

A Translation and Critical Analysis of an Excerpt from Soth Polin's *L'Anarchiste* [The Anarchist]

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Abstract

This dissertation is a translation and critical analysis of an excerpt from *L'Anarchiste* (1980/2011), a Francophone semi-autobiographical novel by Cambodian author Soth Polin (b. 1943). The selected extract looks back to Phnom Penh in 1974, one year before the Khmer Rouge took power, as the narrator grieves the loss of his close friend in a government-ordered assassination and reflects on the forces at play in the collapse of the Khmer Republic, lamenting his own role in bringing it to its knees. As one of the few surviving Francophone Cambodian novels by one of the few surviving Cambodian authors born before the Khmer Rouge era, it is a rare and important book, not only offering insights on the period never before heard in English but also constituting a powerful and accomplished work of literature in its own right.

As the product of a bilingual postcolonial migrant to France with a life-long passion for French literature and philosophy, the book exists at the crossroads of the two cultures, blending elements from both as Soth paints a picture of the home he left behind for metropolitan French readers, a form of self-translation in itself. The ethical translation of the resulting hybridity – linguistic, cultural and intertextual – takes centre stage in the critical analysis, which includes discussions on foreignising strategies, the treatment of culturally specific items (CSIs) from both cultures and the handling of intertexts in light of the book's unique postcolonial context, engaging critically with relevant scholarly literature on these topics. The preservation of French language, CSIs and intertexts alongside those from Cambodia is demonstrated to be of particular importance in retaining a degree of historicity, replicating the book's desired impact for English-speaking readers today, reflecting the author's identity and honouring his courageous resistance against all that the Khmer Rouge stood for.

Declaration

This dissertation is my own original work unless referenced to the contrary. No portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Dedication

*For Connagh and Petra.
I couldn't have done it without you.*

Note on the Text

The source text (ST), *L'Anarchiste*, is a book of two halves, each consisting of a discrete novella. The ST extract begins forty-two pages into the book's second half, so a brief note on the context established in the preceding pages is provided here to assist readers.

In the opening pages of the novella, we join the protagonist Virak at work in Paris on 23 January 1979, driving his taxi with a young English woman as his passenger. Distracted by a terrifying vision of his dead father, he loses control of the car on the banks of the Seine and it crashes through the guardrail separating the road from the river, hanging suspended over the water. His passenger is thrown from the car and dies instantly. As Virak's life flashes before his eyes, he recounts key events from it in a monologue addressed directly to her, which makes up the rest of the novella.

Part I
Translation

Translation with Source Text

Source Text

L'Anarchiste

[...]

Maintenant venons-en à l'année 1974. Je me trouvais en plein milieu de l'arène politique cambodgienne. C'était le moment de la République en déconfiture. Malgré ses suffocants effluves : cadavres, corruptions, trahisons, je m'enivrais de ma propre personne et de ma propre illusion. Je me regardais agir comme un grand patriote, nationaliste, servant l'intérêt supérieur de son pays. Je persistais à croire que l'existence de Phnom Penh était immuable, éternelle, que tout était là pour durer, malgré les ravages de la guerre, malgré les souffrances.

Et pourtant, je sentais bien qu'il y avait longtemps déjà que le pays khmer était condamné. Depuis quatre ans que le Cambodge était entré en guerre, ce pays n'avait pas arrêté de se désintégrer. Le gouvernement de Phnom Penh, que j'avais toujours soutenu contre vents et marées, s'empêtrait de plus en plus dans d'inextricables difficultés politiques et financières. Le maréchal-

Target Text

The Anarchist

[...]

1 Now we come to 1974. By then I was right in the middle of
2 Cambodia's political arena. The Republic was at the point of total
3 collapse. Despite its suffocating effluvium, the stench of corpses,
4 corruption and betrayal, I was intoxicated by my own self-image
5 and my own delusions. I saw myself as a grand patriot, a
6 nationalist, serving the best interests of his country. I still
7 believed Phnom Penh's existence was unshakeable, eternal, that
8 it was there to stay, despite the ravages of war, despite the
9 suffering.

10 And yet I was convinced the Khmer country was damned and
11 had been for a long time. In the four years since the war began,
12 Cambodia hadn't stopped falling apart. The Phnom Penh
13 government I had supported through hell and high water was
14 getting more and more entangled in inextricable political and
15 financial difficulties. What's more, the marshal-president who

président, celui qui avait viré Sihanouk, n'était plus qu'une lavette, un infirme hémiparétique préoccupé seulement de faire encore des enfants, pour prouver sa virilité au pays, seul moyen, croyait-il, de redresser la situation. Il était entouré d'un essaim de généraux profiteurs, des traîtres qui guignaient vers l'autre côté, vers le prince Sihanouk. Ces petits seigneurs de guerre, ces satrapes, ces potentats ou bien pillaient les honnêtes habitants ou bien refilaient armes et munitions Vietcong contre des dollars. Leurs soldats rançonnaient les paysans dans les campagnes et jouaient aux terroristes en ville, juchés sur des motos pétaradantes, armés de M-16 et de grenades. Tous les gens dévoués au maréchal-président dès la première heure, et fidèles à la République, furent massacrés d'une façon ou d'une autre. Comme directeur d'une chaîne de journaux à Phnom Penh, j'étais assez bien placé pour en savoir quelque chose : des députés nationalistes avaient trouvé la mort dans d'étranges accidents de voiture ; des officiers du 2^e Bureau avaient été déchiquetés à la bombe pour avoir poussé trop consciencieusement leurs enquêtes ; des instituteurs de province étaient retrouvés pendus dans leur obscure cellule parce qu'ils en savaient trop sur des

16 had ousted Sihanouk was now nothing but a wet rag, a
17 hemiplegic invalid concerned solely with producing more
18 children to prove his virility to the public – the only way to rectify
19 the situation, in his eyes. He was surrounded by a swarm of
20 bloodsucking generals, traitorous satraps who leaned towards
21 the other side, towards Prince Sihanouk. When these would-be
22 warlords weren't pillaging the homes of respectable citizens,
23 they were offloading Vietcong arms and ammunition in exchange
24 for US dollars. The despots' soldiers bled farmers dry in the
25 provinces and played at being terrorists in the city, cruising
26 around on put-putting *motos* armed with M16s and grenades.
27 Every one of the marshal-president's faithful supporters who had
28 stayed loyal to the Republic from day one was slaughtered in one
29 way or another. As the director of a newspaper chain in Phnom
30 Penh, I was well placed to stay au courant with it all: the
31 nationalist deputies turning up dead in mysterious car accidents;
32 the officers of the local Deuxième Bureau blown to pieces for
33 pursuing their investigations too diligently; the provincial
34 primary school teachers who knew too much about smuggling
35 deals found hanging in their dingy cells...

affaires de trafic... Et moi donc ! J'avais failli aussi repartir pour notre « monde d'origine » à la suite du plasticage de ma maison, travail des hommes de main du chef de l'armée lui-même. Les bons citoyens ne pouvaient plus aimer impunément leur pays.

Seules ces bêtes répugnantes qui s'étaient engraisées du sang de la nation, trafiquants et contrebandiers, avaient le vent en poupe, prospérant sur du fumier, protégées par les « huiles » de l'état-major.

Les ravages étaient tout aussi terribles au sein même de l'armée. L'état-major général des Fank¹ extorquait régulièrement de l'argent à ses unités combattantes, obligeant ainsi leur commandant à tricher sur les effectifs. Dans ce système tout se payait : les grades, les numéros d'unité, et même les munitions. Il n'était pas surprenant de voir des démarcheurs, des courtiers, les maquereaux, accéder aux honneurs militaires, se pavaner avec leur uniforme flambant neuf, seulement parce qu'ils savaient rapporter du fric à leur patron. Alors que les vrais officiers se trouvaient toujours en retard d'une promotion, se faisaient

¹ Forces armées nationales khmères.

36 *Et moi donc!* I had almost joined them in returning to our
 37 'homeland' myself when my house was bombed – the work of
 38 the henchmen of the head of the army himself. Good citizens
 39 could no longer love their country with impunity.
 40 The only ones thriving were the repulsive brutes growing fat
 41 on the nation's spilled blood, traffickers and smugglers
 42 luxuriating in the mire under the protection of the general staff's
 43 top dogs.
 44 The devastation was just as dire at the heart of the army itself.
 45 The general staff of FANK¹ regularly extorted money from its
 46 combat units, forcing their commander to fudge the numbers.
 47 Everything was paid for via this system: ranks, unit numbers,
 48 even ammunition. It wasn't out of the ordinary to see salesmen,
 49 insurance brokers or even pimps parading around in crisp new
 50 uniforms after receiving military honours for nothing more than
 51 lining their boss's pockets. Meanwhile, legitimate officers were
 52 passed over for promotion at every opportunity and forced to
 53 fade into the background, keeping a low profile in the street,

¹ Forces armées nationales khmères (Khmer National Armed Forces).

discrets dans les rues, ne portant pas leurs galons, cherchant à se faire oublier. Mais il y avait plus grave encore, les unités d'élite comme les parachutistes, la 7^e brigade d'infanterie... avaient été brimées, démantelées par les plus hautes instances de la République même. On voulait se prémunir contre les coups d'État.

Pendant tout ce temps, le peuple dépérissait, se mourait. C'étaient les heures sombres de l'avilissement. Un grand nombre de fonctionnaires qui ne gagnaient pas l'équivalent de cent francs par mois s'adonnaient à des expédients. Des milliers de jeunes femmes de familles nobles se prostituaient pour faire manger les leurs... et peut-être y prenaient-elles aussi plaisir, les garces. Entre nous, j'ai remarqué que les femmes « de la haute » dégringolaient vertigineusement dans la luxure, beaucoup plus vite que les filles humbles... Mais enfin, il n'y a pas de quoi nous étonner... C'est dans leur nature de toute façon ! Dans le même temps, les diplômés étaient vendus aux étudiants par des présidents de jury qu'on disait « respectables ». Jamais les Khmers n'avaient autant

54 leaving their stripes at home. But that wasn't the worst of it... By
55 this time, elite units like the parachutists and the 7th infantry
56 brigade had been bullied out of existence, dismantled by the
57 highest authorities of the Republic itself. They couldn't risk a
58 coup d'état.

59
60 Throughout that time, the people were wasting away and
61 dying. These were the dark days of degradation. A great many
62 officials with monthly incomes equating to less than 100 francs²
63 turned to backdoor dealings. Thousands of young women from
64 noble families prostituted themselves to put food on the table...
65 and probably took pleasure in it too, *les garces*. Between us, I've
66 noticed that bourgeois women dive headfirst into lasciviousness
67 at the slightest push, much faster than girls of humble origin...
68 But there's nothing surprising about that – it's in their nature,
69 after all. At the same time, once respectable exam board
70 chairmen were selling degrees to students. Never before had the
71 Khmer people lost so much faith in themselves. The

² 100 francs was roughly equivalent to ten pounds sterling.

perdu la foi en eux-mêmes. Le délabrement de la République atteignait le seuil de l'intolérable.

Bref, le pays était mis en coupe réglée par des chefs militaires corrompus et par une aristocratie sans scrupule qui se disputaient argent et pouvoir. Et pour donner le change l'armée publiait des statistiques du nombre des ennemis tués qui gonflaient fabuleusement de jour en jour. À en croire ces statistiques, toutes les divisions viets auraient été éliminées du sol khmer. Or il n'en était rien. Et cet abruti de Sith, général à deux étoiles, chaque fois qu'il se montrait à la télévision, se vantait d'appartenir à la race des guerriers, et affirmait que les Viets, il en faisait son affaire en « les attrapant comme des grenouilles »...

Mais moi, j'étais obligé de surmonter mon dégoût, de ne pas céder à cette fascinante tentation : déballer brutalement, tout à trac, ces saletés en public, cette pourriture qui valait de l'or – du point de vue journalistique – pour renverser ce régime chancelant. J'aurais pu peut-être donner le coup de pouce, mais je savais trop bien qu'aucun régime libéral ne le remplacerait, et que ce serait l'avènement de la dictature rouge. Il y avait bien sûr

72 deterioration of the Republic was reaching an intolerable
73 crescendo.

74 In short, the country was being systematically bled dry by
75 corrupt military leaders and an unscrupulous aristocracy who
76 squabbled over money and power. And to cover it up the army
77 was publishing figures on the numbers of enemy dead that
78 swelled fantastically from one day to the next. If there had been
79 any truth to the reports, every communist Vietnamese division
80 would have been eliminated from Khmer soil. But that simply
81 wasn't the case. And every time that half-wit two-star general
82 Sith showed his face on television, he boasted of being a great
83 warrior and swore he would take care of the Vietnamese
84 communists, 'trapping them like frogs'...

85 As for me, I had to swallow my disgust and steadfastly resist
86 the all-consuming temptation to pull the rug out from under the
87 already teetering regime by suddenly, mercilessly and publicly
88 lifting the veil on their sordid dealings, exposing the rotten
89 corruption underneath, which – from a journalistic perspective –
90 would have been worth its weight in gold. I might have been able
91 to deliver the finishing blow, but I knew all too well that no

un politicien en réserve, le prince Sirik, l'un des tombeurs de Sihanouk, homme intelligent et tacticien habile ; mais celui-ci, depuis qu'il avait été évincé en 1972, ne rêvait plus que de restaurer Sihanouk et la monarchie. Or, il était impensable que Sihanouk, hébergé à Pékin, revînt sans l'escorte des communistes. Ce qui aurait été la fin de tout.

Il fallait bien ronger mon frein, tempérer l'humeur batailleuse et versatile du journaliste imbu de lui-même, distiller les vérités à petite dose. Mais mes critiques voilées, qui étaient fort bien comprises par des milliers de compatriotes, mes insinuations, exhortations n'avaient servi à rien, sinon à « glisser comme l'eau sur la tête du canard ».

Qu'est-ce que j'avais donc récolté durant quatre dernières années de guerre et de patriotisme forcené ? Oui, à part ce plasticage... et à part mes coucherries ? En tant que Cambodgien et en tant que journaliste, j'étais coincé. Comme journaliste, j'avais noté quotidiennement, avec une espèce de pédantisme,

92 liberal regime would take its place and the rise of the red
93 dictatorship would inevitably follow. Naturally, there was a
94 politician waiting in the wings: Prince Sirik, one of Sihanouk's
95 usurpers, a thinking man and deft tactician – although, since his
96 ousting in 1972, his only ambition had been to reinstate
97 Sihanouk and the monarchy. But it was inconceivable that
98 Sihanouk, holed up in Peking, would return without the
99 communists behind him. Which would have meant the end of
100 everything.

101 I had to bite my tongue, temper my bloodthirsty and
102 mercurial inclinations as a self-important journalist, drip-feed
103 readers the truth. But my veiled criticisms, my insinuations and
104 entreaties – which were very well understood by thousands of
105 my compatriots – were like water off a duck's back,
106 accomplishing nothing.

107 So what did I have to show for the preceding four years of war
108 and fervent patriotism? *Oui*, apart from a bombed house... and
109 apart from all my conquests. Throughout that time, as a
110 Cambodian and as a journalist, I was cornered. As a journalist, I
111 had reported the most insignificant, useless details every day

sinon une volupté tout occidentale, les détails les plus infimes, les plus inutiles, pour être à même de jauger la situation, d'informer consciencieusement le public. Mais en tant que patriote, j'en avais profondément souffert. Mon cœur n'avait pas manqué de se serrer à chaque coup de boulot de l'ennemi, à chaque nouvelle hécatombe, à chaque destruction provoquée par les roquettes soviétiques-122, à chaque mutilation de mon pays au profit de la vermine viet. J'éprouvais une sorte de tristesse sauvage, harcelante, de pessimisme dévorant qui m'avait lancé sur les routes désertes où de temps à autre les maquisards khmers rouges et les soldats nord-vietnamiens dressaient leurs embuscades, pour aller « couvrir » jusqu'à la première ligne les batailles les plus dangereuses, là où ce n'était pas mon rôle. Comme si je pouvais conjurer le danger national en exposant ma pauvre petite carcasse de journaliste aux balles des communistes. Comme si une multitude de *Tévodas*² invisibles et protecteurs oubliant mes turpitudes assistaient à mes actes de bravoure et étaient prêts à exaucer mes vœux. Cela m'avait servi à quoi, en fin de compte ? Personne ne m'en savait gré, pas plus mes

112 with a conceitedness and delectation verging on that of a
 113 Westerner, keeping myself in a position to judge the situation
 114 and to conscientiously inform the public. But as a patriot, it had
 115 been agonising. Without fail, my heart had clenched tighter with
 116 every enemy assault, every new massacre, every blast of the
 117 122mm Soviet rockets, every mutilation of my country for the
 118 benefit of Vietnamese vermin. I felt a sort of harrowing, reckless
 119 sadness, an all-consuming misanthropy which had driven me to
 120 deserted roads where North Vietnamese soldiers and Khmer
 121 Rouge guerrillas – or *maquisards*, as the French press called
 122 them – would set up their ambushes from time to time, all in the
 123 name of 'covering' the most dangerous battles on the front line,
 124 a place I didn't belong. As if I could ward off the danger to the
 125 nation by exposing my pitiful little journalist's carcass to the
 126 communists' bullets. As if, overlooking my transgressions, an
 127 invisible host of protective *Tévodas*³ would surround me in my
 128 noble endeavour, ready to grant my every wish. Which had
 129 helped me how exactly, at the end of the day? No one had
 130 appreciated it, no more my readers than anyone else. The whole

² Divinités du panthéon cambodgien.

³ Deities of the Cambodian pantheon.

lecteurs que les autres. L'univers entier était sinon hostile au Cambodge au profit du Nord-Vietnam, du moins honteusement indifférent. Que cette République dérisoire coulât à pic, on s'en lavait les mains... et le reste. Bien sûr, il y avait l'affluence des journalistes occidentaux à Phnom Penh, surtout parisiens, parmi les plus illustres, qui se payaient un voyage aux frais même du gouvernement républicain... auquel ils étaient « sourdement » hostiles ? Non, traîtreusement hostiles. Mais ce n'était rien de moins que des rapaces qui s'étaient abattus sur de la charogne. Les entrailles puantes du Cambodge étaient devenues leur pâture.

En revanche... ô ma petite Anglaise, ma douce amie, il faut que tu le saches : au cours de mes folles expéditions journalistiques, c'étaient mes amis qui payaient, et lourdement, de leur vie. Tu n'es donc pas ma seule victime... Notre voiture, cent fois réchappée comme par miracle des embuscades, fut mitraillée par une belle matinée ensoleillée d'avril, presque à bout portant, au détour d'un chemin, près de Oudong. Les Viets se planquaient

131 universe was, if not actively hostile towards Cambodia in aid of
 132 North Vietnam, shamefully indifferent at best. Let the pathetic
 133 Republic sink like a stone, we wash our hands of it... and the
 134 rest. Of course, there was the throng of Western journalists in
 135 Phnom Penh, mainly Parisians, among the most illustrious,
 136 whose presence was funded by the Republican government... the
 137 very same government they 'secretly' – no, treacherously –
 138 opposed. But they were no more than vultures descending on a
 139 rotting carcass. Cambodia's putrid entrails had become their
 140 lifeblood.

141

142 And yet... *O ma petite Anglaise*, my sweet friend, there's
 143 something you should know. It was my friends who paid the
 144 price for my wild journalistic expeditions – the ultimate price. So,
 145 you see, you're not my first victim... One beautiful, sunny April
 146 morning, having miraculously survived dozens of ambushes
 147 unscathed, our car was sprayed with machine-gun fire at almost
 148 point-blank range as we took a bend in the road near Oudong.

dans les feuillages d'un tamarinier. Le chauffeur, un pruneau
 d'A.K. 47 dans la colonne vertébrale, en restera paralysé toute sa
 vie ; Sem, mon ami reporter, un autre dans la nuque, laissera au
 monde une veuve charmante, avec neuf enfants. Tu te rends
 compte. Et moi, pas une éraflure. Baraka ! la baraka ! une baraka
 luciférienne. Et j'en avais honte. Mais je n'avais pas compris que
 je portais malheur à mes amis. Maintenant oui, je comprends,
 chère Anglaise. Oui, fuis-moi, que ton âme sache me fuir, je t'en
 prie... Ou plutôt non, pas encore ! Si tu vas au paradis, ça va, tout
 est réglé. Moi, je n'y monterai jamais. Ce n'est pas possible.
 Lucifer ne peut pas rentrer en grâce après son entourloupette à
 grand-papa. Mais si tu devais descendre dans les ténèbres,
 attends-moi, j'y réparerai mon erreur. Je rattraperai le temps
 perdu dans un délire de stupre, de foutre, de fornications... Je te
 baiserais, jusqu'au trognon. Je t'enculerai ignoblement jusqu'à l'os.
 Et je me délecterai de tes entrailles et de ta vermine dans les
 flammes torturées que crache Satan-le-dragon. Alors l'absurdité
 qui nous sépara sur cette terre nous unira dans le séjour infernal.
 Et merde pour Rousseau avec son « séjour éternel » et sa vertu.
 Et merde à Bouddha pour son *Nirvana*, cet étang immobile et

149 The North Vietnamese soldiers were staked out in the foliage of
 150 a tamarind tree. The driver, who took an AK-47 bullet to the
 151 spine, was paralysed for the rest of his life; Sem, my reporter
 152 friend, took one to the neck, leaving behind a charming widow
 153 and nine children. You get the picture. As for me, not a scratch.
 154 What luck! I was blessed! Blessed by Lucifer. And I was ashamed
 155 of it. But I didn't understand that I was bringing misfortune on
 156 my friends. Now I understand, *chère Anglaise*, I do. Yes, flee from
 157 me so your soul may escape me, I beg of you... or no, not yet! If
 158 you're going to heaven, *ça va*, all is as it should be. Me, I'll never
 159 get there. It isn't possible. Lucifer can never be restored to grace
 160 after the dirty trick he played on Grandpa. But if you have to
 161 descend into the darkness, wait for me, and there I'll put right
 162 my mistake. I'll make up for lost time in a frenzy of debauchery,
 163 of come, of fornication... I'll fuck you, to the core. I'll sodomise
 164 you, disgracefully, to the bone. And I'll feast on your entrails and
 165 your worms in the excruciating flames streaming from the mouth
 166 of Satan the dragon. Thus the absurdity that separated us on
 167 earth shall unite us in the infernal abode. And to hell with
 168 Rousseau with his 'eternal abode' and his virtue. And to hell with

sans ride de l'être et du non-être. Foutaise que tout cela. Et vive Mao Tsé-toung ! « Grand maître, grand timonier, grand commandant en chef, président Mao, vous êtes le soleil rouge de notre cœur. » Et vive les Khmers rouges avec leurs cocktails de sang.

Mais, ma petite amie, il ne faut pas que je me laisse aller, que je me berce d'illusions. Comment pourrais-tu descendre en enfer, toi ? Tu es si fine et si belle, ta chevelure est si blonde, tes yeux sont si bleus, tu as une peau laiteuse et nacré, tu as des jambes fuselées... O ! je ne le souhaite pas. Lucifer ne voudrait pas de toi. Parce que même ta crotte doit être bonne, tout autant qu'un radis.

Tu penses sûrement que je me crois spirituel, que je joue le dégoûté avec ces journalistes dont je t'ai parlé, connard que je suis. Je traite mes collègues occidentaux de vautours qui se repaissent de la charogne. Mais moi donc ? Je suis pire. Je ne suis qu'un chien éventré qui bouffe sa propre vermine.

C'est vrai, ma chérie, comme un bousier, je ne me sens à l'aise que dans l'ordure. Avec mon âme vile, je ne peux me complaire

169 Buddha and his Nirvana, that still and untroubled lake of being or
170 non-being. Bullshit, all of it. And long live Mao Tse-tung! 'Great
171 teacher, great helmsman, great supreme commander, President
172 Mao, you are the red sun of our heart.' And long live the Khmer
173 Rouge and their cocktails of blood.

174 But, *ma petite amie*, I mustn't let myself get carried away or
175 be swept up by delusions. How could you possibly go to hell,
176 you? You're so dainty and so beautiful, your hair is so blonde,
177 your eyes are so blue, your skin is milky and pearly, your
178 legs are shapely... Oh! I wouldn't want you to. Besides, Lucifer
179 wouldn't want you. Because I bet even your shit radiates
180 goodness, like a radish.

181 You must think I consider myself enlightened, that I'm
182 feigning disgust over these journalists I've told you about,
183 bastard that I am. I treat my Western colleagues like vultures
184 feeding on carrion. But what about me? I'm worse. I'm just a
185 disembowelled dog gorging on my own worms.

186 It's true, *ma chérie*. Like a dung beetle, I only feel at ease in
187 filth. With my vile soul, I can only find pleasure wallowing in
188 dark, stinking places with a stench of excrement.

que dans des endroits ténébreux, puants, qui ont un fumet
d'excréments.

Mais attends. Que je te parle d'abord de ces journalistes
parisiens. Je me rappelle comme si c'était d'hier d'un certain
Delaunay que j'avais vu au cours d'un reportage à Kompong Speu,
un type courtaud qui louchait un peu, envoyé spécial du *Globe*,
journal que mes amis cambodgiens considéraient comme le plus
sérieux et le mieux informé du monde. En réalité le plus immonde
par son ambiguïté, ses prouesses dans l'équivoque, sa
malhonnêteté intellectuelle inégalée. Celui-là aussi avait été payé
par le régime républicain aller fouiller dans les tripes de cette
République mourante. J'avais tant connu de journalistes qui nous
avaient torpillés, surtout des Anglo-Saxons et des Japonais, mais
dont les écrits restaient circonstanciés, avec des précisions de
date et de lieu, des articles justifiés par des recoupements
méticuleux. On est beau joueur, nous. Si nous sommes des cons,
qu'ils nous foutent sur la gueule. C'est entendu. Si les crâneurs de
Lon Nol bousillent en plein jour les civils de la cinquième colonne
des Viets et laissent leurs corps flotter dans les eaux du Mékong...
spectaculairement... sous la clarté aveuglante du soleil... ils

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But wait. I should tell you about the Parisian journalists first. I
remember one of them like I met him just yesterday, a guy called
Delaunay whom I witnessed on assignment in Kampong Speu, a
stout fellow with a slight squint, a special envoy for the *Globe*,
the newspaper my Cambodian friends regarded as the most
reliable and well-informed in the world. In reality it was the most
unscrupulous of them all with its ambiguity, its feats of
ambivalence, its unrivalled intellectual dishonesty. They too
were paid by the Republican regime to scavenge in the guts of
the dying Republic. Quite a few of the journalists I knew who
torpedoed us – especially the Anglo-Saxon and Japanese ones –
still circumstantiated their articles, justifying them with
meticulous cross-checking, including details of time and place.
We know the rules of the game, us journalists. If we slip up, let
them come for us. It's expected. But if Lon Nol's goons take out
civilians from the Vietnamese fifth column in broad daylight and
let their bodies float in the waters of the Mekong...
spectacularly... in the blinding clarity of the sunlight... they can

peuvent s'en donner à cœur joie. Lon Nol mérite bien ce discrédit mondial.

Mais celui-là, c'était un prestidigitateur de la plume. Il patinait, glissait sur les faits, brodait comme dans un roman à suspense. Crypto-communiste tendancieux, foncièrement pro-vietnamien il ne l'avouait pas. Mieux vaut une plaie qui s'ouvre qu'un mal qui ne se déclare pas. Il se peut qu'il ait été téléguidé par son bureau parisien mais son but était de nous détruire systématiquement, même avec notre propre pognon, le salaud, et d'autant plus efficacement qu'il n'en avait pas du tout l'air. Lors de la première invasion nord-vietnamienne du Cambodge, en 1970, il avait soutenu dur comme fer, alors que les bandes khmères rouges était quasiment inexistantes, que c'était la guerre civile. Mais presque tous les Cambodgiens savaient que le Vietcong, depuis plusieurs années déjà, avait non seulement investi nos frontières, mais rongé opiniâtrement le pays en direction de la capitale... Et moi-même, j'avais vu de mes propres yeux, aux premières heures de l'aggression, que c'étaient des Bodoïs qui venaient guerroyer chez nous, laissant sur place leurs cadavres avec des papiers de Hanoï. Et ces prisonniers qui ne

209 do that to their heart's content. Lon Nol deserves every bit of his
210 international disrepute.

211 But Delaunay, he was an illusionist with a pen. He put a spin
212 on things, glided over the facts, embellishing as he went like the
213 author of a thriller. A tendentious crypto-communist, he was
214 entirely pro-Vietnamese, though he wouldn't admit it. An
215 undetected sickness is far more insidious than an exposed
216 wound. It's possible his Parisian office were pulling the strings,
217 but either way his goal was to systematically destroy us – with
218 our own money no less, the son of a bitch – and he executed it
219 much more efficiently than he seemed at all capable of. During
220 the first North Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1970, he
221 maintained unwaveringly that it was civil war, despite the Khmer
222 Rouge barely yet existing in any organised form. But almost
223 every Cambodian was aware that for many years the Vietcong
224 had not only been infiltrating our borders but also doggedly
225 eating away at the country in the direction of the capital... I had
226 seen with my own eyes in the early hours of the assault that it
227 was the Bô đội soldiers who were coming to wage war on our
228 turf, leaving behind cadavers bearing Hanoi papers and prisoners

parlaient pas un mot de cambodgien ! Les Américains n'étaient intervenus que bien plus tard. Trop tard ! Et de façon dérisoire : à trente kilomètres de la frontière, pendant une durée de deux mois. Ce qui eut plutôt pour effet de repousser ces hordes communistes plus profondément encore à l'intérieur du pays khmer. Si les paras français et les G.I. américains n'avaient pu avoir raison des Vietnamiens au bout de trente années de guerre, comment une opération ponctuelle, limitée dans l'espace et dans le temps, aurait-elle pu les déloger de chez nous, ces petits hommes coriaces comme des racines de bambou, leur symbole ?

Mais ce journaliste se moquait royalement de la vérité ; il n'en avait rien à foutre du Cambodge, cet empire démantelé depuis des siècles par ses voisins puissants et voraces, et dont il ne restait plus que des débris. Il en voulait mortellement à ces Cambodgiens, héritiers d'un passé d'errance et de fatigue, qui osaient encore défendre leur dernier lopin de terre, qui avaient commis le sacrilège d'être nationalistes. Et lui, ce dandy de la plume, dont le langage est si transparent que ça en devient un masque, s'était-il réjoui quand les Allemands avaient occupé la

229 who didn't speak a word of Khmer! The Americans hadn't
 230 intervened until much later – too late. And even then, it was only
 231 a token gesture: 30 kilometres from the border, for a duration of
 232 just two months. Which instead had the effect of driving the
 233 communist hordes even more deeply into the interior of the
 234 Khmer country. If the French paras and American GIs hadn't
 235 been able to get the better of the Vietnamese after thirty years
 236 of war, how could an isolated operation over limited space and
 237 time hope to drive them off our land, these men who were small
 238 in stature but as tough as the bamboo roots they made their
 239 symbol?

240 But this journalist couldn't have cared less about the truth; he
 241 didn't give a damn about Cambodia, an empire reduced to debris
 242 after centuries of being carved up by its powerful and voracious
 243 neighbours. He bore a deadly grudge against those Cambodians
 244 who, having inherited a past of wandering and weariness, still
 245 dared to defend their last patch of land, who had committed the
 246 sacrilege of being nationalists. And him, this pen-wielding dandy
 247 whose language was so transparent that it became a mask, had
 248 he celebrated when the Germans occupied France? Why didn't

France ? Pourquoi ne nous comprenait-il pas ? Pourquoi ne voulait-il pas nous comprendre ? Non, sa principale préoccupation, c'était d'être dans le vent. Il ne parlait que par clichés. Les gens qui ne sont pas de gauche sont des buveurs de sang. Et il nous traitait réellement comme des buveurs de sang. Il fit paraître article sur article, dans sa feuille à grand tirage, feuille si bien cogitée qu'elle est grandement consommée par les professions libérales. Feuille proclamant qu'il s'agissait d'une guerre civile entre Cambodgiens — alors que c'était une agression caractérisée.

Et il se déchaînait contre les Américains qui représentaient notre survie. Et maintenant... et maintenant que les Viets se trouvent aux prises avec les Khmers rouges, dans le cadre d'un vaste conflit sino-soviétique, ces mêmes Viets avouent dans le même journal qu'ils ont fait le travail au Cambodge de A jusqu'à Z. Et maintenant que le Cambodge a rendu l'âme, ce même journal verse des larmes de crocodile, en des analyses édifiantes, dans son style inimitable, lyrique et déclamatoire : « Peuple cambodgien : troisième génocide du siècle », « Fatalité sur les descendants des bâtisseurs d'Angkor », « Menace d'extinction

249 he understand us? Why didn't he want to understand us? No,
250 his primary concern was staying à la mode. He spoke only in
251 clichés. Anyone not on the left was branded a *buveur de sang*,
252 a blood-drinker, harking back to the French Revolution. And he
253 really treated us like we drank blood. He published article after
254 article in his high-circulation paper – a paper so well-considered
255 that members of the liberal professions consumed it in their
256 masses – proclaiming that the invasion was a civil war
257 between Cambodians and thus a case of characteristic
258 aggression.

259 And he lashed out against the Americans, who represented
260 our only chance of survival. And now... now that the Vietnamese
261 have locked horns with the Khmer Rouge against the backdrop of
262 a vast Chinese–Soviet conflict, the same Vietnamese communists
263 have admitted in the same newspaper that they were at work in
264 Cambodia from start to finish. And now that Cambodia has given
265 up the ghost, the same despicable rag is shedding crocodile
266 tears, publishing edifying editorials in its inimitable, lyrical,
267 declamatory style: 'Cambodia: Third Genocide in a Century', 'The
268 Tragic Fate of the Builders of Angkor's Descendants', 'A Race

d'une race », « Survive le peuple khmer ! »... Alors que la fatalité en question, cette feuille infâme y a grandement contribué. De quoi s'émeut-elle à présent ? Elle l'a bien voulu. Ces millions de Cambodgiens exécutés à coups de bâton, histoire d'économiser les projectiles, ne sont que des nationalistes ! Donc des « reac' », des « fachos ». Il fallait applaudir. N'est-ce pas rigolo ?

Mais aujourd'hui, amie, que ce peuple cambodgien, le plus maudit de la terre, achève de crever, avec ces jeunes femmes et ces bébés qui valent moins que des bébés phoques, pourrissant journellement par milliers dans les broussailles de la frontière, enveloppés dans des linceuls de mouches bourdonnantes, mouches aux têtes rouges... ce journaliste... ou plutôt ces journalistes de la bonne conscience — dont ce Delaunay n'est qu'un archétype — continuent de stigmatiser les Américains. Perversion de l'intelligence, labyrinthe cartésien. Dans une tortueuse navigation à vue, ils viennent de réussir un tour de force : démontrer avec une logique vachement implacable que Pol Pot et les Khmers rouges sont les produits de la politique Nixon-Kissinger. Ainsi, à leurs yeux, les Américains ont commis un

269 Threatened by Extinction', 'May the Khmer People Live to Fight
270 Another Day!'... All while having contributed significantly to the
271 fate in question. Why are they so upset all of a sudden? This is
272 exactly what they wanted. The millions of Cambodians executed
273 by beating with bamboo rods – ostensibly to save bullets – why,
274 they were just nationalists, reactionaries, fascists! You've got to
275 hand it to them. Laughable, isn't it?

276 But today, *mon amie*, while the most cursed people on earth
277 grow ever closer to dying out, while every day young women and
278 their babies worth less than seal pups are rotting in their
279 thousands in the undergrowth at the border, enveloped in
280 shrouds of buzzing flesh flies, this journalist... or rather these
281 journalists of good conscience, of which Delaunay is only an
282 archetype, continue to stigmatise the Americans. Perversion of
283 intelligence, Cartesian labyrinth. Through an impressive feat of
284 mental gymnastics, they've pulled off a tour de force:
285 demonstrating with damnably inescapable logic that Pol Pot and
286 the Khmer Rouge are the direct product of the Nixon–Kissinger
287 partnership. Thus, in their eyes, the Americans have committed
288 a double crime. The first was fighting the North Vietnamese

double crime. Le premier, c'est d'avoir combattu cette lèpre de
Viets, d'avoir tenté l'impossible pour défendre la Liberté. Et le
second c'est d'avoir failli... c'est la faute à Kissinger pour avoir
signé des traités de paix, papelards sans conséquences... Pour un
peu, ils leur reprocheraient d'avoir cessé la guerre. Maintenant
que les communistes asiatiques perpètrent les pires crimes
contre l'humanité, ils accaparent l'actualité, pavoisent,
plastronnent... comme si les Américains en étaient la cause. Et
cette camarilla gauchiste, ces médias dans le vent et dans le sens
de l'histoire, ces suppôts du marxisme, n'y étaient pour rien ! Ils
ont les mains propres de toute cette mer de sang et de larmes. Ils
reprochent aux gouvernements du monde entier de ne pas
sauver le Cambodge. Mais il n'y a plus rien à sauver. Les corps se
sont vidés, la terre s'est vidée, le ciel s'est vidé, et ils regardent, ils
mentent et chantent le requiem. Ils ont pu tuer un peuple. Mais
quand il s'agit de le ressusciter, c'est autre chose. Ce qui est fait
ne peut être défait... Toi, je viens de t'assassiner sur la rive
gauche de la Seine... Je ne peux plus rien pour toi. Sinon te
rejoindre en enfer.

289 scourge, attempting the impossible in the name of Freedom. And
290 the second was failing... It's Kissinger's fault for signing the peace
291 treaties, meaningless pieces of paper... At first, they criticised the
292 Americans for pulling out of the war. Now that the worst crimes
293 against humanity are being perpetrated by Asian communists,
294 they're hogging the news, showing off, boasting... as if the
295 Americans were the cause. And of course they had nothing to do
296 with it, this leftist camarilla, these media types jumping on the
297 bandwagon in search of a story, these agents of Marxism! Their
298 hands are unsullied by the sea of blood and tears. They reproach
299 governments the world over for not saving Cambodia. But
300 there's nothing left to save. The bodies are empty, the earth is
301 empty, the sky is empty, and they watch, and lie and sing the
302 requiem. They were capable of killing a people. But when it
303 comes to resurrecting one, that's another matter. What's done
304 cannot be undone... You, I just assassinated you on the left bank
305 of the Seine... I can do nothing more for you. Except to join you
306 in hell.
307

Ma petite Anglaise esquintée, tu ne me contrediras pas, mon amie, tu ne le peux pas, tu as la bouche pleine de sang, et moi je veux parler, parler vite, parler beaucoup et très vite... Mais je ne peux pas leur en vouloir à ces journalistes- là. Parce que moi aussi, je suis journaliste. Je les comprends, d'autant mieux que je suis de la pire espèce. Je me croyais un bon type, un journaliste honnête, un saint. Il n'y a pas de saint honnête. Si ignobles que soient ces canailles, ils ne le seront jamais autant que moi, le journaliste « honnête ». Il y a belle lurette que la plume ne prétend plus incarner la loyauté et l'honneur, comme l'épée et la lance dans les anciens temps. Ah... Je voudrais tant me transporter à cette époque d'Angkor, où les rois s'en allaient à dos d'éléphants au-devant de leurs adversaires. Je ne veux plus n'être que cette plume peureuse, qui pour faire mal se réfugie crânement derrière une froide armure, une monstrueuse abstraction : l'opinion publique.

Comment pourrais-je jamais leur en vouloir ? Même s'ils ne reconnaissent pas qu'ils ont eu tort. Reconnaître qu'on a tort, c'est se renier, c'est renier son existence, c'est mourir politiquement. Le pire châtement pour un politicien, c'est

308 My crumpled English rose, you won't contradict me, will you,
 309 *mon amie*? You can't, you have a mouth full of blood, and I want
 310 to talk, to talk quickly, very quickly and at length... But I can't
 311 hold it against those journalists. Because I'm a journalist too. I
 312 understand them, all the more because I'm the worst kind of all.
 313 I considered myself a good guy, an honest journalist, a saint.
 314 There's no such thing as an honest saint. As despicable as those
 315 hacks are, they'll never stoop as low as me, the 'honest'
 316 journalist. It's been a long time since the pen could claim to
 317 embody fidelity and honour the way the sword and lance once
 318 did. Ah... I'd like so much to travel back to the Angkorian era,
 319 when kings would ride out to face their adversaries on the backs
 320 of elephants. I'm tired of being nothing more than a petrified
 321 penman, gallantly taking shots from behind the shield of a cold
 322 suit of armour, a monstrous abstraction: public opinion.

323

324 How can I hold it against them? Even if they don't recognise
 325 that they were in the wrong. To acknowledge your own
 326 wrongdoing is to renounce your convictions, your existence even
 327 – it's political death. Self-criticism is the worst punishment

l'autocritique. Devenir brusquement objet, être jugé. Quelle infamie ! Il faut avoir raison, avoir toujours raison, avoir raison même de la raison. Ainsi, ce Français de gauche, qui a comploté pendant des mois avec le prince Sirik Matak pour faire culbuter Sihanouk, il a proclamé ensuite à qui voulait l'entendre que c'était un coup d'État mijoté par les « Ricains ». Et pan, il enfonce le clou sur ce mythe. C'est sidérant. Lui aussi, ce journaliste de gauche, ce disciple de Mao, il était donc de mèche avec la C.I.A. ?

Mais le remords n'existe pas ! Ce qu'il faut, c'est l'inventer. Écoute, petite femme, d'aucuns battent leur coulpe. Mais vois-tu, ma petite blonde cartonnée, il y en a qui viennent de proclamer hautement leurs remords d'avoir aidé les Khmers rouges à obtenir la victoire. Ils le regrettent de tout leur cœur. Et s'il faut hurler avec les loups, oui, ils acceptent de hurler avec les loups. Putain ! vois-tu leur subtilité ? Les loups, c'est toujours les autres, ceux qui tentèrent de sauver le Cambodge d'une mort certaine. Eux qui ont tant travaillé à fertiliser la terre khmère avec des millions de dépouilles humaines, ils sont des anges. En quoi dont avaient-ils eu tort ?

328 imaginable for a politician. Suddenly becoming a target, being
329 judged. How mortifying! You have to be right, always, right even
330 about being right. So this left-leaning Frenchman, after plotting
331 for months with Prince Sirik Matak to knock Sihanouk off his
332 perch, proclaimed that it was all a coup d'état cooked up by the
333 Yanks – *les Ricains*, as the French call them. *Et voilà*, he set the
334 seal on that myth. It's astounding. So this left-wing journalist,
335 this disciple of Mao, he was in league with the CIA?

336 But they don't have a scrap of remorse. So they have to invent
337 it. Listen, *ma petite femme*, no one is beating themselves up. But
338 you see, my little broken blonde, some of them have just publicly
339 proclaimed their remorse over helping the Khmer Rouge to
340 victory. They regret it with all their hearts. And if they have to
341 run with the wolf pack, *oui*, they'll run with the wolf pack.
342 *Merde!* Do you see their game? The wolf pack is still the others,
343 those who tried to save Cambodia from certain death. And the
344 people who worked so hard to fertilise Khmer soil with the
345 remains of millions of Cambodians, why, they're angels. So how
346 were they in the wrong?

C'est ainsi, oh oui, loin de moi l'idée de les détester, ces grands gourous de la plume, « gourous gourés » qui ont poussé le Cambodge dans le précipice de par leur appartenance à une idéologie du meurtre. Meurtre des corps, meurtre des âmes, meurtre des peuples... Loin de moi l'idée de leur en vouloir à ces pseudo-chrétiens, ces chrétiens marxisants — remarques-tu les contradictions dans les termes ? Mais je les aime au fond de mon cœur, ces journalistes... Pouah ! Il faut être journaliste pour comprendre la perfidie des journalistes. Il suffit d'un coup de pouce pour détraquer le sens d'un texte. J'ai lu par exemple une phrase quelque part, disant « qu'il ne faut pas donner raison à Ford, le président américain, d'avoir prédit un bain de sang au Vietnam », je dis bien au Vietnam, alors que cette prophétie Ford l'avait faite pour le Cambodge, je dis bien Cambodge. Donc l'auteur de cette phrase a voulu un lapsus, décidant de se tromper de pays, de mettre dans la bouche de Ford Vietnam au lieu de Cambodge. Je m'y reconnais bien dans cette ondulation intellectuelle visqueuse, dans ce déplacement de reptile. Et j'ai fortement envie de l'embrasser ce journaliste. Parce qu'il ment comme il respire... parce qu'il est malhonnête... mais non, je veux

347 Well then, far be it from me to hate them, these gurus of the
 348 pen, half-witted hacks who pushed Cambodia over the precipice
 349 with their subscription to an ideology built on murder. Murder of
 350 bodies, murder of souls, murder of peoples... Far be it from me
 351 to hold it against these Marxising pseudo-Christians – do you
 352 notice the contradiction in terms? Yet I love these journalists
 353 from the bottom of my heart... Ugh! Only a journalist can
 354 understand the duplicity of journalists. All it takes is a little
 355 nudge to distort the meaning of a text. Take this sentence I read
 356 somewhere, for example, declaring 'that Ford, the American
 357 president, shouldn't be vindicated for having predicted a
 358 bloodbath in Vietnam' – you heard right, in Vietnam – when in
 359 fact Ford made this prophesy for Cambodia – that's right,
 360 Cambodia. So the author of this sentence deliberately made a
 361 slip of the pen, deciding to mix up the countries, to put Vietnam
 362 in Ford's mouth in place of Cambodia. I see a lot of myself in this
 363 slimy intellectual undulation, this reptilian revision, and I could
 364 kiss him for it, this journalist. Because he lies like he breathes...
 365 because he's amoral – no, adorable, I meant to say. Oh, it
 366 doesn't take much to send ripples of defeat through our camp;

dire parce qu'il est mignon. Oh, il suffit d'un rien, d'un truquage de photo par exemple, la photo d'une stupa de Phnom Penh que notre observateur « impartial », en réalité notre sacré menteur, a soulignée dans sa feuille comme une photo prise à « Angkor occupé par les maquisards »... pour souffler le vent de la défaite dans notre camp, pire que la catastrophe provoquée par une division nord-vietnamienne. Rien que cette photo truquée répercutée habilement par son empire de presse, cela a provoqué un impact atroce dans l'opinion occidentale. Le démenti qui vient après, relégué dans une page sans importance, ne peut plus rien changer. Le doute s'installe et agit en profondeur comme un poison.

Oui, chère, je les aime du fond du cœur. Eux, ils ont détruit mon pays. Mais le Cambodge n'est pas le leur, ils n'en ont rien à foutre. Moi, j'ai détruit le mien. J'ai porté le coup de grâce à ma propre patrie. Avec une violence inouïe, j'ai poignardé ma propre mère, dépecé ses intestins, mangé son cadavre. J'ai souillé la terre qui m'a fait naître. Là-bas chantait la Mékong... Tu comprends ? Ce fleuve puissant et majestueux, cela résume toute mon existence. Le Mékong ! C'est un fantastique bonheur. Non,

367 even just a faked photo, like the one of a stupa in Phnom Penh
368 that our 'impartial' observer – in reality a damned liar – printed
369 in his paper with the caption 'Angkor occupied by guerrillas',
370 can cause devastation worse than that wrought by a North
371 Vietnamese division. Just that falsified photo alone, deftly
372 deployed by his press empire, had a diabolical impact on
373 Western opinion. Corrections after the fact, relegated to some
374 inconsequential page, don't change a thing. Once doubt sets in,
375 it poisons everything.

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379 It's true, *chérie*, I love them from the bottom of my heart. Yes,
380 they destroyed my country. But it was never their country, so
381 why would they give a damn? Me, I destroyed my own home. I
382 delivered the coup de grâce to my own country. With an
383 inconceivable violence, I stabbed my own mother, carved up her
384 intestines, ate her cadaver. I defiled the land that gave me life.
385 The place where the Mekong once sang... Do you understand?
386 That powerful and majestic river, it sums up my whole existence.

c'est mon bonheur même. Voici que la « Mère des eaux » se mue soudain en une mer de sang ! Et maintenant, j'éprouve du remords, un remords lancinant, insurmontable. Me crois-tu ? Crois-tu en la vérité de mon remords ? Crois-tu que je le regrette vraiment ? Que si je devais à nouveau accomplir ce crime, je ne le referais pas ? Que faire ?... Mais comment te raconter tout cela en quelques minutes ? Elle est longue, mon histoire. J'ai besoin d'autres mots, de beaucoup de mots, d'un vocabulaire mugissant comme un cours d'eau. Je ne les trouve pas et je m'empêtré. Je brandouille...

... Fuis, fuis à tire-d'aile, si tu as encore une parcelle d'innocence, prends garde. Je sens que même les grosses mouches pansues à têtes rouges, d'ordinaire friandes des excréments ou des viscères de cadavres, m'évitent et me dédaignent. Partout où j'irai, errant comme errait Œdipe, la terre sera stérile, les arbres ne porteront pas de fruits, et les hommes seront malheureux. Je te l'ai déjà dit, et je ne me lasse pas de t'avertir : mes amis, mon père, et mon pays ont payé pour moi, *enfant du démon*.

387 The Mekong! It's happiness itself – no, it's my own personal
388 happiness, even. But the 'Mother of Waters' has suddenly fallen
389 silent in a sea of blood. And now I feel remorse, an aching,
390 insurmountable remorse. Do you believe me? Do you see the
391 truth in my sorrow? Do you believe that I truly regret it? That if I
392 had to commit my crime all over again, I wouldn't do it? What
393 can I do?... How can I explain all this to you in just a few
394 minutes? It's long, my story. I need other words, reams of words,
395 a vocabulary that roars like a river. But I can't find them, I trip
396 over them, I grope around...

397 ... Flee, flee as fast as your legs can carry you. If you still have
398 an ounce of innocence, take heed. Even the bulbous, red-eyed
399 flesh flies, usually partial to excrement and the viscera of
400 cadavers, shun me with disdain. Wherever I go, erring as Oedipus
401 erred, the ground will be barren, the trees will fail to bear fruit,
402 and the men will live in misery. I've already told you as much,
403 and I won't tire of warning you: my friends, my father and my
404 country all paid the price for me, *son of the devil*.

405

III

C'était donc le 4 août 1974, jour fatidique de mon existence. On venait de tuer Savouth, mon meilleur ami. Mais puis-je parler ainsi ? « Le meilleur ami », on le dit, on ne le pense pas. Mais lorsqu'on le pense, on ne le dit jamais... Parce que lui et moi, on ne s'était pas toujours bien entendus, pourtant, avant le jour de cet assassinat. Il m'était même arrivé de l'égratigner méchamment dans certains articles de mes journaux. Était-ce à cause de mon injustice à son égard que j'éprouvai un profond engouement pour l'ami disparu ? Était-ce fausse impression du moment, ou une vérité à retardement ? Parce que enfin l'âme humaine est versatile et insaisissable comme une quelconque goutte d'eau roulante de tous côtés sur une feuille de nénuphar. La mienne est probablement l'esquisse la plus folle entre toutes les esquisses : une virtuose de la fluctuation. Mon âme n'est qu'illusion, mirage sans consistance. Mais les illusions se soutiennent elles, elles s'entretiennent les unes les autres. Une illusion a besoin d'autres illusions, comme la flamme d'une

III

406 And so it was the 4th of August, 1974, my day of reckoning.
 407 Savouth, my best friend, had just been killed. Can I say that? You
 408 say 'best friend', you don't think it. But when you think it, you
 409 never say it... You see, we hadn't always seen eye to eye, him
 410 and I, before the day of the assassination. I had even ended up
 411 including some ill-natured quips at his expense in a few of my
 412 articles. Was it because of my past unfairness towards my lost
 413 friend that I now felt a profound fondness for him? Was this a
 414 momentary false impression or a belated truth? After all, the
 415 human soul is as fickle and elusive as a drop of water rolling
 416 around a lily pad. Mine is probably the most erratic scribble of
 417 all, a virtuoso of fluctuation. My soul is nothing but an illusion, a
 418 mirage with no substance. But illusions support one other, they
 419 sustain each other. An illusion needs other illusions to survive,
 420 like the flame of a candle flickering in front of a multifaceted
 421 mirror to confirm itself, to affirm its light. A rolling drop of water
 422 is always grasping for another drop to reinforce it. Yet the

chandelle se place devant un miroir à plusieurs faces afin de s'y
confirmer, de s'y affirmer. Une goutte d'eau roulante est toujours
avide d'une autre goutte qui la renforce. Or l'illusion qu'on m'a
enlevée à ce moment-là prenait une importance fantastique.

Tout d'un coup je réalisais que Savouth représentait tout pour
moi, la totalité de mes élans, l'être unique, irremplaçable, l'ami
de toujours. J'oubliais à ce moment ma propre femme, mes
enfants, mes parents, mes frères, mes autres amis... Il n'y avait
plus que lui. Il y eut dans mon équilibre comme une rupture
soudaine, comme l'éclatement d'une digue, une espèce
d'occupation exclusive de mon âme par les flots tumultueux
d'une volonté extérieure. Savouth mort, son âme était venue se
substituer à la mienne qui, telle une citadelle éventrée, avait été
investie en un rien de temps. J'agissais dans un état second.

La veille de son assassinat, Savouth était venu me voir comme
pour me dire adieu. Nous avons longuement discuté, lui, le
ministre, et moi le journaliste, sur la situation du Cambodge qui
empirait de jour en jour, pareille à un corps gangrené, sur notre
maréchal mollasson et rêveur qui perdait pied irrémédiablement
sur les ennemis de notre République. Et puis il y avait cette affaire

423 illusion that was shattered for me at that moment took on a
424 supreme importance.

425
426

427 In a heartbeat I realised that Savouth was everything to me,
428 my entire impetus. He was a unique, irreplaceable being, a friend
429 for life. In that moment I forgot about my wife, my children, my
430 parents, my brothers, my other friends... There was no longer
431 anyone but him. My equilibrium was thrown off by a sudden
432 rupture, like the bursting of a dam, and my soul became entirely
433 awash with the tumultuous tides of some outside force. With
434 Savouth dead, his soul had come to substitute itself for mine,
435 which, like a breached fortress, had been overrun in no time. I
436 was functioning in a secondary state.

437 On the eve of his assassination, Savouth had come to see me,
438 as though to bid me adieu. He and I, the government minister
439 and the journalist, had talked at length about the situation in
440 Cambodia – which was worsening by the day, like a gangrenous
441 body – and about our lacklustre idealist of a president, who was
442 steadily and irremediably losing ground to the enemies of our

du Watergate, pour nous menace de mort. Parce que la survie politique de Nixon, c'était notre vie à nous. Son destin, c'était notre destin. Des millions de Cambodgiens s'étaient identifiés à lui. Que le président U.S. fût un fourbe ou non aux yeux de l'Amérique, ce n'était pas notre affaire. Nous pensions à notre peau. Mais que Nixon tombe et il n'y aurait plus de Cambodge, les communistes se jetteraient sur nous et nous dévoreraient vivants. Ce serait pour les Viets un jeu d'enfant. Ce que nous avons toujours tant redouté s'accomplirait. Dès lors chacune des révélations du *Washington Post* nous torturait journellement. Nous vibrions comme les cordes tendues d'un violon. Un diplomate américain, d'origine grecque, d'allure sèche et rugueuse, au petit visage pointu rongé de trous et de stigmates, maigre à faire peur, m'avait bien prévenu : « Faites gaffe ! en Amérique, Nixon est la seule personne à soutenir encore le Cambodge. S'il capote, vous autres, les Cambodgiens, ce sera votre fête... » Et je m'apercevais de la justesse de son jugement : rien que dans l'ambassade américaine à Phnom Penh, les *political officers* détestaient Nixon et nous détestaient. C'était vraiment très pénible d'être détestés par nos propres alliés. Je

443 Republic. And then there was the Watergate scandal, the sword
 444 of Damocles hanging over our heads. Because Nixon's political
 445 survival was life or death for us. His destiny was our destiny.
 446 Millions of Cambodians identified with him. Whether the US
 447 president was a crook or not in America's eyes wasn't our
 448 concern. We were more concerned with our own skin. If Nixon
 449 fell and Cambodia was no more, the communists would surge
 450 forward and devour us alive. It would be child's play for the
 451 Vietnamese. Our greatest fear would be realised. From then on,
 452 the *Washington Post's* every revelation would be torture each
 453 day. We were trembling like the taut strings of a violin. I had
 454 been warned as much by an American diplomat who looked to
 455 be of Greek descent, worryingly thin, with a pointed face riven
 456 with pockmarks and scars and a dry, brusque manner: 'Be wary.
 457 Nixon is the only person in America still supporting Cambodia. If
 458 he goes down, you Cambodians will go down with him...' And his
 459 words rang true to me – even in the American embassy in
 460 Phnom Penh, the 'political officers' hated Nixon and hated us. It
 461 was really very bruising to be hated by our own allies. I found
 462 myself questioning what they had come to do in Cambodia,

m'étais demandé même ce qu'ils étaient venus faire là, au Cambodge : parce qu'au lieu de contrer les communistes vietnamiens, ils passaient leur temps à démolir leur propre président aux yeux des Khmers. J'en voulais surtout aux Américains. Hargneusement ! Ils avaient bien le droit de salir l'individu Nixon ; ils n'avaient pas le droit de rabaisser l'autorité de l'Amérique. Il faut faire la part des choses... Bien des chefs d'État ont passé à travers... Pourquoi pas lui ? Pourquoi une procédure de destitution pour une magouille ? « *Impeachment* » signifiait pour nous apocalypse ! Surtout ils pouvaient attaquer la personne Nixon... Ils ne devaient absolument pas toucher à sa politique, parce que cette politique-là, ils l'avaient eux-mêmes votée, sinon plébiscitée. Une politique qui consistait à se désengager du borbier vietnamien dans l'honneur, non pas à baisser la culotte. Or, ils avaient tout bousillé : et la personne, et le président, et sa politique. Ils prônaient, ils exigeaient même que les G.I. déguerpissent devant tous ces cocos de Viets, la queue entre les jambes. Ils sont fous les Ricains. À n'y rien comprendre. *Fuck you son of a bitch*. Comme journaliste je commençais à me rendre compte de la vanité de l'opinion

463 because instead of staving off the Vietnamese communists, they
 464 spent all their time demolishing their own president in the eyes
 465 of the Khmer. I was mainly angry at the Americans, bitterly so.
 466 They had every right to sully Nixon as an individual; what they
 467 didn't have the right to do was diminish America's authority. You
 468 have to consider the bigger picture... Plenty of heads of state
 469 have got away with worse... Why not him? Did a few
 470 shenanigans really warrant a deposition? For us, the English
 471 word 'impeachment' meant apocalypse! They could attack Nixon
 472 the person all they liked. But they absolutely couldn't knock his
 473 politics, because they themselves had voted for them when they
 474 elected him. A politics that consisted of withdrawing from the
 475 Vietnamese mire with honour, not of dropping trou. But they
 476 had trashed everything indiscriminately: the man, the president,
 477 and his politics. They exhorted – demanded, even – that the GIs
 478 flee before the Vietnamese commies, tail between legs. They're
 479 crazy, *les Ricains*. Beyond comprehension. *Fuck you, son of a*
 480 *bitch*. As a journalist I was starting to become aware of the
 481 vainness of public opinion. The public want everything and
 482 nothing at the same time, always asking for more but never

publique. Elle veut tout, elle ne veut rien, elle en redemande toujours mais ne sait pas ce qu'elle veut, jamais satisfaite. Elle est présente et elle est nulle part. Une énorme bête difforme d'irresponsabilité... Et moi, je l'adorais Nixon, je retenais ses discours par cœur. Jamais je n'avais aimé un chef d'État étranger autant que lui. Cela allait de soi. Que ce soit par calcul ou par égoïsme. Je ne me suis pas encore intéressé à Dieu jusque-là, ne croyant ni à son existence, ni à sa non-existence. Mais sache-le, je m'agenouillais chaque nuit dans ma petite chambre les mains jointes, je priais en même temps et Bouddha, et Jésus-Christ, et Çiva et Mahomet — comment te dirais-je, en véritable transe, comme un possédé, pour qu'ils aident Nixon à s'en sortir.

Il était donc normal que ce soir-là, Savouth et moi nous parlions de Nixon. Si je continue à vivre, je me rappellerai jusqu'à mon dernier soupir cette discussion à la fois loufoque et tragique. Loufoque, parce que nous étions tout simplement des sauriens lointains, des grenouilles dans un marécage si éloigné du monde des sorciers blancs, détenteurs de la civilisation. Et nous nous permettions de deviser sur les affaires sérieuses du monde. Nous n'intéressions personne, et notre existence était réellement de la

483 knowing what they want, never satisfied. Public opinion is
 484 everywhere and nowhere, an enormous, misshapen beast of
 485 irresponsibility... As for me, I worshipped Nixon. I learned all his
 486 speeches by heart. Never before had I liked a foreign head of
 487 state as much as him. The affinity came easily, whether through
 488 calculation or selfishness. Up until that point, I'd never been
 489 interested in God, believing neither in his existence nor his non-
 450 existence. But believe me, every night during that time I would
 451 kneel down in my tiny bedroom, hands clasped, and pray to
 452 Buddha, Jesus Christ, Siva and Mohammed all at once – how do I
 453 explain it, in a complete trance, like a man possessed – begging
 454 them to help Nixon pull through.

455 So it was par for the course that Savouth and I were discussing
 456 Nixon that evening. If I survive this, I'll remember that ludicrous
 457 yet tragic conversation until my very last breath. Ludicrous
 458 because we were nothing but faraway saurians, frogs in a swamp
 459 entirely removed from the world of the white wizards, the
 460 masters of civilisation. And we had the gall to hold forth on
 461 serious world affairs. We interested no one, and our existence
 462 was really a kind of non-existence. We felt like two cyclops

non-existence. Nous avons tout d'un coup l'impression d'être
deux cyclopes qui merdoient dans la grotte d'une île perdue,
comme dans le « Septième voyage de Sinbad ». Nous n'avons
plus qu'un œil, un énorme œil de vautour gris et glauque qui
louchait de folie, d'angoisse, pour notre sécurité, et nous avons
une allure mal foutue de bébé apprenant à marcher, et nos corps
s'étaient couverts d'écailles infectes. C'était grotesque et nous
nous le disions. Mais notre situation n'en était pas moins
tragique, parce qu'il y allait de notre vie. Les barbares surgiraient
pour ouvrir nos poitrines et bouffer notre foie.

— Je pense que nous sommes arrivés au bout du rouleau,
fit Savouth. Avec cette affaire du Watergate, ça va être la
débandade. Ces journalistes ne vont pas louper Nixon. Le Congrès
s'en mêle. Et l'opinion qui l'a porté triomphalement à la
présidence bascule maintenant contre lui. Quelle bande de cons.

— Ces journalistes, il faut leur tordre le cou. Des enfants de
salauds, des médiocres qui profitent d'un filon ; des
exhibitionnistes avides de pub, dis-je avec une amertume mal
contenue. Tout est contre nous ! Dieu est pour les Viets.

463 languishing in a cave on an uncharted island, like in *The 7th*
464 *Voyage of Sinbad*. Suddenly we each had just one eye, an
465 enormous grey, glaucous vulture's eye that twitched with
466 madness, with anguish over our fate; our bodies were covered
467 with infected scales, and we had the off-kilter look of babies
468 learning to walk. It was grotesque, and we said as much. But our
469 situation was no less tragic, because our lives were a stake. The
470 barbarians could show up at any moment to crack open our
471 chests and feast on our livers.

472 'I think we've come to the end of the road,' said Savouth.
473 'With this Watergate business, everything's going to fall apart.
474 These journalists aren't going to stop gunning for Nixon.
475 Congress are getting involved. And the same public opinion that
476 carried him triumphantly to the presidency is now turning
477 against him. What a bunch of idiots.'

478 'Someone ought to wring these journalists' necks. These
479 bastards are nothing but hacks riding the gravy train, greedy
480 publicity whores,' I said with ill-concealed bitterness. 'Everything
481 is stacked against us! God favours the Vietnamese.'

— Mais ils ne font que leur travail, fit Savouth en riant... Mon
vieux, tu es drôle. Toi, tu torpilles ton gouvernement, mais tu ne
supportes pas ton propre travers chez les autres... Même sur moi,
tu as écrit des conneries. Et ce n'est pas toujours prouvé que tout
ce que tu as raconté dans tes feuilles n'ait pas été le fait d'un
enfant de salaud.

— Ouais, ça va, je déteste ce métier de pute. On ne choisit pas
son destin. Le journalisme a été pour moi un accident, une
mauvaise maîtresse. Alors que la littérature est ma légitime.
Malgré mes infidélités, je lui reviens toujours. De toute manière
tu ne peux jamais être libre dans le journalisme. L'opinion
publique est une hydre tentaculaire assoiffée de sensations et
d'horreurs, qui t'éperonne, qui t'astique pour que tu inventes son
breuvage. Et d'un autre côté, le gouvernement, qui épie ton
moindre faux pas, ne va pas te manquer au tournant... Mais...
mais je ne vais pas me plaindre. C'est la rançon du métier ;
« comme cochon, je ne vais pas craindre l'eau chaude ». Comme
putain, je n'ai pas à m'inquiéter des milliers de gens qui vont me
passer sur le ventre.

482 'But they're just doing their jobs,' replied Savouth, chuckling.
483 'You're funny, old friend. You lambast your own government,
484 but you can't accept it when others do the same to theirs...
485 You've even written bullshit about me. What makes you think
486 your reporting shouldn't be branded the handiwork of a
487 bastard?'

488 'Yeah, yeah. I hate this whorish profession. But we don't
489 choose our fate. Journalism was an accident for me, a bad
490 mistress. Literature is my true bride. Despite my infidelities, I
491 always come back to her. In any case, you can never be free in
492 journalism. Public opinion is a many-headed hydra, insatiably
493 thirsty for scandal and horror; it spurs you on, stimulates you
494 until you stir up more for it to drink. Meanwhile the government
495 are watching your every move for the slightest faux pas, ready to
496 pounce at any moment... But... but I can't complain. It's the price
497 of the job. "Like a pig, I won't fear hot water." Like a whore, I
498 don't worry about the thousands of people who are going to
499 bring me to my knees.'

500

— Quittons ce sujet... si les Américains balancent Nixon, et ça va arriver, il faut nous dire que nous sommes perdus. Mais quelle idée saugrenue pour un grand président de s'être acoquiné avec des « plombiers » de cet acabit. Il aurait été réélu de toute façon.

— Ça c'est le nez de Cléopâtre... Mais en tout cas, on ne peut qu'en arriver là avec l'Amérique. Les Américains ne sont pas des meneurs d'hommes, des colonisateurs comme les Français ou les Anglais. Ce sont des cow-boys. L'Amérique est loin d'être une civilisation, c'est une superposition de manières de vivre. Une superproduction en technicolor !... ou plutôt une société anonyme à irresponsabilité illimitée. Jusqu'ici, elle n'a sacrifié que ses propres alliés. Elle a fait tuer Ngo Dinh Diem, elle a largué Formose.

— Il va falloir, fit Savouth, penser à sauvé notre peau sans les Américains. Il ne faut plus que nous dépendions d'eux. Il faut dépendre de nous-mêmes, comme dit Bouddha.

— Oui, mais comment ? Nous sommes assiégés. Sans les Américains, ce n'est pas une poignée de Cambodgiens qui va résister aux Vietnamiens soutenus par les Chinois et les Russes.

501 'Let's change the subject... If the Americans force out Nixon, and
502 it's going to happen, we have to face the fact that we're goners.
503 But why on earth would a great president get mixed up with
504 those "plumbers"? He would have been re-elected anyway.'

505 'Yeah and if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, we wouldn't
506 be sitting here now... But, in any case, it was always going to end
507 this way with America. Americans aren't leaders of men,
508 colonisers like the French or the English. They're cowboys.
509 America is far from being a civilisation; it's a mishmash of ways
510 of life, a blockbuster in technicolour!... More like an anonymous
511 society with limitless irresponsibility. All they've done so far is
512 sacrifice their own allies. They got Ngo Dinh Diem killed; they
513 dropped Formosa.'

514 'We're going to have to think about saving our skin without
515 the Americans,' said Savouth. 'We can't depend on them
516 anymore. We need to depend on ourselves, like Buddha says.'

517 'Yes, but how? We're under siege. Without the Americans,
518 you won't find even a handful of Cambodians who'll stand firm
519 against the Vietnamese with China and Russia behind them.'

— Dans peu de temps, les communistes prendront Phnom Penh, laissa-t-il tomber froidement, peut-être demain, peut-être après-demain. Et les Américains vont foutre le camp, parce qu'ils en ont marre, crois-moi. Il s'agit de prévenir notre chute. Il faut créer en vitesse notre propre troupe et nous retirer dans la forêt, à Koh Kong par exemple, le dos à la mer, un endroit inexpugnable. Il faut le faire dès à présent, parce que je suis sans illusion. Moi je ne peux pas aller vivre en France ou en Amérique... Je ne peux pas... Je les ai connus ces pays-là. Je ne peux pas survivre à l'étranger.

— Oui, mais pour créer une troupe, il faut du fric.

— J'en ai demandé au maréchal.

— Combien ?

— Quatre millions de riels.

— Rien que ça ? Qu'espères-tu faire avec quatre millions ?

On pédale dans la semoule.

— Mais ce n'est qu'un commencement.

— Il est vraiment radin, le maréchal. C'est un type qui garde même son caca... son entourage et les Américains veulent

520 'Pretty soon, the communists will take Phnom Penh,' he threw
521 out coldly. 'Maybe tomorrow, maybe the day after. And the
522 Americans will get the hell out of Dodge, because they've had
523 enough, believe me. We need to do something or we'll go down
524 with the city. We should gather a troop of our own as quickly as
525 we can and head for the forest, maybe Koh Kong, somewhere
526 with our backs to the sea, unassailable. We need to do it now
527 too, because I'm not kidding myself that I can go and live in
528 France or America... I can't... I've seen those places. I can't
529 survive overseas.'

530 'Okay, but putting together a troop takes cash.'

531 'I put in a request with the marshal.'

532 'How much?'

533 'Four million riels.'⁴

534 'Is that all? What are you expecting to do with four million?

535 We won't get far with that.'

536 'But it's just the start.'

537 'The marshal's so tight-fisted. He wouldn't even part with his

538 own shit... His entourage and the Americans are ready to take

⁴ 100 riels was at this time approximately equivalent to one pound sterling.

l'abattre maintenant, et il ne dépense pas un rond pour les contrecarrer. Et quand auras-tu l'argent ?

— Demain. Dis donc... on dîne ensemble. Tu m'attendras vers sept heures au Hoa Koan... Sûr qu'on aura l'argent demain. On verra ce qu'on va en faire.

— D'accord, ça marche pour Hoa Koan.

— On va se payer un banquet du tonnerre, et sans arrière-pensée... tu préfères de la viande de serpent ou de rat³ ? Il faut commander à l'avance...

— Je préfère du chien.

— Beurkh ! Tu peux manger comme les Vietnamiens, toi ?

— Ha ! Ha ! On s'est moqués d'eux pendant si longtemps que maintenant c'est notre tour, on peut manger du chien ou même du chat... et c'est très cher, plus cher que le veau... et il faut connaître les garçons dans certains restaurants.

Le visage de Savouth s'assombrit.

— Cela me dépasse, dit-il, c'est impensable... que nous autres, Cambodgiens, nous puissions être aussi des mangeurs de chien, comme les Viets.

539 him out any day now, and he won't spend a cent to stop them.

540 When will you have the money anyway?'

541 'Tomorrow. Hey... let's have dinner together. Wait for me

542 around seven at Hoa Koan... We'll definitely have the money

543 tomorrow. We'll work out what we can do with it.'

544 'Okay, Hoa Koan works for me.'

545 'We'll treat ourselves to a first-rate feast, just for the hell

546 of it... Do you want snake or rat⁵ meat? You have to order

547 ahead...'

548 'I prefer dog.'

549 'Bleugh! You can eat like the Vietnamese, can you?'

550 'Ha! They've been made fun of for so long that now it's our

551 turn. We can eat dog or even cat... and it's very expensive, more

552 expensive than veal... You have to know the waiters in certain

553 restaurants.'

554 Savouth's face darkened.

555 'That's too far for me,' he said. 'It's unthinkable... that we

556 Cambodians could be dog-eaters like the Vietnamese.'

557

³ Rats des rizières.

⁵ Rats from the rice paddies.

— Mais tout le monde à Phnom Penh est rongeur de chien à son insu. Avant, Phnom Penh détenait le record du monde des chiens errants... maintenant dans les rues, il n’y a pas une âme de chien. Mais il n’y a pas que nous. Les Américains et les Français aussi, ils bouffent du chien. C’est servi dans tous les restos. L’autre soir, après un repas plantureux et du champagne et tout... un ami américain m’a demandé de lui dire quelle sorte de viande on avait servi, parce qu’il s’était régalé. Je lui ai dit que c’était du « chevreuil domestique », il ne me croyait pas parce qu’il était connaisseur, et qu’il y avait un petit goût particulier qui lui disait que ce n’était pas du chevreuil. Et il m’a tellement harcelé pour en savoir plus, et il était si mécontent de mon mutisme, parce que depuis la sortie du ventre de sa mère, il n’avait jamais goûté quelque chose d’aussi délectable, que j’ai été obligé de lâcher le morceau. « C’est un chien noir, très jeune, très beau, très robuste qu’on vient de bouffer... la viande que les Viets adorent et contre laquelle ils échangeaient leur putain de mère. » Le pôvre Lucky Lucke⁵, il a dégueulé pendant une semaine...

558 ‘But everyone in Phnom Penh is a dog-eater without knowing
559 it. Phnom Penh used to hold the world record for the number of
560 stray dogs... Now there’s not a dog soul to be found anywhere on
561 the streets. But it’s not just us – the Americans and the French,
562 they dine on dog too. It’s served in all the restaurants. The other
563 night, after a hearty meal – with champagne and everything – an
564 American friend asked me to tell him what kind of meat we’d
565 been served, because he’d enjoyed it so much. I told him it was
566 “domestic venison” but he didn’t believe me. He said he was a
567 connoisseur, that it had a unique taste that told him it wasn’t
568 venison. And he harassed me so much to tell him more, and he
569 was so unhappy with my silence on the subject, because he’d
570 never tasted anything so exquisite since the day he was born,
571 that I had to give in. “What we just ate was a black dog, very
572 young, very handsome, very healthy... the meat the
573 Vietnamese love so much they’d trade their own fucking
574 mothers for it.” Poor old Lucky Luke⁶ was throwing up for a
575 week...’

⁶ An American cowboy character from a Belgian comic strip of the same name.

— Ha ! Ha ! (Savouth éclata de rire.) Je comprends pourquoi ça
foire chez les Ricains. Ils font la guerre au Vietnam. Ils sont
capables de casser du Viet. Les petites Vietnamiennes, ils les
enfilent. Mais ils ne peuvent pas manger du chien. Ils ne boivent
même pas l'eau du Vietnam. Ils en font venir de Manille.
Comment pourraient-ils gagner la guerre ?

Tout à coup, je sentis monter en moi une crise de tristesse, et
je n'eus plus le goût de badiner.

— Savouth, j'en ai plein le dos, j'ai envie de me tirer pour
quelque temps... J'ai envie d'être ailleurs. Je vais vendre une
partie de mon imprimerie et aller me planquer quelques mois à
Londres, histoire d'apprendre l'anglais... D'ailleurs, c'est ce que
j'ai toujours voulu, mais l'occasion ne s'en est jamais présentée.
Et j'en profiterai pour écrire un roman. Maintenant, j'en ai marre,
de ce sang et de cette pourriture...

— Toi, dit Savouth en colère, ne me parle plus d'aller à
l'étranger... Si des types comme toi s'en vont, qu'est-ce qui reste
dans le pays ?

— Ouais, c'est ce qu'on m'a toujours répété. Tu te rappelles
notre prof M. Combès... Il y a longtemps de ça, c'était peut-être

576 Savouth burst out laughing. 'Ha! I get why that would mess
578 with the Americans. They're at war in Vietnam, they've got no
579 qualms about cracking Vietnamese skulls or sticking it in the
580 petite Vietnamese girls, but they draw the line at eating dog.
581 They won't even drink Vietnamese water – they get it brought
582 over from Manila. How can they possibly win the war?'

583 Suddenly I felt a wave of sadness wash over me, and my
584 appetite for badinage drained away.

585 'Savouth, I can't go on. I need to get away for a while... I need
586 a change of scenery. I'm going to sell part of my printer's and go
587 and hide out in London for a few months, learn English... It's
588 what I've always wanted to do anyway, but the opportunity has
589 never presented itself. And I'll use the time to write a novel. I
590 can't take it anymore, the blood and decay...'

591
592 'I don't want to hear any more talk about you going overseas,'
593 Savouth said sharply. 'If guys like you take off, who have we got
594 left?'

595 'Yeah, that's what people have always said. You remember
596 our teacher, Monsieur Combès? A long time ago, maybe in '67, I

en 67... Je lui ai fait part de mon envie de tout plaquer, parce que je ne supportais pas Sihanouk, et de bourlinguer à travers le monde. Il m'a dit la même chose que toi... Mais je ne suis pas Sisyphe. Personne ne peut soutenir à lui seul un univers qui s'écroule.

— Ça, ce sont des mots les plus malheureux et les plus nuisibles. Chacun pense cela au fond de lui-même et notre pays fout le camp. Et toi, ne me parle plus d'aller à l'étranger, plus jamais. Ne t'inquiète pas, tant que je suis là, tu ne risques rien. Si le gouvernement te cherche des ennuis, planque-toi dans le complexe sportif... c'est mon fief, ma citadelle. Personne ne te trouvera dans ce labyrinthe. Là tu pourras pondre à souhait tes conneries, et moi je me chargerai de les écouter. C'est ici, le Cambodge, notre raison de vivre. Et puis, va te faire couper un peu les cheveux, toi le plus brillant des intellectuels cambodgiens, le contraire d'un hippie, d'un hurluberlu.

— Et toi donc ? Pourquoi ne te fais-tu pas raser la barbe ? te prends-tu pour Che Guevara ?

— La barbe c'est noble... Je dois te quitter à présent, j'ai à faire. Au revoir, Diogène. Demain soir au Hoa Koan.

597 confided in him my aspiration to leave everything behind and go
598 travelling around the world, because I didn't support Sihanouk.
599 He said the same thing as you... But I'm not Sisyphus. No one can
600 hold up a crumbling world on their own.'

601

602 'Those are the most disheartening, most damaging words you
603 could say. Everyone feels that way deep down and our country is
604 going to hell. Don't you say another word to me about going
605 abroad, never again. Don't worry yourself; as long as I'm here,
606 you're not in danger. If the government are giving you trouble,
607 hide out in the sports complex... It's my fief, my fortress. No one
608 will find you in that labyrinth. There you can churn out your
609 bullshit to your heart's content, and I'll make it my job to listen
610 to it. Our raison d'être is here, Cambodia. And then go and get a
611 haircut – you look like a hippie or a crackpot, not the country's
612 most brilliant intellectual.'

613 'What about you? Why don't you shave that beard? Who do
614 you think you are, Che Guevara?'

615 'Hey, it's a noble beard... I have to go now. I've got stuff to do.
616 *Au revoir*, Diogenes. See you tomorrow night at Hoa Koan.'

— Au revoir, fils de pute.

Et il partit précipitamment. Il quitta si vite notre salon que je ne m'en aperçus même pas. Un énorme aquarium surplombait l'escalier. Lorsque Savouth l'eut dépassé, et qu'il dévala les marches quatre à quatre, un lourd pressentiment me vint. Se glissa en moi une angoisse indéfinissable à m'en couper la respiration. Je fus envahi d'inquiétude sur son sort, le sort de cet homme qui m'aimait tant, et qui prenait soin de moi comme de son petit frère. Je ressentis pour lui une inexplicable compassion. Je m'étais mis à l'aimer plus qu'un ami, plus qu'un frère... et je te jure, ma chérie, comme un amant, oui comme un amant, sans être pédé, sans me faire sodomiser ou le sodomiser, ou en avoir envie. Non, Sodome n'est pas ma ville élue, même si le Cambodge a flambé comme Sodome, même si ce type-là était beau comme Antinoüs, rude mais élégant, tout en muscles mais d'une souplesse une féline. Une démarche de danseur. Non, je te jure chérie. Je suis foncièrement, incurablement misogyne, c'est d'accord. Comment puis-je-ne pas l'être ? Je te le dirai plus tard et te dis en attendant que les femmes ne sont qu'objets à tripoter. Elles aiment toutes se faire tripoter, mais elles ne

617 'Au revoir, you son of a bitch.'

618 And he rushed off. He left the room so quickly that I didn't
619 even see him go. An enormous aquarium towered over the
620 staircase. As soon as Savouth passed it, taking the stairs four at a
621 time, I was overcome by a heavy sense of foreboding. An
622 indefinable anguish settled on my chest, such that I couldn't
623 breathe. I was seized by anxiety about his fate, the fate of this
624 man who had always loved me so, who had always looked after
625 me like I was his little brother. I felt an inexplicable compassion
626 for him. I had grown to love him as more than a friend, more
627 than a brother... like a lover, I swear to you, *ma chérie*, like a
628 lover, without being queer, without being sodomised by him or
629 sodomising him, or wanting to. No, Sodom isn't my city of
630 choice, even if Cambodia did go up in flames like Sodom, and
631 even if the guy was as handsome as Antinous, rugged yet
632 elegant, brawny yet as supple as a leopard. With the gait of a
633 dancer. No, I swear to you, *chérie*. I'm fundamentally, incurably
634 misogynistic, that's for sure. How could I not be? I'll tell you now
635 and I'll tell you again later, women are nothing but objects to
636 play with. They all like to be played with, but they only return the

branlent que sur demande. Ces poupées-là, elles jouissent quand on les tripote. L'inverse n'est jamais vrai. Elles ne jouissent pas en tripotant. Et puis, tu sais, je n'aime pas leurs petites cervelles d'oiseau, bourrées de confitures, qui ne pépient que des platitudes. Je les méprise royalement, et leur compagnie m'ennuie à mourir. Aussi, les femmes je les baise... après je prends une douche et je fume une cigarette. Mais la plupart du temps, je me mêle aux hommes... J'aime leur commerce, c'est tout.

À l'instant précis où Savouth s'éloignait de moi à grands pas, je me surpris à esquisser un geste de regret traduisant une envie insurmontable de l'embrasser, de l'étouffer dans mes bras. Je m'étais levé à mon insu et je le suivis, ou plutôt le poursuivis. Mais déjà il s'engouffrait dans sa voiture, une petite Toyota... Et alors le spectacle me glaça d'horreur. Son corps était là ; mais sa tête ne se trouvait nulle part. Comme un fou, comme un type qui perd l'esprit, j'appelai Savouth de toute la force de mes poumons, agitant mes bras de façon désordonnée. Mais le corps sans tête ne m'entendit ni ne m'attendit ; la petite voiture partit avec une

637 favour on request. These vapid dolls, they only get off when
638 they're being played with. The inverse is never true. They don't
639 get off on playing with someone else. What's more, I don't like
640 their little bird brains, full to the brim with candyfloss, chirping
641 out nothing but platitudes. I utterly despise them, and their
642 company bores me to death. So, women, I screw them, sure...
643 afterwards I take a shower and I smoke a cigarette. But most of
644 my time, I spend with men... I enjoy their society, that's all.

645

646 As Savouth slipped swiftly further and further away, I found
647 myself stirring with regret, betraying my insurmountable desire
648 to hold him close, to smother him in my arms. I rose
649 unconsciously to my feet and followed him, or rather chased
650 after him. But he was already diving into his car, a little Toyota...
651 And what I saw turned my blood to ice. His body was there, but
652 his head was nowhere to be seen. Like a man possessed, I called
653 out to Savouth at the top of my lungs, waving my arms in a
654 frenzy, distraught. But the headless body neither heard me nor
655 waited for me; the little car pulled out with a terrible groan, the

plainte pénible, les pneus crissant sur la terre battue, soulevant un nuage de poussière.

Tous les Cambodgiens savent bien que lorsqu'un type est vu sans tête par l'un de ses proches, c'est que le démon est en train de s'emparer de son esprit. Il mourra dans trois jours au plus tard, ou bien d'un accident, ou bien par suicide, si on n'organise pas immédiatement tout un jeu complexe de rites, de cérémonies religieuses pour désamorcer le sortilège. Il faut une assemblée d'au moins cinq bonzes pour réciter certains versets bouddhistes purificateurs qui chassent le démon ou le mauvais esprit. En même temps les villageois doivent découper un tronc de bananier, et frapper avec violence le corps de la victime, pour l'exorciser, jusqu'à ce qu'il soit délivré.

Une demi-heure plus tard, rongé d'angoisse, je téléphonai à Savouth pour le persuader d'organiser chez lui une cérémonie religieuse, et pour lui demander surtout de ne pas sortir le lendemain parce que, prétendis-je, j'avais fait un mauvais rêve le concernant. « Tu es fou ? » me répondit-il. Et il m'envoya promener. Ce fut notre dernier échange.

656 tires screeching on the battered earth, throwing up a cloud of
657 dust.

658 Every Cambodian knows that when a man is seen without a
659 head by one of his loved ones, it means the devil is taking
660 possession of his spirit. He will die within the next three days,
661 whether accidentally or by his own hand, unless a complex set of
662 rites and religious ceremonies are immediately organised to
663 break the curse. An assembly of at least five monks is required to
664 recite certain purifying Buddhist verses that drive out the devil or
665 bad spirit. At the same time, the victim's fellow villagers need to
666 cut up the trunk of a banana tree and exorcise him by thrashing
667 his body until he is liberated.

668
669 Half an hour later, consumed with anguish, I called Savouth to
670 persuade him to organise a religious ceremony at his house and
671 implored him not to go out the following day, claiming I'd had a
672 bad dream about him. 'Have you lost your mind?' he replied.
673 And he sent me on my way. That was the last time I ever heard
674 his voice.

Part II

Critical Analysis

Introduction

I.1 *L'Anarchiste* in Context

The source text (ST) translated and analysed in this dissertation is an excerpt from the second half of the Francophone novel *L'Anarchiste*, written by Cambodian author Soth Polin and published in 1980 by Parisian publisher La Table Ronde (with a second edition in 2011). The book's bipartite structure was brought about by the publisher's request that Soth write an original novella to accompany their publication of his self-translation of his controversial Khmer-language novella, *Showing My Ass with No Mercy* (ចំតឹតតតអាសួរ, 1967), the latter of which constitutes the book's first half (Deville 2011: 11).

The new novella was written at a fraught time in both the author's life and the lives of all Cambodians, and this trauma of both personal and national proportions is inextricably woven into its fabric. Living as an exile in France after fleeing Cambodia in 1974 to escape retribution for publishing an exposé on a government-ordered assassination, Soth wrote the semi-autobiographical novella in just three months in 1979 after learning that his father had died under the brutal Khmer Rouge regime (Soth 2015a: n.p.). The radical communist group ruled Cambodia under the leadership of Pol Pot from 1975 to 1979, during which time they perpetrated a genocide that caused the deaths of an estimated 1.5 to 2 million people, many of whom were intellectuals (Dam 2021: 1). Soth is thought to be one of only three or four Cambodian authors to have survived, of a total of approximately 200 (Deville 2011: 7).

Though the spectre of the genocide looms large in *L'Anarchiste*, it is the years preceding it that take centre stage as the protagonist Virak recounts the events of 1963 and 1974 in the form of a monologue delivered to an audience of one: the dead English passenger of the taxi he has just crashed on the banks of the Seine. Strong parallels with Soth's own life emerge as Virak describes preparing a special edition of his newspaper to expose the government's role in the assassination of his close friend, the Minister of Education, blaming himself for precipitating the fall of the pro-United States, anti-communist Khmer Republic (1970–1975) and paving the way for the rise of Pol Pot.

Indeed, Soth's work has never shied away from the political, with the eight Khmer-language novels he published during the 1960s frequently taking aim at the government

headed by the former king, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, in their portrayal of social tensions (Keo 2019: 116). In 1969, Soth lost his job as an editor at his uncle's newspaper when it was shut down amidst threats of arrest from Prince Sihanouk, leading him to found his own newspaper and publishing house, *Nokor Thom*, which he ran until his departure in 1974 (Soth and May 2006: 112).

Though *L'Anarchiste* was his first French-language novel, Soth spoke French fluently from a young age, having been born into a middle-class family ten years before the end of the French protectorate in Cambodia (1863–1953) (Ntoumos 2015: 334), and peppered his Khmer works with French phrases and quotations. Its status as perhaps the only surviving Francophone Cambodian novel of its era is just one of the qualities that mark out *L'Anarchiste* as an incredibly rare and important book, written by 'the most celebrated living Khmer writer' (Macquet 2003: 202, quoted in Keo 2019: 122). Almost no Cambodian first-person accounts of the period preceding the Khmer Rouge era, fictionalised or otherwise, are available in English. Yet thus far the book's only full-length translation has been into Italian (*L'anarchico*, 2019).¹

I.2 Translation Brief

The translation has been produced as a sample to be included as part of a pitch for a translation of the full book to a suitable UK publisher. A number of considerations went into the selection of a publisher: the book's limited commercial potential in the present UK market, its historical South-East Asian setting, its multilinguality, the presence of paratextual apparatus such as footnotes, and the unsuitability of a translation masquerading as an original English-language work. Independent publisher Balestier Press was identified as a good fit due to its focus on Asian literature in translation, its director Roh-Suan Tung's willingness to publish titles lacking in 'market support' via alternative funding methods such as crowdfunding (Balestier Press n.d.) and his conceptualisation of a book as 'an art form created by writers and translators together' (Harman 2018: n.p.), which is reflected in the presence of translations with prominently featured paratextual apparatus (such as translator's notes and commentary) in the publisher's list. The book would be in keeping with other titles in their World Literature series and would be well-placed to reach its target

¹ Two extracts (preceding the extract chosen for the ST) have been published in English – see Soth 2015a and 2015b.

audience consisting both of readers with a general interest in translated Asian historical fiction and those with a more specific interest in Cambodian history.

No translation technologies were used in the production of the translation.

I.3 Outline

The critical analysis is divided into two chapters, each exploring issues raised by the translation of a multicultural, multilingual text written predominantly in an ex-colonial language. Chapter 1 tackles the ethical transfer of cultural and linguistic hybridity in a complex postcolonial context, one in which the French language has assumed new significance as a site of resistance. Chapter 2 continues this thread with a shift in focus to intertextuality, highlighting what is achieved by the co-existence of Western and Eastern literature and philosophies in the text and arguing that the substitution of target culture references is an unsuitable strategy in this context. The analysis concludes with a reflection on the translation process and the unique case study offered by the book in translation, considering how this can contribute to further research in Translation Studies.

Chapter 1

Linguistic and Cultural Hybridity

1.1 Introduction

During his time in Paris studying for a master's in Social Science at the Sorbonne in 1968, Soth Polin wrote of his 'grandiose and crazy dream ... to imperatively become an author in the French language' (quoted in Deville 2011: 10; my translation).² Upon his return to Cambodia, against a backdrop of the 'Khmerization' initiative designed to eliminate the lingering presence of French from the education system, he continued writing in Khmer, albeit with the inclusion of French epigraphs and phrases (Keo 2019: 125). But the complex nature of his desire to one day be known as an author in the ex-colonial language intensified exponentially when he returned to France in 1974 as an exile on the eve of the accession of a regime in which knowledge of French (or indeed any foreign language) was grounds for execution (Dam 2021: 4).

Inexorably cut-off from his homeland but compelled to depict it, Soth produced *L'Anarchiste* for metropolitan French readers through a combination of self-translation and original French-language writing. But the act of self-translation was arguably not confined to the pre-existing material alone, with composition of the second half likely involving the 'exercise in mental translation' (wa Thiong'o 2009, quoted in Polezzi 2012: 350) many postcolonial migrant authors undertake (ibid.), involving 'transposition' not just of language but of a whole culture unfamiliar to the intended readership (Tymoczko 1998: 20, 23). This entails selection of 'aspects of the home culture to convey and to emphasize', to simplify or to explicate (ibid.: 23), particularly in handling culturally specific items (CSIs) with no equivalent in the target culture, resulting in the employment of strategies familiar to professional translators such as 'orthographic adaptation' (i.e., transliteration) and explanatory intratextual and extratextual glosses (e.g., footnotes) (Aixelá 1996: 61-62) – all of which can be identified in *L'Anarchiste*. Indeed, the substantially reduced number of footnotes in the second half compared to the first suggests significant simplification took place during composition to aid accessibility for the French audience.

² '[U]n rêve grandiose et fou : celui de devenir impérativement un écrivain de langue française'.

The presence of transliterated terms and proper names is just one manifestation of the ‘heterolingualism’ (Grutman 2006: 18) frequently observed in postcolonial texts; other materialisations vary in subtlety from the inclusion of quotations, intertextual allusions,³ ‘proverbs, aphorisms and idioms’ (Chan 2002: 64) to the active reshaping or ‘contamination’ of the colonial language through modified use of syntax and lexis (Rizzardi 2013: 184), along with myriad other ‘hybridization processes [which] become ... both the means and the message of the narration’ (ibid.: 185). This hybridisation results in a ‘language “in between”’ (Mehrez 1992: 121) that poses a significant challenge for translators of such texts, not least in its troubling of any theory framing translation as the transfer of a monolingual text from one language to another (Chan 2002: 50). Yet the fundamental role of multilingualism in the creation of meaning in postcolonial texts necessitates its retention in translation. In the case of *L’Anarchiste*, the status of the ex-colonial language in the text is further complicated by the new significance it assumed during the Khmer Rouge regime. After a review of the relevant literature on the translation of hybrid postcolonial texts, this chapter will demonstrate how these challenges were tackled through an application of the ethical approaches proposed by Antoine Berman and Lawrence Venuti tailored to the book’s unique circumstances.

1.2 Translating In-Betweenness

Just as Mehrez writes of a ‘language “in between”’ which ‘subvert[s] hierarchies’ (1992: 121), postcolonial migrant authors like Soth can be said to inhabit a place of ‘permanent in-betweenness’ (Cavagnoli 2013: 167) which, when represented on the page, subversively ‘disrupt[s] the myth of the ... separateness of cultures’ (Martín Ruano 2003: 192). The question of how to translate hybrid texts without displacing them from this ‘intercultural space’ (ibid.: 191) and thus undermining their destabilising impact is therefore a critical one for translators seeking to avoid ‘wasting the savory, hybrid fruits born of the encounter of multiple languages and cultures’ (Cavagnoli 2013: 171).

A fruitful point of departure is Bhabha’s conception of this in-between space at ‘the cutting edge of translation and renegotiation’ as a Third Space which ‘carries the burden of the meaning of culture’ (1994/2004: 38-39), ‘located between existing referential systems’

³ See Chapter 2.

and cultures (Wolf 2000: 135, 139). Indeed, Wolf suggests ‘the Third Space is ... the potential location and starting point for postcolonial translation strategies’ from which interventionist creativity can blossom (ibid.: 135, 139); here, in Bhabha’s words, ‘symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity’, meaning ‘the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew’ (2004: 37). Cavagnoli also extols the ‘creative potential of liminal space’, calling for translators of hybridity to deviate from established publishing norms and commit to ‘the ethical aim of the translating act, that is, to receive the Foreign as Foreign (Berman 2004: 277)’ (2013: 172).

In practice this entails resisting the temptation (or instruction) to impose order in place of a text’s ‘perceived chaos’, destroying the author’s ‘idiolect’ and ‘idiosyncrasy’ (Grutman 2006: 21) to bring the writing in line with dominant norms Berman has branded ‘ethnocentric’ (2004: 278) – the very norms many postcolonial authors have sought to defy and disrupt in their writing. Instead, ‘a certain respect of the original’ must take priority (Berman 1995: 92; my translation),⁴ involving the use of such strategies as literal translation, non-translation, the creation of neologisms, the ‘exploitation of etymology’ and the ‘stretching of the meaning of words’ and of language in general (Rizzardi 2013: 189) so the reader is simultaneously forced ‘to perceive the foreign author as foreign’ (Berman 1999: 62, quoted in translation in ibid.) and confronted with ‘the hybridity of [their] mother tongue and the heterogeneity of national space’ (Bhabha 1990: 203, cited in Prasad 1998: 55). The application of such strategies alongside those proposed by Venuti will be illustrated in Section 1.3.

This principle of respect extends to the retention of CSIs from both cultures, which contribute to conveying ‘the cultural schizophrenia characteristic of the hybrid condition’ to readers (Martín Ruano 2003: 196). However, the treatment of CSIs from the colonising culture, familiar to the original intended readership, presents an additional challenge upon translation to a third culture in which they are almost as foreign as those of the colonised culture, as will be explored in Section 1.4.

⁴ ‘[U]n certain respect de l’original’.

1.3 Linguistic Hybridity

The representation of the French in *L'Anarchiste* is neither entirely critical nor entirely favourable, as Virak condemns French journalists for their role in the ascent of the Khmer Rouge (pp. 160-70), is left by his wife for a Frenchman (p. 248) and punches a despicable French ethnographer (p. 251), but also wishes he had been born during the 'security' ('sécurité') of the 'golden age' ('époque dorée') of the French protectorate (p. 257), despite considering himself a nationalist. In light of the close author–protagonist relationship, the latter regret offers some insight into Soth's complex relationship with the ex-colonial language. Though transliterated and translated Khmer is interwoven throughout *L'Anarchiste* (typically in italics or quotes), the French used is that of the metropole, demonstrating the ability to be 'more French than the French' (Fanon 1963, quoted in Rizzardi 2013: 182) through the employment of an extensive literary vocabulary combined with expert use of slang (not to mention the abundant intertextual references analysed in Chapter 2). Yet the juxtaposition of the two languages by a Cambodian author in a largely Cambodian setting powerfully 'deterritorializes' (Martín Ruano 2003: 192) the French, 'debunking the myth ... of language (singular) as the ultimate marker of a fixed identity' (Polezzi 2012: 354).

In light of the integral role of French in Soth's identity as an author, reflected in its presence in even his Khmer *oeuvre*, and its status as a site of resistance against the Khmer Rouge, to strip the text of it entirely in translation would be an act of violence, concealing his bilingualism, his defiance against Pol Pot and the linguistic 'mark of the torments and tribulations of history' (Cavagnoli 2013: 166). Interweaving French throughout the translation through the application of techniques proposed by Berman and Venuti was therefore essential in attempting an ethical translation. This will be illustrated in this section after a brief examination of the treatment of English, the third language present in the text.⁵

1.3.1 English

As Grutman highlights, when an embedded foreign language in the ST is the language of the target text (TT), transferring this unchanged means the 'elements that signalled Otherness ... [risk] being read as "familiar"' (2006: 22). Creative intervention is therefore necessary to

⁵ The ST extract was chosen for its suitability to be read in isolation as representative of the book's narrative and unfortunately contains little transliterated Khmer.

retain an indication of the ‘balancing act between languages’ present in the original (ibid.: 23), whether through typographic variation, an inversion of the languages involved or a direct reference to the language in question. The latter option, facilitated in this case by repeated reference to the foreign setting, is illustrated in Example 1.1:

Example 1.1 (lines 470-472)

ST: « *Impeachment* » signifiait pour nous apocalypse !

LT*: ‘Impeachment’ meant apocalypse for us!

TT: For us, the English word ‘impeachment’ meant ‘apocalypse’!

* *Literal translation*

1.3.2 French

Venuti’s ethics of difference, framed by Bandia as an evolution of Berman’s ethics with a shared foundation of Schleiermacher’s work but an increased focus on ‘resistance’ and ‘dissidence’ (2001: 129), espouses the use of foreignising strategies to ‘restrain the [inevitable] ethnocentric violence of translation’ (1995/2008: 20). Much like the strategies proposed by Berman, foreignisation aims to ‘[send] the reader abroad’ by accentuating that which is foreign to the target culture and language, thereby ‘stag[ing] ... an alien reading experience’ (ibid.). Yet Venuti’s work typically presupposes a monolingual ST whose ethical translation entails resistance to hegemonic colonial languages and cultures (1998: 135). *L’Anarchiste* therefore offers an interesting case study in that the selective application of foreignising techniques to the ex-colonial language alongside the ‘dominated’ language actually serves to achieve Venuti’s goals of ‘evok[ing] the history of [the minor language’s] domination’ (ibid.: 137) and ‘reflect[ing] the foreign writer’s personality’ (1995/2008: 1).

Borrowing (or non-translation) is one of the primary techniques in the foreignising toolkit and involves retaining source language terms or expressions from the ST, either to ‘overcome a lacuna’ or, as in this case, to add ‘an element of local colour’, in Vinay and Darbelnet’s terms (1995: 31-32). The frequent use of this technique without explicitation in the TT was facilitated by the relatively high levels of exposure to basic French among English speakers, particularly in a UK context, although lexical items that do not convey plot-essential information were generally selected to avoid compromising understanding, and

italics were used to distinguish borrowed language not accepted into English. For example, terms of address used for the English passenger were retained, such as ‘ma petite Anglaise’ (lit. ‘my little Englishwoman’, l. 142), ‘chère Anglaise’ (lit. ‘dear Englishwoman’, l. 156) and ‘ma petite amie’ (lit. ‘my little [female] friend’, l. 174), to emphasise that Virak is addressing her in a language other than her mother tongue. Valedictions (‘adieu’, l. 438; ‘au revoir’, l. 616) and other easily recognisable phrases (e.g., ‘ça va’, l. 157) were also transferred untranslated, along with accepted loan words and phrases such as ‘faux pas’ (l. 496) and ‘coup de grâce’ (l. 381). On one occasion, the borrowing of the French word for motorbike, ‘moto’ (l. 25), doubles as a transliteration of the Khmer word with the same meaning, adopted from French (WordSense Dictionary n.d.).

At times, an equivalent French word or phrase that would be more familiar to English speakers was substituted in place of borrowing to facilitate comprehension. For example, ‘raison d’être’ (l. 610) took the place of ‘raison de vivre’ (lit. ‘reason for living’) and ‘merde’ (lit. ‘shit’, l. 342) was used in place of ‘putain’, a stronger expletive that would be less recognisable. Some use of slang required explanation if it was to be preserved, as with ‘les Ricains’, the French equivalent of the sometimes derogatory ‘Yanks’ in a UK context, as shown in Example 1.2:

Example 1.2 (lines 332-333)

ST: [C]'était un coup d'État mijoté par les « Ricains ».

LT: It was a coup d'état cooked up by the ‘Yanks’.

TT: [I]t was all a coup d'état cooked up by the Yanks – *les Ricains*, as the French call them.

This use of an intratextual gloss (Aixelá 1996: 61-62) contributes to a wider translation strategy situating Virak – and, by extension, Soth – as an expert on French culture, into which he offers insights for his English passenger and, by extension, the English-speaking reader, as will be explored further in Section 1.4.

The final foreignising strategy utilised was the insertion of French loan words and expressions accepted into English in the TT where not present in the ST to increase the presence of French and augment the overall effect: for example, ‘bourgeois’ (l. 66) was used

to translate 'de la haute' (lit. 'high-class'), 'à la mode' (l. 250) to translate 'dans le vent' (lit. 'trendy') and 'et voilà' (l. 333) to translate 'et pan' (lit. 'and bang').

1.4 Cultural Hybridity

In seeking to maintain the text's position in an 'intercultural space' (Martín Ruano 2003: 191) and to preserve Soth's 'idiosyncrasy' (Grutman 2006: 21) as part of an ethical translation, it was necessary to retain elements of not only the two key languages at play in the original but also the two key cultures. This section will examine the treatment of each set of CSIs in turn, arguing for the importance of respecting decisions made in the act of composition as self-translation and the unsuitability of substituted target culture CSIs in place of those from the colonising culture.

1.4.1 Cambodian CSIs

As Tymoczko highlights, the choices made by postcolonial authors in 'transposing a culture' may be 'constrained ... by history, myth, ideology, patronage and affiliation' (1998: 22), with patronage in this case relating to the conditions of the publisher's support for the project. This makes the selective explanation of CSIs significant, in that the author's decision to leave certain CSIs unexplained for the Western reader – or to provide only sparing explanation – may have involved resisting editorial intervention on these points, either to avoid overburdening the reader with information or to decline to provide them with a comfortable reading experience in which every foreign item or practice was made digestible (almost literally in the case of eating animals such as rats, snakes and dogs – see lines 546-548). Preserving the balance of explanation and non-explanation deliberately constructed by the author was therefore fundamental to attempting an ethical translation that recreated the desired effect for the modern-day English-speaking reader, whose average familiarity with Cambodian culture can reasonably be assumed to be as – if not more – limited than that of 1980s French speakers.

Thus no new footnotes or intratextual glosses were inserted for Cambodian CSIs (such as politician's names, place names like 'Oudong' and 'Kampong Cham' and food items) and no additional information was included in the translation of footnotes (see pp. 10, 14, 38). The only adaptation made was the conversion of francs to pounds sterling in the case of a footnote providing an equivalent to Cambodian riel (transferred from the book's first half

(p. 42) for the purposes of the extract – see p. 37), to provide the English-speaking reader with equal insight.

1.4.2 French CSIs

At the time of the book's publication in France, the inclusion of French CSIs from popular culture and history could be seen as an example of the postcolonial exile's 'act of mimicry', framed by Bhabha (1994/2004) as 'an act of defiance and destabilization for the host country' that would have confronted readers subscribing to colonial discourse with 'the possibility of the "Other's" closeness to the "I"' and thus precluded a focus solely on the author's difference (Dascalu 2007: 13). Replacing these with parallel target culture CSIs through the strategy of 'synonymy' (Aixelá 196: 63) – by substituting the British cowboy comic character Desperate Dan for the Belgian cowboy comic character Lucky Luke (l. 574), for example – would therefore be highly problematic in its stripping away of Soth's hybrid identity and relationship with French culture. Furthermore, not only would such anachronisms compromise the text's integrity as a historical document for the sub-section of target readers seeking to receive it as such, they would also risk creating either a 'credibility gap' (Nedergaard-Larsen 1993: 234) or a false impression for other readers in drawing connections to English-language cultural products.

French CSIs were therefore handled in one of three ways: 1) retained without explanation where surrounding context was sufficient (e.g., 'Deuxième Bureau', l. 32); 2) retained with an extratextual gloss in a footnote where no context was provided in-text (e.g., 'Lucky Luke', l. 574); or 3) retained with an intratextual gloss where the delivery of this fell naturally within the rhythm of the monologue (see Example 1.3).

Example 1.3 (lines 251-253)

ST: Les gens qui ne sont pas de gauche sont des buveurs de sang.

LT: People who aren't on the left are drinkers of blood.

TT: Anyone not on the left was branded a *buveur de sang*, a blood-drinker, harking back to the French Revolution.

A similar example occurs in line 121 in the retention of the use of the word 'maquisards' to refer to Khmer Rouge guerrillas, a common practice in the French news coverage of the era which is significant in its potentially favourable connection to the bands of French

Resistance fighters called ‘maquisards’ during WWII. The use of this approach is integral to the broader translation strategy mentioned in Section 1.3, positioning Virak as an expert on French culture and history in relation to his English listener(s) in order to preserve evidence of Soth’s in-depth familiarity with it. This also serves to counteract the impression that could be generated through the scattering of recognisable French phrases throughout the text that Virak/Soth is merely a foreigner to France testing out a limited repertoire of French expressions, rather than a true bilingual, more accurately representing his position at ‘the crossroads’ of two cultures (Bhabha 1984: 130).

1.5 Conclusion

Despite the terrible circumstances surrounding its composition, *L’Anarchiste’s* publication represented the fulfilment of the lofty dream Soth had expressed some twelve years earlier: to become a Francophone author. Perhaps then his experience of writing predominantly in the ex-colonial language was not only one of ‘loss, or even betrayal’ of his mother tongue, but also one of ‘greater freedom and a wider choice’ (Polezzi 2012: 351), particularly during the oppressive Khmer Rouge regime. With 90 percent of the book taking place in Cambodia, his hard-won status as a Francophone author could easily have been lost in translation for its English-speaking readers, relegated to a footnote along with any clue to the historical roots of his bilingualism. As this chapter has demonstrated, capturing the hybrid postcolonial identity of both the author and the text – along with an echo of its impact on the original target reader – therefore required not only the respectful transfer of Khmer elements and their treatment in self-translation but also the retention of French CSIs, words and phrases through an application of Berman’s and Venuti’s ethical approaches to this unique manifestation of Bhabha’s Third Space.

Chapter 2

Intertextuality

2.1 Introduction

In adapting *L'Anarchiste* for the stage, playwright Jean-Baptiste Phou described having to conduct extensive research on 'the historical and political context, the journalistic handling of the events of the time, philosophy and mythology, to which the author unceasingly makes reference' (quoted in Barrière 2014: n.p.; my translation).⁶ Indeed, as Batchelor writes of Alain Mabanckou's work, *L'Anarchiste* is 'characterized by an intense intertextuality' (2013: 196), necessitating similarly extensive research on the part of the translator tasked with transferring such references. Speziari (2016: 9) posits that the first clue to this resides in the title itself, which has parallels with André Gide's *L'Immoraliste* [The Immoralist] (1902) that extend into the book's confessional narrative structure and close author–narrator relationship, suggesting the titular echo is more than coincidence. Speziari (*ibid.*: 7-10) further identifies connections to the work of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Sophocles and Buddha, while Edwards notes influences such as Pierre de Ronsard and Nou Hach (Soth 2015b: n.p.). Soth Polin himself has cited the influence of both 'Occidental' and 'Oriental' 'philosophers and thinkers', describing how, after studying the works of Albert Camus, Sartre and Nietzsche, 'their ideas came to [him] as if they were [his] own' in his writing (Soth and May 2006: 111, 112).

This 'palimpsestuous' (Prince 1997: ix) quality of literary texts resulting from their ties to pre-existing texts, or 'hypotexts' (*ibid.*), is the essence of the concept of intertextuality. As Federici highlights, it is a key component in novels' creation of meaning, constituting 'not only a rhetorical device but the kernel of the plot' (2007: 153). Furthermore, in the context of a postcolonial text, it is partly through the blending of allusions to texts from both the colonising and colonised cultures that the author 'reclaims and recentres a multiple linguistic and cultural identity' (*ibid.*: 157). The translator of a highly intertextual postcolonial text is therefore faced with the challenge of maintaining the

⁶ '[L]e contexte historique, politique, le traitement journaliste des faits de l'époque, la philosophie et la mythologie dont l'auteur fait sans cesse référence'.

discursive presence of these ‘subtle intertextual networks’ (ibid.: 153), navigating an area of translation that Hatim – along with many others – warns is ‘particularly problematic’ (1997: 29). After presenting a relevant selection of the scholarly literature on intertextuality, both more broadly and in postcolonial literature specifically, this chapter will explore the unique case study offered by *L’Anarchiste* and its translation, demonstrating the unsuitability of substituted target culture references – referred to by Venuti as ‘receiving intertexts’ (2009: 172) – in this context and outlining the strategies employed as a result.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Of the two conceptualisations of intertextuality identified in the literature by Batchelor, the first in which ‘intertextuality is viewed as a quality of all texts’ in relation to their predecessors and the second in which its ‘scope ... is more limited’ (2013: 200), it will be helpful to focus on the latter conception, which frames intertextuality as ‘a literary device very consciously and deliberately deployed by the author’ (ibid.), involving literary references to specific texts which create what Bakhtin classifies as ‘horizontal’ intertextual relations (1986, quoted in Hatim 1997: 30). This ‘more structuralist’ approach is represented in the work of French textual theorists Gérard Genette and Michael Riffaterre (Weir 2006: 2). Of the sub-categories of intertextuality identified by Genette, the most relevant to us here are ‘*quoting* (with quotation marks, with or without specific references)’ and ‘*allusion*’, implicit references to another text which must be identified to grasp the text’s ‘full meaning’ (1997: 2, emphasis in original). Similar categories are included in Hatim and Mason’s (2001: 132) typology, along with clichés, self-quotation, conventionalisms, proverbs and mediation. Allusions are explored in detail by Riffaterre, who describes every word in a text as ‘the tip of the proverbial iceberg’ (1981: 6; my translation).⁷ ‘The trace of the intertext’ can be detected through phrasal anomalies he calls ‘ungrammaticalities’, entailing a deviation from the norms of grammar, morphology, syntax, semantics or semiotics which results in a phrase that is ‘inexplicable by context alone’ (ibid.: 5).⁸

While readers falling into Umberto Eco’s ‘model reader’ category (1979, quoted in Venuti 2009: 170) may recognise allusions on first reading, for others the presence of these ‘ungrammaticalities’ signals the need for a ‘retroactive reading’ to unlock the deeper

⁷ ‘[L]a pointe de l’iceberg proverbial’.

⁸ ‘[L]a trace de l’intertexte’, ‘agrammaticalités’, ‘inexplicable par le seul contexte’.

meaning or 'hypogram' (Riffaterre 1978, quoted in Kuleli 2014: 208; my translation). Riffaterre divides references into 'ordinary intertextuality' and 'obligatory intertextuality' depending on the depth of background knowledge required to understand them, with the former requiring little while the latter require significantly more (1978, quoted in *ibid.*).

Yet determining the source of an allusion is only the first hurdle in its translation, as underscored by Venuti's warning that 'the possibility of translating most foreign intertexts with any completeness or precision is so limited as to be virtually nonexistent' (2009: 172). This difficulty arises from the 'decontextualization' entailed by transplanting a text into an entirely different network of established cultural and linguistic associations and connotations (*ibid.*: 158, 161). As a result of this shift into a new context, a 'close rendering' of the allusive words will not evoke the same connections for the target culture reader and may instead 'release' unintended new connections and meanings (*ibid.*: 159, 164) due to differing 'social knowledge' (Hatim and Mason 2001: 129). Varying degrees of 'mediation' are therefore required to transfer each reference, depending on its cultural and 'temporal remoteness' from the setting of translation (*ibid.*: 127-8), and decisions must be made as to 'which aspects of the [semiotic] sign are to be retained and which aspects must be jettisoned' (*ibid.*: 135).

In making such decisions, Hatim and Mason advise first identifying the 'informational', 'intentional' and 'semiotic' status of the reference and then prioritising the retention of its semiotic status (i.e., what it connotes) and 'intentionality' (i.e., the purpose of its inclusion) over its informational content, which may no longer be relevant (*ibid.*: 134-6). Internal coherence and, if possible, 'extra-linguistic' aspects such as genre should also be retained (*ibid.*: 136). Venuti suggests this can be achieved through the 'transformative' substitution of 'receiving intertexts' which 'work only in the translating language and culture', prioritising reader comprehension (2009: 163). However, a consideration of postcolonial intertextuality and the specific postcolonial context of *L'Anarchiste* in Section 2.3 will demonstrate the unsuitability of such an approach here.

2.3 Postcolonial Intertextuality

As Caminero-Santangelo (2005: 1-29) underscores, much of postcolonial intertextuality theory centres around an 'oppositional binary' between the West and its former colonies

(ibid.: 1), with any postcolonial cultural output that engages with Western literature often read exclusively through this lens in a quest to ‘decolonise rather than to recolonise fictions’ through a focus on difference (Brydon and Tiffin 1993: 89, cited in ibid.: 13). Thus intentional use of Western intertexts by postcolonial authors has been framed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) as ‘a particularly effective form of writing back to the imperial centre’ (Caminero-Santangelo 2005: 2), and reappropriation of Western classics has been understood by authors such as Brydon and Tiffin (1993) as ‘parodic or critical revision’, designed to undermine colonial ideology (Caminero-Santangelo 2005: 10).

Yet such a limiting approach can be seen to achieve the opposite of its aim of decolonisation as it positions postcolonial literature as ‘a *supplement* of the dominant culture’s history’ (Choudhury 1996: 316, emphasis in original). Not only does it fail to recognise the wide variety of postcolonial contexts, assuming every former colony shares the same ‘socio-historical concerns’ and relationship with the West (Caminero-Santangelo 2005: 13), it also results in a ‘reductive simplification’ of authors’ reasons for integrating intertexts into their work (ibid.: 16). Though Bhabha’s destabilising ‘act of mimicry’ (1994; see Section 1.4.2) may well play a role, in many cases it is not the sole or primary function of intertextuality (Batchelor 2013: 201).

Indeed, the use of intertextuality in *L’Anarchiste* is first and foremost a manifestation of Soth’s ‘literary diglossia’ (Bandia 2001: 125; my translation)⁹ and philosophy mastery as he flits from the Bible to Buddha to Rousseau in the same breath, drawing on an eclectic mix of texts in Khmer, Chinese, French and English in a ‘synthesis of East and West’ (Speziari 2016: 10; my translation)¹⁰ that reflects his education and interests. The resulting juxtaposition of allusions to the two literary and theological worlds in the monologue without distinguishing between ‘texts that originate from the “centre” and those from the “periphery”’ (Batchelor 2013: 210) certainly offers a powerful challenge to any notion of the superiority of the Western canon founded upon the ‘clear, unassailably self-evident’ separateness of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Said 1993: 216, cited in Caminero-Santangelo 2005: 1). Yet considering that his French literature teacher was none other than Saloth Sâr, the man who would become Pol Pot (Ntoumos 2015: 334), the true target of Soth’s unapologetic fusion of

⁹ ‘[D]iglossie littéraire’.

¹⁰ ‘[U]ne synthèse de l’Orient et de l’Occident’.

frames of reference may have lain much further east. Thus the inclusion of French intertexts may constitute not only the assertion of Soth's 'multiple linguistic and cultural identity' (Federici 2007: 157) but also his defiant self-identification as an intellectual influenced by the West, now hypocritically condemned by the same man who taught him to appreciate Verlaine's poetry (Soth 1980: 43).

The substitution of English-language intertexts for French ones would therefore be inappropriate in most cases in dismantling Soth's carefully constructed network of references and all it signifies. Though attempting to retain the original intertexts inevitably entails some lost connections as a result of 'decontextualization' (Venuti 2009: 158), this was partially counteracted through an application of Hatim and Mason's (2001) approach in an effort to 'decode' (Federici 2007: 157) references for the target reader where necessary (and possible), as will be illustrated in Section 2.4.

2.4 Analysis and Discussion

In this section, examples will be discussed in descending order of the explicitness of the intertextual reference, beginning with attributed and unattributed quotations before progressing to proverbs and, finally, explicit and implicit phrase-level allusions.

2.4.1 Quotations

Just one attributed quotation appears in the ST extract (Example 2.1). The reference is to Rousseau's novel *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and extends beyond the material within quotation marks into the previous sentence, which constitutes an un-signposted, modified quotation from the novel, in which 'absurdité' has been substituted for Rousseau's 'vertu', and 'séjour infernal' for his 'séjour éternel', creating an oppositional echo of the original phrase in the subsequent sentence (highlighted in bold):

Example 2.1 (lines 165-168)

- ST:** Alors l'absurdité qui nous sépara sur cette terre nous unira dans le **séjour infernal**.
Et merde pour Rousseau avec son « **séjour éternel** » et sa vertu.
- TT:** Thus the absurdity that separated us on earth shall unite us in the **infernal abode**.
And to hell with Rousseau with his '**eternal abode**' and his virtue.

The reference's placement in the context of a discussion of hell meant it was not necessary to abandon its informational content in favour of its intentionality (Hatim and Mason 2001: 136), and in light of this and the novel's immense popularity across Europe at the time of its publication (Darnton 1984: 242), little mediation was required in its transfer, allowing for a target text (TT) 'rendering that quote[s] an authoritative translation'¹¹ of the same text (Venuti 2009: 165): *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1997: 610). The resulting use of the old-fashioned and formal 'shall' serves as an 'ungrammaticality' (Riffaterre 1981: 5) in its deviation from the TT's prevailing register, providing the TT reader with a clue absent from the ST and thus partially compensating for the increased remoteness of the intertext.

Later in the same rant, Virak sarcastically quotes Chinese propaganda in support of Mao Tse-tung, combining two popular slogans into one utterance (see Example 2.2). In this case, the genre of propaganda is signposted both by the preceding sentence, which translates literally to 'And long live Mao Tse-tung!', and by the repetition, lexis and imagery in the quote itself, facilitating a literal translation without further explanation. Where multiple translation options presented themselves for a word (e.g., 'master', 'ruler' or 'teacher' for 'maître'), decisions were made based on translations provided in official US government documents (FBIS 1970: A 11), likely reproduced in the Western press at the time, to aid recognisability:

Example 2.2 (lines 170-172)

ST: « Grand maître, grand timonier, grand commandant en chef, président Mao, vous êtes le soleil rouge de notre cœur. »

TT: 'Great teacher, great helmsman, great supreme commander, President Mao, you are the red sun of our heart.'

2.4.2 Proverbs

A further reference to Chinese culture arises when Virak uses a Chinese proverb commonly translated as 'A dead pig is not afraid of boiling water' (Tham 2017: n.p.), though in the ST it is reordered and no equivalent for the word 'dead' is included. The intentionality (Hatim and Mason 2001: 136) of the reference appears to be to emphasise that, as a journalist, he

¹¹ It should be noted that this is course of action is not recommended by Venuti.

cannot allow himself to be daunted by the conflicting pressures he has just described. However, no additional explanation is offered in the ST, so as with the Cambodian CSIs discussed in Section 1.4.1, this authorial decision was respected, along with the omission of 'dead'. The only concession to reader comprehension was to translate 'l'eau chaude' literally as 'hot water' rather than 'boiling water', offering TT readers a clue through employment of a fitting English-language idiom:

Example 2.3 (line 498)

ST: « [C]omme cochon, je ne vais pas craindre l'eau chaude ».

TT: "Like a pig, I won't fear hot water."

2.4.3 Allusions

During a conversation between Virak and his friend Savouth, Savouth speculates that even without the dealings that gave rise to the Watergate scandal, Nixon would still have been re-elected. To assert the futility of such speculation, Virak alludes to a quote from French philosopher Blaise Pascal, commenting 'Ça c'est le nez de Cléopâtre...' (lit. 'That's Cleopatra's nose...', l. 505), evoking for French-speaking readers the full quotation, 'Si le nez de Cléopâtre eût été plus court, toute la face du monde aurait changé' ('If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the entire face of the world would have been changed'; my translation) (1670: fr. 162), and, for a smaller subset, the deterministic historical theory it inspired.¹² The phrase's incongruity signals its allusory nature, but the incompleteness of the reference, if reproduced, would prevent the transfer of its semiotic status and intentionality (Hatim and Mason 2001: 136) for most TT readers, instead assuming a new signification: nonsense. In light of the unsuitability of a target culture intertext, the decision was therefore taken to include a paraphrase of the full quotation in conversational register, incorporating a phrase commonly used with hypothetical 'if' clauses in English to aid comprehension (highlighted in bold):

Example 2.4 (lines 505-506)

TT: "Yeah and if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, **we wouldn't be sitting here** now."

¹² See, e.g., Lively (2002).

The recurring discussion of hell in the extract incorporates a number of allusions to the Bible, either in representing a specific scene or in utilising an oft-repeated biblical phrase. The prevalence of Christianity in the English-speaking world means very little mediation (Hatim and Mason 2001: 127) is required, but correspondence to recognisable phrasing used in a suitable version of the Bible is desirable to ensure allusions hit home. As Venuti underscores, loss is inevitable in the transfer of biblical references due to the varying historical associations of differing translations of the Bible in each language, and the style of the chosen version can ‘widen the gap’ between cultures (2009: 161-2). Considering that the register of these allusions in the ST was not markedly formal or archaic, the *NIV* (originally published in 1978) was therefore selected for its modern style and enduring status as one of the most popular English translations (Rainer 2021: n.d.). Example 2.4 alludes to Job 41:19 (*NIV* 1978/2011) (amended *NIV* quote highlighted in bold):

Example 2.5 (lines 164-166)

ST: [...] dans les flammes torturées que crache Satan-le-dragon.

LT: [...] in the tortured flames that Satan-the-dragon breathes.

TT: [...]in the excruciating **flames streaming from the mouth** of Satan the dragon.

Likewise, ‘souillé la terre’ (l. 383), for which a number of translation options are available (e.g., ‘soiled the earth’), was translated as ‘defiled the land’, a phrase which appears in the *NIV* version of Jeremiah 2:7 and Numbers 35:34 (*NIV* 1978/2011).

The link Virak draws between excrement and sin is also a biblical one (see Morrison 2008: 30), though Soth’s choice of words in expressing this suggests a different intertext: *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* by Guillaume de Deguileville (1331). In quick succession he uses three words that appear as a trio in the iconic poem: ‘ordure’, ‘puants’ and ‘vile’ (‘ors et puans et avillis’ in Old French; de Deguileville 1331/2010: 95):

Example 2.6 (lines 186-190)

ST: [J]e ne me sens à l'aise que dans l'**ordure**. Avec mon âme **vile**, je ne peux me complaire que dans des endroits ténébreux, **puants** [...]

TT: [I] only feel at ease in **filth**. With my **vile** soul, I can only find pleasure wallowing in dark, **stinking** places [...]

As the allusion's presence is extremely subtle, creating no 'ungrammaticalities' (Riffaterre 1981: 5) to disrupt the reading experience or serve as clues, the translations for these words (in bold) were taken from the authoritative English translation of the poem (de Deguileville 1992: 36) to offer a 'trace of the intertext' (Riffaterre 1981: 5) for readers seeking the 'great joy' (Kuleli 2014: 212) of tracking it down.

2.5 Conclusion

As Batchelor highlights, there is a 'marked tendency' in the translation of hybrid texts for 'canonical' intertexts to be retained while 'peripheral' intertexts are removed or replaced, resulting in a new intertextual network which is 'far from politically or ideologically neutral' in its bolstering of the centre (2013: 11). In the context of a translation into English, Venuti's approach of substituting 'receiving intertexts' (2009: 172) therefore appears at odds with his ethics of difference and espousal of foreignising techniques (explored in Chapter 1). This approach was consequently deemed unsuitable in attempting an ethical translation representative of the author's hybrid identity, as this chapter has demonstrated.

However, despite these efforts to maintain balance, it must be acknowledged that, like all translators, I have brought my own 'baggage of literary, linguistic and cultural archives' to bear on the identification and interpretation of literary intertexts and have viewed the text through my own temporally and culturally specific lens (Federici 2007: 152), no doubt resulting in some loss of intertexts. Collaboration with a Cambodian translator to refine the treatment of intertextuality would be a desirable final step to ensure readers are truly transported to Soth's 'literary and cultural world' (ibid.: 155).

Conclusion

The brief envisioned for this project of a translation produced with an independent, translation-focused publisher in mind has facilitated a translation process informed by translation theory that dares to question and subvert the norms of mainstream Western publishing, in which translators are expected to leave no trace of their presence in the text as they transform it into a homogenised facsimile to be received by the target reader as ‘the “original”’ (Venuti 1995/2008: 1). The existence of a publisher like Balestier Press offers hope that it is possible for books like *L’Anarchiste*, so challenging in their ingrained hybridity as to resist any attempts at homogenisation, to see the light of day in English, and in a form that does them justice.

Despite the freedoms afforded by the brief, however, the non-academic publication context meant that the textual-linguistic norm of ‘fluency’ (ibid.: 24) could not be rejected. Nonetheless, I have endeavoured to resist a fluency that irons out the author’s ‘idiosyncrasy’ (Grutman 2006: 21), ‘inscribe[s] foreign texts with English-language values and provide[s] readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other’ (Venuti 1995/2008: 15), as the critical analysis has explored. Its unifying theme has been the ethical translation of postcolonial hybridity – linguistic, cultural and intertextual – in the context of the unique case study offered by *L’Anarchiste*, in which the ex-colonial language and culture is a site of resistance not just against the colonisers but also, more significantly, against home-grown oppressors known internationally by a French name: the Khmer Rouge. While in Chapter 1 Venuti’s foreignising strategies were found to be applicable in such a context, alongside those of his predecessor Berman, Chapter 2 demonstrated that his recommended approach to intertextuality was not. And just as Chapter 1 joined the call for translation theory that engages with multilingual and multicultural texts, Chapter 2 corroborated Caminero-Santangelo’s assertion that analysis of postcolonial literature must break free from the ‘oppositional binary’ of colonised versus coloniser (2005: 1), in both cases appealing for theory that reflects our world’s complex reality.

To that end, an avenue for further research would be a wider analysis of the treatment of CSIs from multiple cultures in the translation of postcolonial or otherwise multicultural texts, especially those where an uneven power dynamic is at play between the cultures involved. This was found to be a gap in the existing scholarship on hybridity in translation, which has thus far largely focused on the treatment of linguistic hybridity, and *L'Anarchiste* offers a useful case study in this regard.

An additional path worthy of investigation would be the translation of semi-autobiographical fiction with historical value and the influence historicity has on the process. After all, part of what makes *L'Anarchiste* such an important book is the new light it casts on the pre-Khmer Rouge years and the road to genocide, an ordeal Cambodia and its people are still recovering from. The book's publication in English could open the door to fresh understandings, as well as offering its author the chance, like his country, to rise like a phoenix from the ashes.¹³

¹³ Adapted from a quote from Soth cited in Deville 2011: 13: 'à l'instar de mon pays, le Kampuchéa, le phénix qui renaît de ses cendres'.

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