature can be called "foreign language writing", resulting in its back translation being a "foreign language back-translation". (Wang 2009, 173)<sup>2</sup>.

‘Foreign language creation’ was coined in the specific context of Chinese author Lin Yutang writing in English, a foreign language, about his native culture—hence a foreign language creation. However, Wang broadens the term in 2015 to include non-Chinese authors like Dutch author Robert van Gulik and his Judge Dee mystery series, a ‘series of gong’an fiction (a genre similar to Western detective stories), rooted in procedural criminal laws of ancient China’ (Wang and Mo 2017, 513). As such, it seems the ‘foreign language’ of ‘foreign language creation’ is not necessarily foreign in relation to the author, but rather in relation to the culture depicted, and that “‘as long as the language signifier is inconsistent with the cultural signifier, it belongs to “foreign language writing”” (Jiang and Wang 2021, 133). Those terms were then brought into the English translation field by Guo 2017 and Tu and Li 2017, and into the Turkish translation field by Ayşe Banu Karadağ during his talk ‘Tarihsel romanların (geri) çevirileri üzerine betimleyici bir

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by Google Translated, post-edited by me.

<sup>2</sup> Translation by Google Translated, post-edited by me.

çalışma' [A descriptive study on (back) translations of historical novels] on May 12th 2018 as 'kökensiz geri çeviri' [rootless back translation], 'metinsiz geri çeviri' [textless back translation] and 'yabancı dil yaratımı' [foreign language creation] (in Baydere 2018, 317). It is to note that while other scholars before him had done research on the same topic, Wang seems to have been the first one to try and develop a general theory with its own specialised term in China.

*b. A surprisingly common term: cultural back translation*

'Cultural back-translation' presents the peculiar case of at least three scholars coining the same term in different languages, for the same phenomenon, without consulting one another. It seems to have first been used by master's degree student Shan Yajiao in their thesis "A Study of Cultural Back-Translation of 'The Clouds of Jinghua'". The word 'cultural back-translation' appears in the title; and Ge and Guo 2014 note that Shan 2010 called the translation phenomenon 'cultural back-translation'. It also appears in the title and abstract of Wu Qian's 2013 master's degree thesis. I was unfortunately unable to access these two theses and thus to check their usage and definition of the term, and if there was any relation between the two. The first published academic paper using 'cultural back-translation' is Liang 2013, in which she coins a proper definition for the term. She does not cite anyone else when doing so, leading me to surmise that her paper might not be linked to Shan 2010 and Wu 2013.

Transnational literary works that describe the culture of country B in the language of country A are a special kind of literary works that have emerged in large numbers with the intensification of globalisation. Translating such works into the language of country B and returning them to the culture of country B constitutes a special translation phenomenon—"cultural back translation".<sup>3</sup> (Liang 2013, 51)

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<sup>3</sup> Translation by Google Translate, post-edited by me.

‘Cultural back-translation’ has since been used by many Chinese scholars (see Wang 2015, Guo 2018, Hu 2018, Jin 2020, Zhang and Meng 2020, etc.) despite the growing popularity of Wang’s terminology. Even Tu and Li 2017 use ‘cultural back-translation’ several times although their article is about ‘textless back translation’. I was not able to check all papers and confirm in which way they used the term, but Tan 2018 and Wu 2020 cite Liang, and Gao and Zhao 2019 then quote Tan 2018, which makes me think Liang did spark her own terminology within the topic. The term was most recently re-coined by Hungarian scholar Klaudy Klinga in 2018 as ‘kulturális visszafordítás’ [cultural back-translation] and as the English ‘cultural back-translation’ in Klaudy and Heltai 2020 when studying works taking place in Hungary but written in English such as Diane Pearson’s *Csardas* or Tibor Fischer’s *Under the Frog*. Klaudy (2018, 4) first describes the phenomenon as being ‘when the translator translates into a language culture that they know better than the author of the original text’, a definition specific to her case study of Diane Pearson’s *Csardas* as Diane Pearson is an English writer. It is then redefined as the ‘translation into a target language (TL) of texts that are not translations themselves but describe a culture different from that associated with the SL and contain CSEs [cultural specific elements] imported from the TL culture’ (Klaudy and Heltai 2020, 44). As for the source text, while Liang uses the more general ‘transnational literature’ (2013, 51), Klaudy and Heltai coin the term ‘partial cultural literature’ for texts in which “the language of the ST does not at all reflect SL culture: there may be practically no SL CSEs in the text, while large numbers of CSEs are imported from another culture’ (2020, 44). With ‘cultural specific elements’, Klaudy and Heltai (ibid, 46) expand the notion of cultural specific items, ‘words that signify concepts that are related to a specific culture’ (Terestyényi 2011), to not only a lexical aspect but also a grammatical aspect, without distinction between extralinguistic and intralinguistic cultural specific items (i.e.: items in the language of the writing and items left in the language of the depicted culture). As such, ‘cultural specific elements’ or CSEs will be the term used in this paper going forward. I will come back later on the definition of ‘partial cultural translation’.

c. *Sündüz Öztürk Kasar’s terminology: watermark translation and rétro-translation*



In 2012, Turkish scholar Sündüz Öztürk Kasar studied the Turkish translation of Jason Goodwin's *The Janissary Tree*, a detective novel set in the Ottoman empire and written by an English writer with a degree in Byzantine History from Cambridge University (Avşaroğlu and Karadağ 2021, 47). She coined the term ‘rétro-traduction’ in French, then translated into ‘retro-translation’ in English (also written “rétro-translation” by Tuna and Çelik 2021) and ‘aslına çevir’ in Turkish (Öztürk Kasar 2020). She actually first came up with a term for the source text, that she called ‘traduction en filigrane’ or in English ‘watermark translation’ and in Turkish ‘özde çeviri’ (Öztürk Kasar 2012 and 2020) and defined as

an original text directly written in the native language of the context in which it is published but this language is not the language of the context presented in the work. The text is thus produced by a translation process taking place in the mind of the author. Then, like the watermark of a bank note, this process of mental translation is woven into the text and leaves its trace [...]⁴. (Öztürk Kasar 2012, 267-268)

While her terms have been around since 2012, ‘textless back translation’ and ‘foreign language creation’ seem to be more popular in Turkey: thirteen articles out the twenty-one that I found used these terms, as opposed to seven for Öztürk Kasar’s terminology— with so far only two not having been written by her or in collaboration with her—, and two without specific names for the phenomenon.

*d. Non-specific terms*

Other non-specific terms used for the translation phenomenon are ‘retranslation’ (Liang 1994 as “复译”), ‘translation of a translation’ (Ajtay-Horváth 2012), or ‘back translation’ (in English in Li 2012, Sun 2014, in Hungarian Heltai 2008 as ‘visszafordítás’ and in Chinese in Wu and Li 2004, Liu 2005, Li and Zuo 2009 or Ye 2012 as ‘回译’). As for the source text, it is named ‘cultural translation’ (Sun 2014; Liu 2005 and Wang 2015 as ‘文化翻译’); ‘sinological works’ for the Chinese context (Ye 2019); and ‘国文学作品 (transnational literature)’ (Liang 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> Translation by me.

English term	Coined by	First used in	Used by	Chinese name	Turkish name	Name in other languages
Rootless back translation	Wang Hongyin	2009	Wang 2009, Jiang 2012, Wang and Jiang 2012, Guo and Ge 2014, Zhang 2015, Wang 2015, Guo Ting 2017, Huang 2017, Gökdoğan 2018, Ye 2019, Zhang 2019, Araz 2020, Avcı Solmaz 2020	无根回译	kökensiz geri çeviri	/
Textless back translation	Wang Hongyin	2015	Wang 2015, Jiang 2016, Wang 2016, Wang and Jiang 2017, Wang 2017, Guo 2017, Tu and Li 2017, Wang and Mo 2017, Mo 2018, Tu and Li 2018, Baydere 2018, Gökdoğan 2018, Chen and Li 2018, Tu and Li 2019, Tu 2019, Avşaroğlu and Karadağ 2019, Sayın 2019, Li and Li 2019, Öztürk Baydere 2019, Yalçındağ and Karadağ 2020, Taş 2020, Zeng 2020, Avcı Solmaz 2020, Cai 2021, Avşaroğlu and Karadağ 2021, Li 2021, Chen and Li 2021, Jiang and Wang 2021, Zhang and Guo 2021, Guan, Hang and Qi 2021	无本回译	metinsiz geri çeviri	/
Foreign language creation	Wang Hongyin	2009	Wang 2009, Jiang 2012, Wang and Jiang 2012, Guo and Ge 2014, Zhang 2015, Jiang 2016, Wang 2016, Wang and Jiang 2017, Wang 2017, Guo 2017, Tu and Li 2017, Wang and Mo 2017, Mo 2018, Baydere 2018, Gökdoğan 2018, Chen and Li 2018, Tu and Li 2019, Tu 2019, Avşaroğlu and Karadağ 2019, Sayın 2019, Li and Li 2019, Öztürk Baydere 2019, Yalçındağ and Karadağ 2020, Zeng 2020, Avcı Solmaz 2020, Avşaroğlu and Karadağ 2021, Chen and Li 2021, Jiang and Wang 2021, Zhang and Guo 2021, Guan, Hang and Qi 2021	异语创作	yabancı dil yaratımı	/
Cultural back translation	/	2010	Shan 2010, Liang 2013, Wu 2013, Wang 2014, Wang 2015, Tan 2018, Guo 2018, Klaudy 2018, Sayın 2019, Klaudy and Heltai 2020, Taş 2020, Jin 2020, Zhang and Meng 2020	文化回译	/	kulturális visszafordítás
Partial cultural translation	Klaudy and Heltai	2020	Klaudy and Heltai 2020	/	/	/
Retro-translation	Sündüz Öztürk Kasar	2012	Öztürk Kasar 2012, 2020 and 2021, Tuna 2020, Tuna and Çelik 2021, Öztürk Kasa and Çelik 2021, Öztürk Kasar and Gülmüş Sırkıntı 2021	/	aslına çeviri	rétro-traduction
Watermark translation	Sündüz Öztürk Kasar	2012	Öztürk Kasar 2012, 2020 and 2021, Tuna 2020, Tuna and Çelik 2021, Öztürk Kasa and Çelik 2021, Öztürk Kasar and Gülmüş Sırkıntı 2021	/	özde çeviri	traduction en filigrane

(Table 4: all specialised terms coined, their creators, date of first use and a list<sup>5</sup> of papers using them)

### **Issues in the research topic**

#### *a. The problems of nebulousness*

As explained previously, there is no unified theory or terminology for the topic. Even Wang's theory and its subsequent revisions are scattered across several papers and prefaces published in different periods (Jiang and Wang 2021, 138). All articles written by non-Chinese scholars that make mention of 'textless back translation' cite either Tu and Li 2017 (Gökdoğan 2018, Baydere 2018, Avşaroğlu and Karadağ 2019, Klaudy and Heltai 2020<sup>6</sup>), or Guo 2017 (Taş 2020), or both (Sayın 2019, Yalçındağ and Karadağ 2020, Avcı

<sup>5</sup> List limited to the papers I have been able to read myself or at least confirm the term usage of through their abstract or being quoted in another paper.

<sup>6</sup> Klaudy and Heltai do mention Wang 2009 and 2015 and list him directly in their bibliography; however, it is my understanding that they might not have actually read his paper as they use his article to back up the fact that '[t]here are Chinese detective stories back-translated from English (Wang 2015)' (Klaudy and Heltai 2020, 45), while Wang 2015 lists many more texts and types of texts (and actually lists the types of text he believes is concerned by this "foreign language creation" on page 3) and Chinese detective stories only predominantly appear in the title 'Text-less Back Translation Reviewed and Reconsidered — — — With Examples from A Judge Dee Mystery and Other Works' (Wang 2015).

Solmaz 2019, Avşaroğlu and Karadağ 2021, etc.). They thus rely on a translation<sup>7</sup> of the concepts they mention, without accessing the original text, and are only aware of Wang's research as it was in 2017, and as explained by Tu and Li 2017 and Guo 2017. This lack of unification means gathering data on the research already done for the topic is complicated, as it requires looking across three different specialised terms, and many more non-specialised terms, in at least four different languages, in order to find all the literature available. Many papers are also master's or doctorate theses that are not all accessible (see Shan 2010, Wu 2013, Jiang 2012, Li 2012, Sayın 2019, Gülmüş Sirkinti 2021, Avcı Çelik 2021<sup>8</sup>, etc.). This also means many scholars are not aware of the research that has already been done and that is being done in other countries, or that uses a different terminology. Recent Chinese articles do not cite any of the work done in Turkey; most papers on 'textless back translation' (save for Ge and Guo 2014 who mention Shan 2010 and Tu and Li 2019 who cite Liang 2013) do not cite any of the articles using the term 'cultural back translation'. Klaudy and Heltai 2020 also do not appear to know of the previous research using 'cultural back-translation' and their short literature review lacks the entire Turkish research on textless back translation. Only Gökdoğan 2018 mentions 'watermark translation'; but Öztürk Kasar does not seem to know about the literature on the topic outside her own terminology as her articles, as well as all articles based on her work, do not cite any paper that does not use it. She still states in her 2021 article that to her knowledge, 'watermark translation' is a new concept that has not been addressed in previous reviews (Öztürk Kasar 2021, 4), which is surprising considering the introduction of 'textless back translation' into Turkish translation studies in 2018 and the several articles published on the topic in English before 2021 no matter which term they use (e.g. Li 2012, Sun 2014, Tu and Li 2017, etc.). I surmise that even my attempt at putting together all the research on the topic is incomplete and that many other scholars will unfortunately remain unaware of it.

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<sup>7</sup> Tu and Li cite Wang 2009 directly on page 2 but the quote is in English and nowhere is it mentioned that it is a translation: it is possible that the scholars citing Wang through them are not aware that all of Wang's works are fully in Chinese and that they are thus reading a translation.

<sup>8</sup> I thank professor Sündüz Öztürk Kasar for letting me know about Gülmüş Sirkinti 2021 and Avcı Çelik 2021 in private correspondence.

*b. Differences and disagreements*

Despite the near-exactitude of the definition of all terms, they still present their differences and sometimes even disagreements with one another. Klaudy and Heltai (2020, 44) call ‘textless back translation’ and ‘rootless back translation’ misleading, although they do not explain what they find misleading, and prefer the term ‘cultural back-translation’. However, Jiang argues that the translation phenomenon cannot be covered by ‘cultural back-translation’ (Wang and Jiang 2021, 134) and seems to associate ‘cultural back-translation’ with another phenomenon called ‘cultural restoration’ that ‘only involves the return of the cultural part of the work to the native language, while textless back-translation also involves the restoration of aspects such as style, genre, language, etc. in addition to the restoration of culture<sup>9</sup>’ (Jiang 2012, 343). However, as seen previously, Liang 2013 and Klaudy and Heltai 2020 do not make that distinction. The definition of the source text differs between the two papers, however. For Liang (2013, 51), the source texts of cultural back translation are ‘transnational literary works that describe the culture of country B in the language of country A’<sup>10</sup> while for Klaudy and Heltai (2020, 44), ‘partial cultural translation’ is ‘texts that are not translations themselves but describe a culture different from that associated with the SL and contain CSEs imported from the TL culture’. A footnote at the end of their paper, however, does include the caveat, that

The type of text that we regard as a ST for cultural back-translation is in some ways similar to the works of bilingual postcolonial writers writing in the former colonial language, importing some of the characteristics of their native language into the colonial language. It has been claimed that in this case a process of mental translation takes place, and the resulting work gives the impression of a foreignizing translation, with various CSEs, address forms, proverbs, etc. imported from the author’s native vernacular. However, while there are certain similarities, there are also important differences. In cultural back-translation authors write in their native language about a different culture. In postcolonial writing there is usually a conscious foreignizing approach, motivated by

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<sup>9</sup> Translation by Google Translate, post-edited by me.

<sup>10</sup> Translation by Google Translate, post-edited by me.

ideological reasons, while in partial cultural translation domesticating strategies prevail. Postcolonial authors often use mental translation, while authors of cultural translations draw on several sources in expressing the culture-specific features of the foreign culture. (ibid, 63)

Given there is no example nor source supporting their argument, it is difficult to comprehend the differences talked about and to understand the exclusion of an entire category of writers. It is possible, from their description, that they are talking about a type of literature where the author describes their experience in the country they are writing for while including elements of their native culture—such as works relating immigration and diaspora experience. If this is the case, then it is to be noted that other scholars do not make the difference. Tu and Li 2017, based on Wang 2015’s categories of ‘foreign language creation’ writers, made diaspora writers—in their case foreign writers from Chinese descent—a specific category<sup>11</sup> and many Chinese scholars (e.g.: Wang 2015, Tu and Li 2017 and 2018, Wei 2021, Chen and Li 2021, etc.) analysed the works from second generation Chinese-American authors through the lenses of ‘textless back translation’. Considering that the translation of these works is the same ‘textless back translation’ that reconstitute the English text to its ‘original’ Chinese context, however, has its pitfalls as it might not be accurate to translate diaspora Chinese culture into mainland Chinese culture (see Zhou 2008 and Sun 2014).

Some translators, in order to avoid possible misconception of cultural images analogous to those perceived by the Chinese reader, domesticate the imagined source text rather freely and with little restraint. There is some irony in the fact that these translators choose to domesticate what is supposed to be Chinese culture found to be distorted and alienated, hence the conscious attempt at the voluntary “restoration” of the so-called cultural purity and authenticity. By the same token, stark omissions of the so-called false descriptions of Chinese culture are detected, indicative of the fact that acting out of an inclination for familiarity and intimacy, these translators tend to take

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<sup>11</sup> Wang 2015 counts foreign writers from Chinese descent within the category of overseas Chinese writers, and actually put up to debate their inclusion in the concept, stating that they are not typical foreign language writers as while their work contains many elements of Chinese culture, it does not take place in China and often depicts the conflict between this Chinese culture and the culture of the country they live in—along with the identity and struggles that comes with it (Wang 2015, 4).

liberty with the original as if to suggest that they know the “real” original better. (Sun 2014, 115)

Whether or not diaspora-experience works translated into the language of their author’s origins should count as ‘textless back translation’ is a debate to be better explored in future research. While it is unclear if Klaudy and Heltai are talking about similar cases when excluding postcolonial authors from ‘partial cultural translation’, it does show that the scope of works included in ‘partial cultural translation’ and ‘foreign language creation’ differs. ‘Foreign language creation’ seems to be a broader term, as it includes any work in which ‘the language signifier is inconsistent with the cultural signifier’ (Wang and Jiang 2021, 133). Another noteworthy element about ‘partial cultural translation’ is Klaudy and Heltai mentioning ‘mental translation’—which they do not define—, as something postcolonial authors do but authors of cultural translations do not. On the contrary Öztürk Kasar (2012, 267-268) considers ‘watermark translation’ to be ‘a translation process taking place in the mind of the author’ and thus ‘a process of mental translation’.

### **Conclusion**

#### *a. This dissertation’s terminology*

These differences aside, most terms have such similar meanings that it would be difficult to choose one for another reason than personal taste. For this reason, I will prefer ‘cultural back-translation’ for the translation phenomenon and ‘diacultural creation’ for the source text. I mostly chose terms in order to talk about my research through this dissertation, not to conclude on which term is subjectively more appropriate or should be used in future research. I opted to use specialised terms rather than general ones as I am talking about specific phenomena, and picked ‘cultural back-translation’ as the word ‘cultural’ makes it, in my opinion, more explicit than ‘rétro-translation’; and, as explained before, ‘rootless/textless back translation’ has been used for the back translation of works about the diaspora experience, that I do not intend to include in my present research<sup>12</sup>. ‘Diacultural’ comes from the prefix dia- meaning ‘through’ or ‘across’ to signify the foreign culture coming across or through the text; and I have chosen ‘creation’

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<sup>12</sup> I do not, however, exclude works written by diaspora authors or ‘postcolonial writers’.

instead of ‘text’ in order to include other types of media than written literature. It is a term I might revise in future research.

Here, ‘cultural back translation’ will be understood as ‘the translation into language B and for the audience of country B of a work written in language A and for the audience of country A, the story of which takes place in country B and, in-universe, in language B’ that I described earlier, and thus diacultural creation will mean ‘a work written in language A and for the audience of country A, the story of which takes place in country B and, in-universe, in language B’. This implies a focus on literary works and novels, although the translation phenomenon itself does not have to be limited to them.

*b. A short overview of cultural-back translation as a phenomenon*

When it comes to the way the ‘back- translator’ tackles diacultural creation, there seem to be patterns but no systemic approach. Klaudy and Heltai 2020 conclude from their analysis that ‘domesticating strategies are used exclusively’ in cultural back-translation, with predominantly strategies of specification, cultural substitution and omission of explanatory text (2020: 58). They call this phenomenon ‘re-domestication’, a domesticating process which ‘restores the original cultural context and increases its culture specificity by finding the original TL CSEs domesticated in the ST (and eventually, introducing some more)’ and which, unlike regular domestication, appears to have an effect of cultural gain rather than loss (ibid: 58). This same process of re-domestication and adapting—and even enriching—the text to the target text culture seems to be common in cultural back translations (see for example the analyses of Sun 2014, Wang 2016, Guo 2017, Avşaroğlu and Karadağ 2019 among others). In a notable example, Li (2012, 99-102) details how Ha Jin’s *Waiting*’s translator, Jin Liang, translated the target text into a Chinese Northeastern dialect as the story takes place in the Northeast of China, thus making it ‘more familiar and localized to Chinese people living in the Northeast’ (ibid: 102). However, re-domestication does not always happen. Özürcü Kasar (2020: 16) points out translation mistakes in one of the Turkish translations of Jason Goodwin’s *The Janissary Tree*, namely a lack of domestication making terms that should feel familiar to the target reader be instead confusing. Turkish translators of historical works written about Turkey by foreigners also did not re-domesticate the text, instead

adding footnotes and paratext in order to correct the source author or point out any inaccuracy to the readers (see analyses by Baydere 2018 and 2019 or Taş 2020). This paper will mostly focus on the process of redomestication, as it appears to be the most distinct and unique characteristic of cultural back-translations.

c. *A short overview of the academic literature*

Just as there are many approaches to cultural back-translation, there are many approaches to its study. My goal is not to do a literature review on all works on the topic, and as such I focused on the terminology and definitions of the papers cited, but various perspectives include paratext analysis and paratranslation (Taş 2020), intertextuality (Wei 2021), postcolonialism (Sayın 2019), power struggles (Avcı Solmaz 2020), Otherness (Li 2012), transmedia aesthetics (Li 2021), or even urban semiotics (Özürk Kasar 2012). Most works analysed by cultural back translation scholars are novels of different genres although biographies, autobiographies and historical novels are the most prominent (e.g. Lin Yutang's *Moments in Peking*, Jason Goodwin's *The Janissary Tree*, Robert Van Gulik's *Judge Dee Mysteries*, Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, Halide Edib Adivar's *The Clown and His Daughter*, Fairfax Downey's *The Grande Turke Süleyman the Magnificent, Sultan of the Ottomans*, etc.). It is my understanding, then, that there is a gap in research when it comes to applying cultural back translation and diacultural creation to speculative fiction, such as the fantasy genre, that I intend to bridge in this dissertation.



## Fantasy, worldbuilding and translation

### ***Fantasy and worldbuilding***

#### *a. Definitions and examples*

The fantasy genre is not easy to define. ‘There are many ways of writing fantasy, and many places to set it’ (James 2012, 77). Because of this, most academic definitions fail to cover the entire scope of the genre (Weinreich 2011, 4). While fantasy might be thought as battles against dark forces in an entirely fictional world (e.g. J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Ring*, Brandon Sanderson’s *The Stormlight Archives*, Licia Troisi’s *Cronache del Mondo Emerso* [The Chronicles of the Emerged World]) or in magic schools set in our current world (e.g. Kim Jin Kyeong’s *고양이 학교* (goyangi hakkyo) [The Cat School], Holly Black and Cassandra Clare’s *The Magisterium*, Dhonielle Clayton’s *The Marvellers*), it can also depict the day-to-day life of supernatural people or creatures (e.g. Ishizuka Chihiro’s *Flying Witch*, Miyazaki Hayao’s *Kiki Delivery Service*, Jeong Eun Gyeong’s *Beautiful Vampire*) or blend magical elements in what otherwise reads as non-speculative fiction or even non-fiction (e.g. Echo Brown’s *Black Girl Unlimited*, Téa Obreht’s *The Tiger’s Wife*). Oziewicz 2022 called the even broader genre of speculative fiction a ‘fuzzy set supercategory’: the same words can be applied to fantasy. It is a genre the boundaries of which can be blurry; and some genres that would fall under that definition are often considered their own (e.g. ghost stories, the gothic, steampunk, superhero fiction). However, in its broadest sense, fantasy might be defined as

a story, movie, game or piece of art which incorporates supernatural phenomena as an important part of its content which can assume different roles but without which it would not function. (Weinreich 2011, 7-8)

It is the incorporation of this supernatural phenomena which simultaneously demands and allows for the highly creative and inventive side of the fantasy genre. The new, non-realistic elements require what is called worldbuilding: ‘the process of constructing a complete and plausible imaginary world that serves as a context for a story’ (Zaidi 2019, 17). While it can be the creation of a separate, original world (although, as I will tackle

later, whether it is completely ‘original’ is debatable), which is the basis of the subgenre of fantasy usually known as ‘high fantasy’ (Kuznets 1985, 19), it is not always the case. Wolf (2012, 23) reuses Tolkien’s terms of ‘Primary World’ and ‘secondary world’ when talking about worldbuilding, in which the ‘Primary World’ is ours, and a ‘secondary world’ is any world built from it but which deviates from it in some way. According to Wolf, not all secondary world involves the same degree of deviance from the Primary World:

As secondariness is a matter of degree, it may be more useful to arrange fictional worlds along a spectrum of attachment to, or on reliance on, the Primary World (as we know it) and its default; from those the closest to the Primary World, to the secondary worlds that are the farthest from it (that contain the highest degree of subcreation). (Wolf 2012, 27)

As such, worldbuilding is flexible. It can involve the creation of a whole Middle Earth just as well as it can be what Wolf (2012, 28) calls ‘overlaid worlds’: the Primary World, but with fictional, supernatural elements ‘overlaid’ onto it, such as the inclusion of mythical creatures living among us in vampire fiction, or the interaction of Biblical mythology with contemporary Britain as in Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman’s *Good Omens*. Regardless, no matter how much of a full-fledged ‘world’ any secondary world turns out to be, the inspiration behind it, or at least some aspects of it, is always the Primary World.

*b. Imagined worlds, real inspiration*

Fantasy is considered a non-mimetic genre, a genre that ‘in one way or another depart[s] from imitating consensus reality’ (Oziewicz 2022), but that does not mean it never imitates it. As remote from reality as fantasy can be, ‘secondary worlds are, to some degree, versions or variations of our own world’ (Wolf 2012, 63) and fantasy mimics reality far more than the term ‘non-mimetic genre’ lets on. On his blog, fantasy author Brandon Sanderson explains that he bases himself on one or two real-life cultures for the linguistic influences of the names and words of his fantasy settings ( <https://faq.brandonsanderson.com/knowledge-base/how-do-you-make-up-names-and-words-for-your-fantasy-settings/> ) and he is far from being the only one. C.S Lewis and Tolkien were both inspired by respectively the Late and Early Middle Ages (James 2012, 67) among other influences such as Christianity for Lewis’ Narnia (see Chapman 2012) or

Old Norse literature for Tolkien's Middle Earth (see St Clair 1996). Even the Jedi in Star Wars take after the Buddhist Doctrine (see Feichtinger 2014). As such, 'fictional cultures are often modeled after real cultures' (Wolf 2012, 36), whether historical or modern, although their base inspiration is more or less apparent. It might not be obvious that G.R.R. Martin took inspiration from mediaeval events and locations like the War of Roses or the Wall of Hadrian for his series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, that he conceives as more historical than fantasy (Facchini 2017, 50-52), but Frank Herbert's *Dune*, for example, has strong ties to the Arabic language and Arabic cultures as he purposefully chose already existing names or altered them slightly during his worldbuilding (Kennedy 2016, 100). There is even the emergence—or recognition—of fantasy subgenres tied to the country or culture that inspired their worldbuilding, such as, among many other examples, the West-African fantasy subgenre (<https://fivebooks.com/best-books/best-west-african-fantasy-books-for-teenagers-efua-traore/>) with books like Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone* or Roseanne Brown's *A Song of Wraith and Ruins*, or the label of Asian fantasy that not all Asian authors embrace as such due to its broadness (<https://text.npr.org/1000466671>) but that was still used for novels by Asian authors like Roshani Chokshi, Tasha Shuri or Ken Liu. In these cases, the inspiration is obvious, and one might even say purposeful. The reader is supposed to be able to trace back the real-life culture the world is modelled after. For some writers, like those listed here, it is to break from the Medieval Europe-inspired, Tolkien-like fantasies that still dominate the genre (James 2012, 67) and instead draw on their own cultures or the history of their own community (see Woo 2006 or Thomas 2019). However, as seen with *Dune*, writing about a certain culture is not limited to the people who belong to it. This does not always come without criticism, with critical literature often 'addressing issues of race [...] and complexities of cultural appropriation and problematizing common terms of engagement such as the injunction to "write the other"' (Okorafor 2012, 188). It is to be noted that this discussion is mostly centred onto the Anglo-American publishing world—as it is the one I am most familiar with—and onto the cultural power dynamics (here, in predominantly white countries) between the hegemonic culture and authors who belong to it, and authors and stories outside it. Indeed, '[w]hile this kind of cultural borrowing is endemic to mythopoesis, members of cultures and nations that are not privileged may take exceptions to reading such portrayals by cultural outsiders.' (Thomas 2019, 297).

There is less criticism, for example, Korean fantasy romance webcomics set in aesthetically European-inspired worlds (e.g. Dalsaeowl and Hwaeum's *Like Wind on a Dry Branch*, Sam's *Your Throne* or Plutus' *Under the Oak Tree*), partly because, as mentioned before, European-inspired fantasies still dominate the genre and cultural power dynamic issues are not at play. However, no matter the scenario, at the core of it is the need, intrinsic to worldbuilding and fantasy, to make the secondary world deviate from the Primary World—or rather, to make the fantasy world differ from its audience's reality, in more or less drastic ways. According to Wolf, it also has a lot to do with the credibility of the fantasy world as

[e]ven though audiences know something is not real, Secondary Belief is easier to generate if the proposed inventions fit in with what the audience knows (or does not know) about the Primary World. A story set on another planet does not contradict any known facts, since we do not know what life there may be on other planets.[...] However, invention that conflicts with what the audience already knows is harder to accept; for example, a fictional U.S state would make Secondary Belief more difficult for an American audience who know the 50 states than for a foreign audience who did not. Likewise, a fictional African country may be easier for an audience to accept than a fictional North American country, simply because there are more African countries and fewer people who can name all of them. (Wolf 2012, 37-38)

Obviously, Wolf's perspective is that of an American author, and actually demonstrates the issues caused by the aforementioned cultural power dynamics: an American author may think it easier for an audience to accept a fictional African country, but an African or Afro-descendant reader might find it more difficult to believe in—and might notice all the things the author would have made up about Africa thinking their audience would not know what is true or not. Nevertheless, it might explain why fantasy authors take inspiration from cultures they do not belong to and are not necessarily knowledgeable on, and highlights the need of the fantasy genre for remoteness and for elements the readers will not be familiar with, be it geographical, temporal, cultural, or fantastical.

### ***Fictional multilingualism and translation***

a. *Fantasy as translation*

Be it ‘names and terminology unfamiliar or “strange-sounding” to the modern reader’ (Bergmann 2017, 38), and the explanations they might require, the newness and Otherness inherent to fantasy works most often appear as linguistic elements. Salviaterra (2020, 195) coins the term fictive multilingualism ‘to describe the literal rendering of words, phrases, syntactic forms, or other linguistic manifestations originating in a created source language, within a target language text’. According to her, created languages, also known as conlangs, play an important role in establishing the foreignness of the secondary world (2020, 196). Her use of the terms ‘source language’ and ‘target language text’ highlights a crucial implication: that if the story takes place in a secondary world remote from ours with its own culture, no matter how inspired by the Primary World, it implies that this world has its own language and thus that the in-universe language is not the one the novel is written in. The most notable example of this is Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*: Tolkien made it out to be the translation of a book called *The Red Book of Westmarch* from Westron—one of Middle Earth’s languages—into English, presenting himself as *The Red Book’s* editor and translator (Thompson 1988, 12-13). Fictive multilingualism, then, is not solely about the presence of a created language, but about ‘the specific instances in a text where the created source language enters into dialogue with the target language’ (Salviaterra 2020, 196), whether it is the actual use of a conlang into a novel or the way the fact that the in-universe language must be different from ours appearing in the written text. Salviaterra’s fictive multilingualism is about created languages being the actual source text, but she acknowledges that her concept would be applied to *Dune* although its language is heavily drawn from an existing language, blurring the line between what she calls ‘factual multilingualism’ and her fictive multilingualism (2020, 214). When secondary worlds are purposefully inspired by real cultures, the in-universe language may be the language of said-culture with little to no modification—for example, Julie Kagawa’s *The Shadow of the Fox* takes place in a fantasy world heavily modelled after Japan and contains many unaltered Japanese words. While the language is not created, by definition, her concept could also be applied to such works. By definition, too, her concept interestingly echoes that of diacultural creation. To go even further, diacultural creation, while initially conceived with existing cultures in mind, could just as

well be applied to created cultures and secondary worlds. Both this trail of thought and Salviaterra's fictive multilingualism posit the interesting concept of fantasy works being inherently translation—and when it comes to secondary worlds that directly draw from existing cultures, a double translation from both the cultural and the imaginary. While this would be most prominent in the high fantasy subgenre, I would like to posit that it could be applied even to overlaid worlds. Even if the story takes place in a secondary world where the supernatural phenomenon is only layered onto our reality, it still creates a newness—new beings, events, concepts, or even cultures or subcultures—that will need to be 'translated' from the author's imagination to the reader and expressed textually and linguistically. I would thus like to expand Salviaterra's concept into 'fictional multilingualism' and apply it not only to in-universe fictive languages, but more broadly about the way the fictional, what marks the story as fantasy, finds its way into the language of the text—its expression, manifestation, and influence on the writing. Most often, this means the presence of neologisms.

*b. Neologisms*

Neologisms are 'newly-coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense' (Newmark 1988, 140). They abound in speculative fiction like science-fiction and fantasy (Oleynikova 2016, 7). According to Salviaterra (2020, 206), 'neologisms are able to suggest that behind that specific word or utterance there is a wider system of concepts being referenced', which makes them so significant in fantasy. They denote the 'fictional places, creatures, or other phenomena, arising from the "third" culture created by the author' (Saduov and Vinczeová 2017, 65) and as such are one of the most common—if not, the most common—marker of fictional multilingualism. Their importance in the genre might explain why most of the research on fantasy in translation studies, so far, is about their translation and its challenges (see Kolev 2016, Bergmann 2017, Čačija 2018, Pauković 2019 among others). Among said challenges, Pauković (2019, 8) lists 'unclear extralinguistic referents, opacity of motivation and meaning and the possible unavailability of additional support and advice in the case of ambiguity (especially when it comes to the first novel in a series)'. The 'invented' aspect of fantasy means there might not be any pre-existing component to rely on to understand the neologism or to translate all its meaning and connotations into a target language.

Language-specific challenges are also to be considered. Bergmann (2017, 28) points out that English is a highly flexible language that seems to have an infinite potential for the creation of neologisms, puns and wordplays, that might not exist in other languages, making the translation of English neologisms tricky. Similarly, Japanese fantasy manga often use the reading gloss above kanji characters, which usually gives the kanji's pronunciation, to associate a different word to the kanji and merge the two together—a phenomenon known as *ateji* (当て字) (Lewis 2010, 28). Lewis (ibid, 29) give the example of the manga *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicles* by CLAMP, in which the word for memory (記憶), usually pronounced *kioku*, is instead being given the pronunciation *kokoro*, which means heart/soul, thus creating a link between the two words and concepts. As *ateji* give a new meaning or a layered meaning to already existing words, they could arguably be considered as falling under Newmark's definition of neologisms; and just like with neologisms, this new double meaning can be complicated to translate into a language that does not have the same peculiarities as Japanese (Yean 2021). Obviously, due to the diversity of cases, there is no single all-encompassing strategy to translate fantasy neologisms (Kolev 2016, 177), leaving it up to the translator's creativity and imagination. Translating fantasy, then, means 'building a new TT world populated with its own unique objects, creatures and concepts that has an internal coherence [...] while trying to retain and maximize the semantic and stylistic potential of the ST' (Pauković 2019, 8). This internal coherence matters more than external coherence for the target audience, as fantasy has a foreignising effect on both the source and target audience (Bergmann 2017, 29) and fantasy readers are willing to suspend their disbelief for the story's sake. However, fantasy diacultural creations and their cultural back-translations might be subjected to an additional challenge of the target audience's familiarity with the culture and language that served as—at least—base inspiration.

### ***Fantasy cultural back-translation***

#### *a. High fantasy and conlangs*

As said previously, there is no research yet on cultural back-translation applied to speculative fiction, and thus nothing on fantasy cultural back-translation. The fantasy genre 'has almost always been considered popular literature, a "low" art form' (Casey

2012, 115), which might explain why it is still under-researched in translation studies. However, considering the similarities between fictional multilingualism and diacultural creation, it is unfortunate that cultural back-translations scholars have yet to pay attention to it. Arguably, when it comes to high fantasy and invented languages and cultures, there is no language and culture to translate the work back to—in that sense, high fantasy works could be considered true ‘rootless translations’, the cultural roots of which cannot be fully returned to. This is not only a problem for cultural back-translation: to my knowledge, published regular translations into conlangs remain rare as well. This might be due to the incompleteness of most conlangs, save perhaps for Esperanto, and because the target audience is usually too limited to justify the costs of producing such translations. There do exist translations of Shakespeare plays into Klingon, interestingly presented as being back translation into the ‘original Klingon’ in-universe (<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/shakespeare-klingon/>), translations of novels into Esperanto (see <https://esperantoliteraturo.com/tradukita.html> for a list of translation into Esperanto), and a few translations of parts of the Bible in invented languages like Quenya or Na’vi (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible\\_translations\\_into\\_fictional\\_languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_translations_into_fictional_languages) for the list of Bible translations into fictional languages), but little else. Official—of unofficial for that matter—cultural back translations of fantasy novels into their ‘source text’ conlang do not seem to exist yet. The closest would be the translations into Old English, one of the languages Tolkien used and inspired himself from, of a chapter of *The Hobbit* by reddit user Telemannische\_Aias (<https://www.reddit.com/r/OldEnglish/comments/rv4v47/comment/hr33qr0/>), and of *The Hobbit’s* riddles by user slagnanz ([https://www.reddit.com/r/OldEnglish/comments/2jo02z/r%C7%A3delsa\\_in\\_%C3%BE%C7%A3re\\_deorcnesse\\_my\\_translation\\_of\\_the/?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=web2x&context=3](https://www.reddit.com/r/OldEnglish/comments/2jo02z/r%C7%A3delsa_in_%C3%BE%C7%A3re_deorcnesse_my_translation_of_the/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3)). Slagnanz does not comment on their translation process, but Telemannische\_Aias, or L.C., translated the chapter *The Death of Thorin* into a poem and provides some hindsight in their introduction to the translation:



It seemed fitting to adapt the modern legends of Tolkien's work into the older styles he studied. This 220-line poem takes a segment of his shortest book, *The Hobbit*, and attempts to depict the battle, death, and burial in a form familiar to the Anglo-Saxons. [...] The whole poem is set in Old English, the language used by the principal characters. (L.C. 2022, 3)

L. C.'s decision to render the chapter into a poem, 'a form familiar to the Anglo-Saxon', resonates with Wang's sentiment that the Chinese translations of Robert Van Gulik's *Judge Dee Mysteries* should to some extent 'restore' the language and stylistic characteristics of *gong'an* fiction, which Van Gulik's series takes inspiration from (Wang 2017, 2). When dealing with fiction that has roots in the past, it seems the cultural and linguistic return should also implicate a temporal one. While, as seen previously, a cultural return does not always happen in cultural back translation, it feels worth mentioning that it is the case here, as it offers hindsight on the possibilities of cultural back-translation applied to high fantasy works.

*b. The case of fantasy diacultural creation*

Even when the work's linguistic and cultural inspiration can be found as such or almost as such in real life, examples of fantasy cultural back-translations do not appear to be common. It requires, in the case of literature, for a work to be popular enough for a foreign publishing house to buy the translation rights, and for this foreign publishing house to be from the country from which the book's secondary world is inspired. Even when such a scenario happens, material such as author's or translator's notes, reviews or translation analysis either do not exist or do not provide much hindsight into the translation process. The little I was able to find is outside academic circles. The Arabic translation of *Dune* conducted an Ask Me Anything session on reddit under the username salamacast

([https://www.reddit.com/r/dune/comments/cvla0z/im\\_the\\_translator\\_of\\_the\\_arabic\\_version\\_ama/](https://www.reddit.com/r/dune/comments/cvla0z/im_the_translator_of_the_arabic_version_ama/)) in which he answered questions about the translation of the novel, including on how he dealt with the Arabic-inspired terminology and Herbert's distortion of the

actual meaning for his worldbuilding. Salamacast explains that he added the English word beside the Arabic, as translating or transliterating them into Arabic would remove their 'exotic' context, and that the words Herbert 'corrupted' to suit his purposes were mostly in the terminology appendix and did not majorly hinder the narrative. With the Arabic words used in an English context like 'Jihad', he simply used the original Arabic word. He notes that Herbert 'did his research', which helped during the translation, except on rare occasions where Herbert is really off mark: salamacast quotes the example of the beginning of the Fremen's religious incantation, Ibn Qirtaiba, which he explains does not mean 'Thus go the holy words' but is in fact just a regular male name. He did note that the published version had been heavily edited by the editor, and that due to the marketing budget, he did not expect the novel to gain much popularity in Arabic-speaking countries. Here, the cultural setting did not seem to cause either trouble or influence much the translator's choices. If phenomena noted in cultural back-translation like re-domestication or corrective footnotes occurred, salamacast did not mention them. His disapproval of the published translation, apparently much different from his, also highlights the role of the editor in the final product. Fantasy cultural back-translation might be more easily found outside literature. Be it Japanese manga (e.g. Tana Yoboso's *Black Bulter*, Nakaba Suzuki's *Seven Deadly Sins*, Mochizuki Jun's *The Case Study of Vanitas* or Shirahama Kamome's *Witch Hat Atelier*) or the aforementioned Korean romance webcomics, visual media taking place in aesthetically European secondary worlds has been translated into Western European languages like English or French more than the reverse—although once again, paratext or reviews for these translations is hard to find, if not seemingly non-existent. However, a short reddit thread praises the official translation for Korean webcomic *Like Wind on a Dry Branch*, with user synochecklover finding it excellent in capturing the feeling of the time period the story is set in ([https://www.reddit.com/r/Otomelsekai/comments/witkbd/like\\_wind\\_on\\_a\\_dry\\_branch\\_translation/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Otomelsekai/comments/witkbd/like_wind_on_a_dry_branch_translation/)). The translation seems indeed to have opted for dated phrasings and vocabulary rather than a modern or neutral lexicon. While this might have been a feature of the source text, a fan translation of the light novel that the webcomic is based on, published on fan translation website Scarlet Webnovel (<https://scarletwebnovel.com/novel/like-wind-on-a-dry-branch/>) does not replicate this historical atmosphere. As it reads like a more literal translation, it can be surmised that

the historical feeling of the webcomic translation was decided by the translator or translation team, rather than taken from the source material—potentially due to the setting. The difference might as well be due to a difference between fan translation and professional translation; however the praise mentioned above leads me to think the difference is not only due to the status of the translator.

Fan translation	Official webcomic translation
<p>It was a harsh season. The plague and demons were back and the Empire was full of groans and grief. Wails of weeping and the flames of burning bodies were endless everywhere. Some lands even offered living sacrifices to appease the plague demon. So in this situation, it was no odd sight for a commoner woman to be buried alive at a noble’s funeral.</p>	<p>It was a merciless season. Persistent fires scorched the parched land... ..as the return of the plague once again filled the empire with cries of grief and sorrow. In an age when living sacrifices were offered to appease the gods... ..viviseulture of a peasant woman was a common matter. A life easily spent.</p>
<p>“Really?” Killian laughed. “I thought you hid the news because you didn’t want me to come.”</p>	<p>“Is that so? And here I was wondering if you had deliberately kept it from me.”</p>
<p>“A temptress, huh? Now I’m interested.”</p>	<p>“A temptress, you say.... I must say, I find myself intrigued.”</p>
<p>“...I’m not sure if I really did save your life. You don’t really look like you’re alive.”</p>	<p>“Have I truly saved your life? I strain to see much life in this face.”</p>

**(Table 5:** comparisons of examples from the first two chapters of a fan translation of the light novel and the professional translation of the webcomic *Like Wind on a Dry Branch*)

The English translation of the video game Final Fantasy XII, the world of which is inspired by an aesthetically mediaeval Europe, seems to trigger a similar sentiment. Alexander O. Smith, one of the translators, talks about his translation process to Martin Robinson from website Eurogamer (<https://www.eurogamer.net/a-translators-tale-inside-the-building->

[of-final-fantasy-12s-ivalice](#)) and explains that he and co-translator Rich Amtower leaned heavily into the mediaeval setting for the translation, as Amtower has a master's in Middle English, and Smith felt it would have been odd if everyone in the game was speaking modern English. He explains:

I would say the original is a little more direct - [...] it's very straightforward Japanese. It's a medieval European setting, and there weren't Japanese people in medieval Europe. It would be very odd to try and impose an accent on the Japanese in that kind of setting [...]. It's very straightforward in Japanese, but when you look at writing in the medieval times, any writing in English that's part of that milieu, wordplay is really important, the leitmotifs where you're using language to create a mood. Those are things that we introduced [...].

Smith and Amtower also opted to give different accents and dialects to characters depending on their background, which do not appear in the original Japanese. Here, the inspiration for *Final Fantasy XII's* secondary world was not only considered in the translation but was even a driving force behind its creative choices. The inclusion of different dialects, for example, that Smith points out would have been odd in Japanese, was made possible in the English version of the game where it enriches the world. According to Robinson, there is even a lot missing from the Japanese version without the texture given by Smith and Amtower's translation. All in all, the little I can find on fantasy cultural back-translations seems to indicate that although a process of re-domestication and adaptation to the setting is neither common nor necessary, a translation that takes it into account and leans into it appears to elevate the work for readers and make the translation noteworthy.

Case study: *The House of Shattered Wings* by Aliette de Bodard

Due to the lack of material to analyse when it comes to fantasy cultural back-translations, I decided to interview the translator of a fantasy diacultural creation after reading both the source and target texts and analysing their differences. I chose the novel *The House of Shattered Wings* by Aliette de Bodard, published in 2015 by Roc in the US and Gollancz in the UK. Indeed, *The House of Shattered Wings* takes place in a magical, post-apocalyptic version of Paris in the late 20th century—and as such takes place in France, with characters speaking French in-universe despite the novel being written in English. *The House of Shattered Wings* also contains many French CSEs, such as place names, food, or historical references. The author, Aliette de Bodard, is a French-Vietnamese writer whose native language is French although she writes and publishes in English for an English-speaking audience. *The House of Shattered Wings* was translated into French in 2017 by Emmanuel Chastellière under the name *La Chute de la Maison aux Flèches d'Argent* [The fall of the house of silver spires] and published by Fleuve Éditions.

**Setting and repatriation**

Notable Parisian locations in *The House of Shattered Wings* are mostly retained in French and capitalised. In the French translation, they go through what Klaudy and Heltai (2020: 53) call 'repatriation': the retribution to their already existing original name of 'historical references, names of food items, units of currency, place names and other topographical references' that were either left in the depicted culture's language or translated literally in the source text. In the French translation of *The House of Shattered Wings*, they are left as such or lose the capital letters that do not appear in the French name of the location. Just as Klaudy and Heltai (ibid: 59) point out that repatriated items will not 'stick out as "foreign words"', I also found that the repatriation of place names had a somewhat 'banalising' effect in the translation. In the source text, the capitalisation of the word highlights them as foreign words, and, to the source reader, foreign locations. However, in the target text, the removal of the capital letter, in addition to the target reader's relative familiarity with the CSEs, meant that the CSEs do not stand out anymore. For example, 'Place de la République' [Square of the Republic] (De Bodard 2015: 99), which stands out in the source text, might sound unusual to an English-speaking reader;

but it is a very common location name in France, with ‘place de la République’ existing in many cities like Orléans, Lyon, Bordeaux or Lille just to name a few (see wikipedia page for Rue de la République for the list of all public squares called Place de la République in France [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rue\\_de\\_la\\_R%C3%A9publique](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rue_de_la_R%C3%A9publique) ). The special status of the French locations disappears in translation due to the setting retribution, and with it the foreignising effect they had on the source reader. In that regard, there will be an inevitable loss as the target text will not be able to replicate, or completely replicate, the source text effect—which would not happen if translated in another language but French, as the French CSEs would keep their foreignising properties. Li (2012: 119-120) tackles the issue of this potential loss on the Chinese translation of Ha Jin’s *Waiting* and while she acknowledges that the ‘Chineseness’ of the source text is lost, the translator employs several linguistic devices to instead make up for this: notably the aforementioned use of ‘Northeastern dialect, rhetorical questions, metaphors, idioms, and cultural-specific items’. Further research on how to keep the foreignising effect of the source text in cultural back-translation would be welcome, just as would be deeper discussions on whether or not maintaining this effect is even necessary.

Source text	Target text
the Grands Magasins	les Grands Magasins
Galleries Lafayette	Galleries Lafayette
Paris	Paris
the Printemps	le Printemps
the Hôtel Scribe	l'hôtel Scribe
the Grand Hôtel	le Grand Hôtel
Périphérique	(does not appear in the target text)

Hôtel-Dieu	l'Hôtel-Dieu
Marseille	Marseille
Montpellier	Montpellier
the Seine	la Seine
Ile de la Cité	île de la Cité
Notre-Dame	Notre-Dame
Préfecture	préfecture
Les Halles	les Halles
Police Préfecture and the Commerce Tribunal	préfecture de police et le tribunal de commerce
Place de la République	place de la République
Arc de Triomphe	arc de Triomphe
Pont-Au-Double	pont au Double
Saint-Lazare station	la gare Saint Lazare
Saint Eustache	Saint-Eustache
Brest	Brest
Guérande	Guérande
Pont de l'Archevêché	pont de l'Archevêché

Pont d'Arcole	pont d'Arcole
Pont-au-Change	pont au Change
rue de Rivoli	rue de Rivoli
La Samaritaine	la Samaritaine
Les Grands Magasins	les Grands Magasins
La Goutte d'Or	la Goutte d'Or
Petit-Pont	Petit-Pont
The Saint-Michel Fountain	la fontaine Saint-Michel
Pont Saint-Michel	pont Saint-Michel
Pont-Neuf	Pont-Neuf

(**Table 6:** French locations in *The House of Shattered Wings* and their translation by Emmanuel Chastellière)

### ***Interview with Emmanuel Chastellière***

I divided my interview into seven questions and groups of questions on different aspects I wanted the translator's insight on after my reading:

1. Collaboration with the author
2. Translating the fantasy aspect
3. Translating the prose
4. Consideration of the target audience during the translation process
5. Details on specific examples
6. The loss of foreignness during the translation
7. Potential of "gain in translation"



I will now report on the results of my interview with Emmanuel Chastellière (see Appendix I for full interview).

*a. Collaboration with the author*

I was interested in knowing if there had been collaboration between the author and translator, and if that had influenced the translation somehow in the context of cultural back-translation. Aliette de Bodard being a native French speaker from Paris, I was wondering if some translation choices were due to her input, notably elements related to the novel's fictional multilingualism. According to Mr Chastellière, however, it sounded like the biggest difference with English-speaking authors was the ease of being able to chat in French and being in the same time zone. On the topic of anything De Bodard might have already had in mind for the French translation of names or excerpts, Mr Chastellière did not remember her having any specific idea or term that she absolutely wanted to see used in the target text.

*b. Translating the fantasy aspect*

Although not the core of my thesis, I was interested in knowing if the fantasy elements, and in a way the fictional multilingualism of *The House of Shattered Wings*, had been difficult to translate or caused some challenges in the translation. It did not, as fantasy literature is a genre Mr Chastellier is very familiar with and has translated through most of his fifteen years of career as a translator.

*c. Translating the prose*

Considering Aliette de Bodard is a translingual author—an author who writes “in more than one language or at least in a language other than their primary one” (Kellman 2000: 14)—it is possible that her prose is influenced by her native language. In an Ask Me Anything session conducted on Reddit ([https://www.reddit.com/r/Fantasy/comments/3k43pj/hi\\_reddit\\_im\\_fantasy\\_and\\_sf\\_novelist\\_aliette\\_de/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Fantasy/comments/3k43pj/hi_reddit_im_fantasy_and_sf_novelist_aliette_de/)), she does mention being very frustrated when writing *The House of Shattered Wings* as some easy French concepts she wanted to use did not have an English

translation. She also answers a question on how her written style differs in English and in French by saying:

I've been told English writing style has a lot of hallmarks of French (long sentences, a fondness for semicolons and a slightly different baseline rhythmic approach), but I'm not sure if it's just me as a writer or if it's a language thing...

While I as well cannot be sure whether this is due to her being French or is simply part of her writing style, I did notice certain phrasings and sentences that seemed to have been written with a French expression in mind—to the point they almost seemed more natural to me in the French translation than in the source text.

Source text	Target text	Back translation
and Philippe, on the bottom tier of the bottom tiers	et Philippe, dernier des derniers	and Philippe, last of the last
as if I only had to turn a corner	comme si je n'avais qu'à tourner au coin de la rue	as if I only had to turn at a corner of the street
he should be adult enough	aurait dû être suffisamment adulte	should have been adult enough
Philippe could go hang	Philippe pouvait aller se faire pendre	Philippe could go get hanged

**(Table 7:** several examples of expressions in the source text that translate almost literally into idiomatic expressions in the target text)

As such, I asked Mr Chastellière if he had also gotten the same impression during the translation.

**Emmanuel Chastellière:** “In hindsight, maybe? Back then, I didn’t think about asking the author about it, but it seems perfectly conceivable that it was intentional on her part.”<sup>13</sup>

*d. Consideration of the target audience during the translation process*

As one of the peculiarities of cultural back-translation is the target audience being familiar with the setting in a way the source audience is not, it seemed crucial to me to know whether this had been on the translator’s mind or not during the translation process and had had any influence; if Mr Chastellière had done or considered doing any changes to the content in regards to the setting, or made translation choices he would not have made had the story not taken place in France. However, it seems not to have played a part in his translation process.

**E.C:** “No, I don’t think so. In fact, even a French audience doesn’t know Paris’ topography that well, let alone the history of Vietnamese immigration in our country, so I didn’t feel like changing anything about that. My translation choices haven’t been influenced that way either, because I really tackled the novel like a fantasy text in another universe even if obviously, Notre-Dame or La Seine are highly evocative no matter the readership.”

*e. Details on specific examples*

I asked here questions about specific aspects of the translation I noticed: notably the modification of some location descriptions in the first chapter, as I wondered if this modification might be part of a conscious or unconscious redomestication process, and the addition of changes in pronouns of address ‘tu’ [familiar you] and ‘vous’ [formal you] between characters. For example, this exchange in Chapter 10 contains a noticeable difference between the source and target text in that regard:

Source text	Target text	Back translation
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<sup>13</sup> Interview originally in French; translated by me.

<p>“Of course he has. He killed you!” If she’d hoped to provoke some reaction [...]</p>	<p>- Evidemment. Il t’a tué !</p> <p><b>Le tutoiement lui était revenu spontanément, mais si elle avait espéré provoquer une réaction [...]</b></p>	<p>“Of course. He killed [you]!”</p> <p><b>The “tutoiement” [informal ‘you’] had come back to her spontaneously, but if she’d hoped to provoke a reaction [...]</b></p>
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(**Table 8:** comparison between source text and target text showcasing an addition in the target text. Emphasis is mine)

For the location descriptions, including the removal of the mention of the “Périphérique” (see Table 6), there did not seem to be any specific intent behind Mr Chastellière’s translation choices. For the change in pronouns of address, however—something that does not appear in English due to the use of ‘you’ in both formal and informal situations—Mr Chastellière consulted the author.

**E.C:** “About the “tutoiement/vouvoiement”, that was one of my questions to Aliette de Bodard. It is the kind of thing that doesn't exist in English, obviously. But here, in French, after a certain amount of time, after a certain level of intimacy, it seems “logical”, or at least conceivable to go from “vous” to “tu”. Determining this moment couldn’t belong to me alone since I was only the translator.”

*f. The loss of foreignness in the translation*

As mentioned above, the repatriation of place names and other French CSEs produces what I consider to be a ‘banalising’ effect in the target text. As such, I asked Mr Chastellière if he found it problematic to lose the foreignness of the text, or if he felt it more instinctive to remove that aspect from the translation. He admitted not being sure that *The House of Shattered Wings’* post-apocalypse Paris, or any other version, would actually be so familiar to the target audience unless they were Parisians. “But,” he added,

“it is [familiar] for the characters living in it. From this angle, it didn’t cause me any particular problem!”

*g. Potential “gain in translation”*

Usually, a sense of loss accompanies a comparison of the target text with its source due to the cultural and grammatical differences between the source and target language (Gandin 2009, 77). However, since in cultural back-translation, the source text is already considered to be a sort of—at least mental—translation with foreign CSEs and the back translation repatriates these CSEs to their original setting, cultural loss is not at play. Additionally, in a novel like *The House of Shattered Wings* which might be influenced by the author’s native language, which is that of the target text, grammatical loss might also be diminished. As such, I wanted to know if, as the translator, he thought there was something that had been ‘gained in translation’.

**E.C:** “It’s a good question! And it reflects very well the peculiar case that is this translation. Well, it would be, surely, pretentious of me to think so! I’d like to think that reading this novel in French could add a special layer to it, if not a bonus... But, in general, the most complete version remains the original work, at least the version which is the closest, by definition, to the author’s vision.”

*h. Conclusion*

Overall, Emmanuel Chastellière does not seem to have been particularly influenced by the language and target audience now matching the setting in his translation, due to the fantasy elements and the fact that it is centred around Paris, that not every French person is completely familiar with. Usual strategies in cultural back-translations such as removal of explanations on target culture items, specification of generalised terms, or addition of target language expressions that do not appear in the source text, do not seem to have been part of his process. He did not intend to recreate either the foreignising effect the source text might have had on the source reader. However, he did agree that there might have been a special layer added when reading the novel in French, which leads me to think that the reconciliation of setting and language in this case was not completely irrelevant. I do believe, nevertheless, that this reconciliation did not

require specific changes during the translation because of *The House of Shattered Wings* as a source text.

### **Reflections**

#### *a. The House of Shattered Wings as a diacultural creation*

When describing the creation process of the novel, de Bodard explains that she wanted the novel to take place in Paris as she wanted ‘familiar streets, the ones [she’d] grown up with all [her] life’ (<http://www.fantasticaficcion.com/index.php/guest-post-writing-the-novel-of-my-heart/>) and mentions doing research on both the time period of the novel and Paris itself. ‘There I was fortunate,’ de Bodard says in a guest post (<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/08/20/the-big-idea-aliette-de-bodard-2/>), ‘because I could do most of my research by walking and going to local libraries.’ As such, while *House of Shattered Wings* takes place in the ruins of a supernatural Paris, its setting is based on and even rooted in the actual city. From De Bodard’s desire for familiarity in her novel and her research, it seems she did not necessarily set her secondary world in Paris because of a need for remoteness to facilitate suspension of disbelief, nor to create a foreignising effect on her readers. This, to me, sets her work apart from the works analysed by cultural back-translation scholars so far. Unlike other cultural back-translations I read about, *The House of Shattered Wings* barely contains any explanation or generalisation to facilitate the reader’s understanding of Paris—which might be why I found little of the redomestication strategies described by cultural back-translation scholars. Explanations, in fact, are more frequent for elements that are not French CSEs. As the novel depicts a Vietnamese character, Vietnamese CSEs and history in relation to France are given explanations and generalisations to facilitate the reader’s understanding; and instances of fictional multilingualism—neologisms, the magical system and differences between regular Paris and *The House of Shattered Wings’s* Paris—are also given explanations. Due to the inherent foreignness and fictional multilingualism of fantasy, the source readers might not have minded the foreign French setting introduced to them without explanations any less than they would have minded a fully invented secondary world. I believe the effect is different for a French reader. From my own reading of the novel and from De Bodard’s frequent mention of Paris as a familiar location, it is my impression that the French CSEs, and especially the names of the various

locations of *The House of Shattered Wings*' Paris, were not included to create a foreignising effect on the English-speaking reader, but to create a domestic feeling for the author herself. As a non-Parisian French reader, the setting of *House of Shattered Wings* may not have felt completely familiar but it certainly felt 'domestic' and recognisable. In a way, French readers of the source text are 'in the know' and experience the familiarity De Bodard created for herself. What this means for the French translation is that there was no need for notable changes in the text for it to fit the new setting. Additionally, as mentioned several times by Mr Chastellière, the historical and fantasy setting meant some expected unfamiliarity and divergences from reality for the target audience. The process of cultural back translation and regular fantasy translation, in that case, appeared to be quite similar.

*b. Potential*

It might have been possible to translate *House of Shattered Wings* in a way that applies processes re-domestication and cultural restoration to the target text, much in the way of *Final Fantasy XII* or *Like Wind on a Dry Branch*'s English translations by for example adding period specific expressions to the prose or the dialogues. Considering some of the characters are immortal beings who have existed for a long time, some embodying the nostalgia for the Belle Époque that haunts the setting (<https://www.scifinow.co.uk/interviews/aliette-de-bodard-on-blending-sf-and-fantasy-in-paris/>), it might have also been possible to tailor their speeches to their respective personalities and how 'modern' these immortals act. This, however, might have required some extrapolation or discussions with the author that might not have been possible within the timeframe or requirements of the translation. It might also have been confusing for the target reader and thus unwelcome. The fact that *The House of Shattered Wings* is a fantasy novel set in an alternative Paris opens for more possibilities when it comes to this process of 'redomestication' than mere cultural retribution. Any deviation from reality in a secondary world will cause deviations from reality in the 'source culture' of the fictional multilingualism of the novel. This is probably one of the reasons why efforts to adapt the text to its setting when it comes to fantasy seem, for now, uncommon: the return to the base culture would only be partial; part of it would have to be invented. The invention might not always make for a better or more pleasant book to

read for a target audience—it could easily feel parodic or put the focus on the prose over the rest of the work’s contents. In many cases, a regular translation might simply be more suitable or less of a risk. It might also be, as the two instances of ‘fantasy redomestication’ that I could find were respectively a webcomic and a video game, that written prose is not the best medium for this sort of endeavour and it is better suited to pictorial or interactive storytelling. That being said, it might also be that, as far as I could find, no translator had had the opportunity to try yet; and that the creative potential of fantasy cultural back-translation has yet to be explored.



## Conclusions

While it might be counterintuitive to look for a cultural return in the fantasy genre, given its highly inventive and supernatural component, fantasy cultural back-translations do exist and it is possible to analyse them as such reusing concepts mentioned or theorised by cultural back-translation scholars. They remain uncommon so far, and the lack of previous research and paratext on them makes it difficult to find much data on them. The nebulosity of cultural back-translation as a research topic, with its scattered terminology, disagreements, varied findings and lack of—or impossibility of—general theory also adds to the challenge. It is not easy to know what to look for in a fantasy cultural back-translation, and to determine if there is even something to look for. Translator's insight is much valued. When it comes to the textual manifestation of the cultural return, fantasy cultural back-translations do not seem to lean into it, or need to lean into it often so far—or not notably so. It does not mean it is entirely forgotten. Cultural back-translation is a phenomenon, and the cultural return and 'banalisation' of the CSEs are a byproduct of this phenomenon, created by the new target audience. Even if a translator is not influenced by the fact that the language, audience and culture now fit that of the work, CSEs that were foreign in the source text will inevitably become familiar in the target text. On the other hand, strategies such as redomestication or additional paratext are a conscious process, a translator's choice. This becomes more apparent in fantasy cultural back-translations, where as stated before, such a choice is not usually made; yet CSEs will bear at least some familiarity to the target audience regardless. No matter the differences between the world depicted in a fantasy [TERM] and the world as we know it, its back translation into its 'Place to go back to', to reuse the expression in the Introduction, will always be different from a regular translation in that regard. Unlike non-speculative fiction, there seems to be less of a tendency—or less of a need—for the translation to take note of that difference and exploit it.

## *Limitations*

This dissertation unfortunately contains many limitations when it comes to its research. There remain many papers on cultural back-translation that I have not been able to read, let alone find. The use of machine translation for many articles also restrains

my understanding of each contribution to the topic. When it comes to the fantasy aspect of my dissertation, it could have been beneficial to develop further on the idea of fantasy as translation, using examples from [TERM] being analysed as translations and reusing the methodology of these analyses to apply them to various fantasy works. There also might be more fantasy cultural back translations with paratext or reviews to analyse; I have simply not been able to find them. In the same vein, my case study was limited to a single work, with only an interview with the translator possible. An interview with the author would have provided more data, and an in-depth comparison of the source and target text might have also provided more insight on the inherent changes that the process of cultural back translation imply, even if the translator did not make these changes with the intent of redomesticating the text. Lastly, much of my analysis is initially based on my own impressions of the source and target text. Due to my own subjectivity, a lot of my findings when it comes to my specific case study are closer to hypotheses than hard facts.

#### *Future Research*

Cultural back-translation is a topic in need of more research and attention. There is still a lot to explore about it. It might not be possible to create a general theory or gather the pre-existing research under a single set of terms and understandings of the phenomenon; but it might be possible, going forward, to reduce this scatteredness among scholars with literature reviews gathering all previous research at the same place. Research on self-cultural back-translation or cultural back-translation applied to minority languages is still very scarce, and research on other subgenres of speculative fiction such as science-fiction, with its technical and technological aspect, is still non-existent. More analyses on the cultural back translations of exophonic authors like Aliette de Bodard would also be of interest; just as would be discussions on the redefinition of ‘source’ and ‘target’ forced by (cultural) back-translations. Fantasy cultural back-translations themselves remain a topic this dissertation has barely scratched. There is much left to research on their own peculiar cultural return, especially when it comes to their fantastical elements; on what might make the difference between a fantasy [TERM] that might benefit from redomestication and one which doesn’t; on what might happen to the cultural back-translation of a fantasy [TERM] inspired by several recognisable cultures— and thus the concept of several cultural back translations and if they can be conceived as

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such—; or on the creative potential of fantasy cultural back-translations and with it the idea of an absolute “gain in translation”.

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Appendix:

**Appendix I:**

*a. Interview with Emmanuel Chastellière (French)*

**Comment votre collaboration avec Aliette de Bodard s'est-elle passée ? Le fait qu'elle soit française a-t-il rendu les choses différentes par rapport à la traduction d'un romancier anglais ou américain ? Avait-elle déjà des idées sur comment certains noms ou certains passages devaient être traduits ? (J'ai par exemple remarqué que Selene est traduit en "Séléné", alors que j'avais imaginé le nom français être "Sélène")**

Mes échanges avec Aliette de Bodard se sont très bien passés ! J'avais par le passé déjà eu l'occasion de converser avec certains auteurs, mais c'est bien sûr encore plus rapide de pouvoir le faire en français et au même fuseau horaire (petit plus parfois non négligeable). Même si je n'ai jamais eu à attendre une réponse pendant des jours. Je ne me souviens pas qu'Aliette ait eu des idées précises ou des termes qu'elle souhaitait à tout prix voir utilisés. Dans le cas de "Selene", j'en suis resté à la traduction du nom grec, donc j'ai opté pour Séléné. Sélène me semblait trop proche de l'adjectif.

**Les éléments de fantasy du roman vous ont-ils posé des difficultés à traduire ?**

Non, pas vraiment, car c'est une littérature que je connais depuis longtemps. Et elle concerne l'essentiel de mon travail de traducteur depuis quinze ans maintenant, même si j'ai aussi traduit des auteurs comme Nicholas Sparks par exemple, qui n'exercent pas du tout leurs talents dans ce registre.

**Est-ce qu'il y a des passages qui vous ont paru presque avoir été écrits avec une expression française à l'esprit ? Je pense par exemple à "as if I only had to turn a corner" dans le chapitre 4 ou "Philippe could go hang" dans le chapitre 14 qui me paraissent presque plus naturel en français ("comme si je n'avais qu'à tourner au coin de la rue" et "Philippe pouvait aller se faire pendre").**

Avec le recul, peut-être ? Sur le moment, je n'ai pas pensé à poser la question à l'autrice, mais ça me paraît tout à fait envisageable que ce soit une volonté de sa part.

**Est-ce que le fait que vous traduisiez pour un public français alors que l'histoire se passe en France a influencé votre traduction ? Par exemple, y a-t-il des éléments que vous avez par exemple ajoutés ou retirés à cause du nouveau lectorat ? Des éléments de culture ou langue française qui n'auraient pas pu être dans le livre du fait qu'il soit écrit en anglais pour une audience anglophone, mais que vous avez eu l'impression de pouvoir ajouter dans la traduction du fait que le public correspondait maintenant au lieu où se déroule l'histoire ? Ou des choix de traduction que vous n'auriez pas faits si l'histoire ne se déroulait pas en France, avec des personnages français ?**

Non, je ne crois pas. En fait, même le public français ne connaît pas forcément si bien que ça la topographie de Paris, et je ne parle même pas de l'histoire de l'immigration vietnamienne dans notre pays, alors je ne me sentais pas de changer quoi que ce soit sur ce plan. Mes choix de traduction eux non plus n'ont pas été influencés en la matière, car j'ai vraiment pris le roman comme un texte de fantasy dans un autre univers même si évidemment, Notre-Dame ou la Seine sont des éléments hautement évocateurs quel que soit le lectorat.

**J'ai remarqué que vous aviez ajouté certains éléments qui ne sont pas dans le texte source : par exemple, dans le chapitre 10, Madeleine passe du vouvoiement au tutoiement pour Elphon et "Le tutoiement lui était revenu spontanément" a été rajouté ; et à l'inverse passe du tutoiement au vouvoiement avec Asmodée dans le chapitre 19. Mais dans le chapitre 1, il y a deux éléments de description qui disparaissent : "Crossing over the rubble in the center—what had once been the accessories department" devient "traversant les décombres de l'ancien département des accessoires" (le centre disparaît) et "The devastated countryside beyond the wastelands of the Péripherique" devient "dans la campagne dévastée qui les entourait au-delà des terres en friche du mur d'enceinte" - ici, c'est le périphérique qui disparaît, remplacé par le mur d'enceinte. Est-ce qu'il y a une raison particulière derrière ces choix de traduction ?**



Alors, concernant le tutoiement/vouvoiement, ce fut l'un de mes questionnements adressés à Aliette de Bodard. C'est le genre de sujets qui n'existent pas en anglais, évidemment. Mais là, en français, au bout d'un certain temps, d'une certaine intimité, il paraît "logique" ou du moins envisageable de passer du "vous" au "tu". Déterminer ce moment ne pouvait pas m'appartenir seul puisque je n'étais que traducteur.

Pour le centre qui disparaît, je me suis simplement dit qu'on traversait rarement une pièce par le côté (ou alors en précisant qu'on longe un mur, etc.), donc qu'on coupait forcément par le centre. Je ne saurai en revanche répondre pour la mention du Périphérique. Faire disparaître le terme me semble inutile dans le cas présent. Mon travail sur le texte remonte à trop longtemps maintenant malheureusement pour que je puisse me souvenir de ce cas précis.

**Pour un public anglo-américain, Paris est un lieu étranger, mais pour un public français (et surtout parisien), les endroits décrits dans le roman sont plutôt familiers. J'ai remarqué que la plupart des noms de lieux possèdent une majuscule en anglais mais pas en français - ce qui retire leur marque en tant que lieu "étranger" pour le lecteur et banalise/familiarise l'endroit. Est-ce que ça vous a posé un problème de banaliser ce qui était étranger/inconnu/"Other" pour le public anglophone (et donc de ne pas conserver cet aspect dans la traduction), ou est-ce qu'il vous a paru au contraire plus instinctif de ne pas essayer de conserver cet aspect ?**

Comme je le mentionnais un peu plus haut, à moins effectivement d'être Parisien, ce qui concerne certes beaucoup de monde, je ne suis pas certain que ce Paris post-apo, ou n'importe quelle autre version, se révèle si familier. Mais il l'est pour les personnages qui le peuplent. Sous cet angle, cela ne m'a pas posé de problème particulier !

**On parle souvent de "lost/loss in translation", ce que l'on perd linguistiquement et culturellement dans une traduction ; mais étant donné que dans votre traduction, la langue correspond maintenant au contexte de l'histoire, pensez-vous qu'à l'inverse, cette traduction a "gagné" quelque chose ?**

C'est une bonne question !

Et qui reflète bien le cas très particulier de cette traduction. Bon, ce serait, sans doute, prétentieux de ma part de le penser ! J'aimerais croire que lire ce roman-là en français pourrait lui apporter une patine particulière si ce n'est un plus... Mais, en général, l'œuvre la plus aboutie demeure la version originale, du moins la plus proche par définition de la vision de l'auteur/autrice.

*b. Interview translation*

**How did your collaboration with Aliette de Bodard go? Did the fact that she was French change anything compared to the translation of an English or American novelist? Did she already have any ideas on how certain names or excerpt should be translated? (I for example noticed that Selene was translated as “Séléné” while I had imagined the French name to be “Sélène”.)**

My exchanges with Aliette de Bodard went well! I had already had the chance to chat with some authors, but it's of course even faster to be able to do it in French and in the same timezone (a non-negligeable bonus). Even if I never had to wait for an answer for days. I don't remember Aliette having specific ideas or terms she absolutely wished to see used. In the case of “Selene,” I kept to the translation of the Greek name, so I picked Séléné. Selène seemed to me to be too close to the adjective.

**Were the fantasy elements of the novel difficult to translate?**

No, not really, as it's a literature I've known for a long time. And it's also been most of my work as a translator for fifteen years now, even if I also translated authors like Nicholas Sparks, for example, who don't use their talents in that same genre at all.

**Were there any excerpt that seemed to you to have almost been written with a French expression in mind? I'm thinking for example about “as if I only had to turn a corner” in Chapter 4 or “Philippe could go hang” in Chapter 14 which feel to almost more natural in**

**French to me (“comme si je n’avais qu’à tourner au coin de la rue” [as if I only had to turn at a corner of the street] and “Philippe pouvait aller se faire pendre” [Philippe could go get hanged]).**

In hindsight, maybe? Back then, I didn’t think about asking the author about it, but it seems perfectly conceivable that it was intentional on her part.

**Did the fact that you were translating for a French audience while the story takes place in France influenced your translation? For instance, are there elements that you for instance added or removed because of the new readership? Cultural or French linguistic elements that could not have been in the book because it was written in English for an English-speaking audience, but that you felt you could add in the translation now that the audience matched the setting of the story? Or translation choices you would not have made if the story was not taking place in France, with French characters?**

No, I don’t think so. In fact, even a French audience doesn’t know Paris’ topography that well, let alone the history of Vietnamese immigration in our country, so I didn’t feel like changing anything about that. My translation choices haven’t been influenced that way either, because I really tackled the novel like a fantasy text in another universe even if obviously, Notre-Dame or La Seine are highly evocative no matter the readership.

**I noticed that you for added certain elements that are not in the source text: for example, in Chapter 10, Madeleine goes from the “vouvoiement” to the “tutoiement” [from formal to informal “you” pronouns] for Elphon and “Le tutoiement lui était revenu spontanément” [The “tutoiement” had come back to her spontaneously] was added; on the other hand, she goes from the “tutoiement” to the “vouvoiement” with Asmodée in Chapter 19. But in Chapter 1 there are two descriptive elements that disappear: “Crossing over the rubble in the center—what had once been the accessories department” becomes “traversant les décombres de l’ancien département des accessoires” [crossing the ruins of the old accessories department] (the centre disappears) and “The devastated countryside beyond the wastelands of the Péripherique” becomes “dans la campagne dévastée qui les entourait au-delà des terres en friche du mur d’enceinte” [in the**

**devastated countryside that surrounded the uncultivated lands outside the outer wall] - here, it is the Périphérique which disappears, replaced by the outer wall. Was there a particular reason behind these translation choices?**

About the “tutoiement/vouvoiement”, that was one of my questions to Aliette de Bodard. It is the kind of thing that doesn't exist in English, obviously. But here, in French, after a certain amount of time, after a certain level of intimacy, it seems “logical”, or at least conceivable to go from “vous” to “tu”. Determining this moment couldn't belong to me alone since I was only the translator.”

For the centre that disappears, I simply thought that you rarely cross a room by the side (or while specifying that you're walking along the wall, etc.), so you had to cut through the centre. I wouldn't be able to answer for the mention of the Périphérique. Making the term disappear seems useless in that case. My work on the text goes back too long now, and unfortunately I can't remember this specific case.

**For an Anglo-American audience, Paris is a foreign place, but for a French public (and especially Parisian), the places described in the novel are rather familiar. I noticed that most of the location names are capitalised in English but not in French - which removes their mark as a “foreign” location for the reader, and banalises the place. Was it a problem for you to banalise what was foreign/unknown/“Other” for the English-speaking public (and thus not to keep this aspect in the translation), or did it actually seem to you more instinctive not to try and maintain that aspect?**

As I was talking about earlier, unless you're Parisian, which sure can be applied to many people, I'm not sure that this post-apocalyptic Paris, or any other version, would turn out to be so familiar. But it is for the characters living in it. From this angle, it didn't cause me any particular problem!”

**We often talk about “lost/loss in translation”, what we lose linguistically and culturally in a translation; but considering that in your translation, the language now matches the context of the story, do you think on the contrary, this translation “gained” something?**

“It’s a good question! And it reflects very well the peculiar case that is this translation. Well, it would be, surely, pretentious of me to think so! I’d like to think that reading this novel in French could add a special layer to it, if not a bonus... But, in general, the most complete version remains the original work, at least the version which is the closest, by definition, to the author’s vision.”

***Appendix II:***

Link to the spreadsheet I worked with to catalogue the literature on cultural back-translation and keep track of the terminology and definitions used by scholars. It remains a work in progress but gives a good overview of existing research on the topic:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1fUVIfq0FEUmgO8t82t4Kol0D04TrQJHL/edit?usp=sharing&oid=100647659802728778481&rtpof=true&sd=true>