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Marlene NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*: There Is No Telling This Story, It Must Be Translated

by *Linda Barone, Roberto Masone*¹

Abstract

Inspired by the text of the legal decision *Gregson vs Gilbert*, known as “the Zong case”, Marlene NourbeSe Philip develops in *Zong!* a chain of poems which tell the murder of 150 African slaves in order to collect insurance money. The unconventional layout of the book, the staggering structure and the whimsical writing strategies adopted by the author constitute a very challenging task for the translator.

In an attempt to translate this book into Italian, or into any language other than English, the translator becomes soon aware of the few chances to preserve the sound, form and linguistic coherence of the ST, losing the “postcolonial clash” between Standard English and African languages and the evocative attitude determined by wordplays and polyvocality throughout the book. The aim of this work is to show how *a* (not *the*, because it is only one among the many possibilities) translation/transformation of this challenging *textus*, can lead or not to a text which successfully combines visual writing and creativity with historical facts, in order to broaden the geography of postcolonial experiences to whom postcolonial is not.

I

Introduction

Starting from the very general assumption that translation should aim at «the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)»² and «reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message»³, some considerations on “equivalence” or “equivalent effect” and on the concept of “faithfulness” in translation are needed.

Nida and Taber argue that only a linguistic translation can be considered “faithful”, because it «is one which only contains elements which can be directly derived from the ST wording, avoiding any kind of explanatory interpolation or cultural adjustment which can be justified on this basis»⁴. Other types of translation which include more than just linguistic elements push the target text away from faithfulness and make the concept of equivalence more complicated. Nida⁵ distinguishes formal equivalence from dynamic equivalence and this binary classification bears a resemblance to the categorization of semantic and communicative translation made by Newmark. The former aims to «render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual

meaning of the original»⁶ while the latter «attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original»⁷. Newmark claims that semantic translation should be used for serious literature and authoritative texts in order to respect the source text and its author as much as possible. However, this respect often implies that many elements of the source language and culture could represent a hurdle for the target audience who is not familiar with the source culture and in these cases equivalence becomes very difficult to obtain. «The more cultural (the more local, the more remote in time and space) a text, the less is equivalent effect even conceivable unless the reader is imaginative, sensitive and steeped in the SL culture»⁸.

The equivalent effect is not easily attainable if a translator wishes to respect the original text and a communicative translation in the field of literature, especially in poetry⁹, is not advisable because it would entail significant changes to the source language and culture resulting in the creation of a different text which is no longer ascribable to the author. How should we treat those texts which are rich in cultural, “local” elements and display, for example, the use of different varieties of language, of puns, of sound effects which are the root of the source language text?

In brief, how can the translator preserve the sound, the sense, the rhythm, the variegation of a text in the transfer from the SL to the TL? Some would suggest a masterly use of the compensation strategy¹⁰ to balance losses and gains, some others would advocate the controversial concept of untranslatability which will be discussed at the end of this paper.

2

Approaching the text

Set to a background of racism, slave trade and violence, *Zong!* by Marlene NourbeSe Philip develops fascinating writing strategies and a continuous, silent bond with translation. The summary which appears on the book’s cover perfectly introduces the historical events, the sources and the writing strategies – the visible ones – adopted by the author.

In November 1781, the captain of the slave ship *Zong* ordered that some 150 Africans be murdered by drowning so that the ship’s owners could collect insurance monies. Relying entirely on the words of the legal decision *Gregson vs Gilbert* – the only extant public document related to the massacre of these African slaves – *Zong!* Tells the story that cannot be told yet must be told. Equal parts song, moan, shout, oath, ululation, curse, and chant, *Zong!* Excavates the legal text. Memory, history, and law collide and metamorphose into poetics of the fragment. Though the innovative use of fugal and counterpointed repetition, *Zong!* becomes an anti-narrative lament that stretches the boundaries of the poetic form, haunting the spaces of forgetting and mourning the forgotten.

The following pages will be dedicated to the analysis of NourbeSe Philip’s poems from the point of view of translation and to possible ways of translating the text while preserving its form, meaning and intentions.

Throughout the book, it is possible to observe the translation from English into English, a canny strategy *uncovered* by Alonso-Breto¹¹, the shaping of a collective memory through writing, the dismembering process of language and bodies, the rebirth, the loss and research for one’s own roots, the eternal rolling to the shore of past and present and other matters

which will be dealt with throughout this paper, whose main aim is to show how difficult it is to translate a text in which culture-bound elements, sounds, a staggering writing full of repetitions, overlapping words, switching, fading fonts and empty spaces play an essential role in fully understanding the writer's intentions.

NourbeSe Philip works on the legal decision *Gregson vs Gilbert* and uses it as a word store to create her poems, a balance between law and poetry, a way of telling a story which is difficult to understand from reading the report which often displays silence, coldness and, at times, also cover-up features. She operates on the legal text by means of several procedures, namely erasure, overlapping, fading out of words and the cut-up technique¹². Discussing these techniques she states

That was when I decided I would rearrange the words as they appeared in the text to fashion the poems. It was as if I had locked myself in the hold of the ship with the "cargo" of bodies, words and memories – all erased by time, by history – the better to find the story that couldn't ever be told, yet had to be told¹³.

and she adds

that the intent of the transatlantic slave trade *was* to mutilate – languages, cultures, people, communities and histories – in the effort of a great capitalist enterprise. And I would argue that erasure is intrinsic to colonial and imperial projects. It's an erasure that continues up to the present¹⁴.

Letters, syllables, sounds, blank spaces – they draw, show and tell the events even though some parts appear meaningless, irrational and confused. In this regard, NourbeSe Philip explains that «the poems resist my attempts at meaning or coherence and, at times, I too approach the irrationality and confusion, if not madness [...] of a system that would enable, encourage even, a man to drown 150 people as a way to maximize profits»¹⁵.

3

The innovative writing in *Zong!*

Efficacy and preciousness of language are among the most distinguishing features of NourbeSe Philip's writing. The unconventional nature of her writing reaches its climax in *Zong!*, as shown in the following excerpt, *Zong! #1*¹⁶, where repetition, form and sonority, imagination and fragmentation, seek to tell the untellable (FIG. 1).

This stuttering writing acts like a slow-motion device. It makes the short journey of the drowning slave last longer. It becomes unhurried, dignified. Right there, in the circle on the centre of the page the body is lying still for a while, in a last battle for life, exhausted. Free at last, the body seems to explode, pouring out the last broken words from the mouth, which, even if "dubbed-dumb" by water, speaks. Death comes and the slave can join his grave, embraced by a foreign mother "l/and" on the seabed, right below the line at the bottom of the page.

As previously stated, visible, superficial themes and techniques are summarized on the book's back cover. As it reads, the book is «relying entirely on the words of the legal decision *Gregson vs Gilbert* – the only extant public document related to the massacre of these African slaves – *Zong!* tells the story that cannot be told yet must be told».

sterling. The first thing NourbeSe Philip achieves is the retrieval of the names of the slaves: lying under the line at the bottom of the page, just like buried bodies, they are written in a very small font as if the reader is looking at them from above, placed on the same level, equal in death. The resistance to any narrative structure, coherence and, thus, sense is expressed by the random rearranging of words here standing for the unnamed Africans listed in the logbook. This is the first of many paradoxes constituting the fundamental reading key of *Zong!*: the only logical connection found in the ledger is given by the indissoluble relation between the slave and *its* price.

Another technique implicitly mentioned is the “cut up”. On page 192 of *Zong!*, NourbeSe Philip writes: «One approach was literally to cut up the text and just pick words randomly». Refined by William S. Burroughs in the 1960s, the cut-up technique gives new life to poetry by cutting poems into pieces and rearranging them so that something new is said¹⁷. In *Zong!*, this stylistic device gains importance from a translation viewpoint and examples of this will be provided in the following paragraph.

4

There is no telling this story, it must be translated

*Love is drowning, in a deep well,
all the secrets, and no one to tell.*

U2, *Love is Blindness*¹⁸

The polyvocality of the book is also achieved through polyphony, a fugal structure that turns the poetry into a song. Just as many songs, written with a clear historical reference, have become universal anthems of peace and non-violent politics (e.g. *Imagine* or *Blowin' in the Wind*, written mainly against the Vietnam war), so *Zong!* acts as an anti slave-trade/racism/violence composition.

In an attempt to translate *Zong!* into Italian, the book presented some insurmountable problems, concerning its untranslatability. The idea of untranslatability came along little by little: the more we tried to translate it into Italian – in the etymological sense, trying to translate both language and experience across the postcolonial borders – the less we felt at ease translating a book that does not want to be read. We felt challenged when we tried to grab this language and catch a minimal sense in order to achieve a coherent translation into Italian.

The title of the paragraph reveals the paradoxical nature of the book, the challenge for the translator: the more we tried to find the matching words, the more we found ourselves diverted by the images that the book reveals, the echoes of past overlapping stories, the fundamental importance of what is not written in the text/accounts ledger: the stories of families killed off and dreams destroyed the humiliation of being unnamed and, also, pages full of empty words displaying a loss of sound and images.

More importantly, if we respected in translation the random rearrangement of the legal decision using the same words, we would certainly preserve the incoherence and nonsense NourbeSe Philip wanted to put at the forefront, but, at the same time, we would conclude with a denial of *that* strategy, given *that* many English words, e.g. “that” metamorphose

themselves into many different Italian words. Thus, the wordplays found in the first part of the book would be totally lost.

The above considerations allow the cut-up technique to be brought back into the analysis. Let us pause for a while on the choices a translator could make to find the Italian equivalent of the word *that* in the “Os” and “Dicta” sections which are the ones in which the legal text is cut up and rearranged.

The following example¹⁹ taken from *Zong! #17* shows the untranslatability – into any language other than English – to which any book featuring this kind of writing technique is subjected (FIG. 2).

FIGURE 2

Zong! #17

there was
 the this
 the that
 the frenzy
 leaky seas &
 casks
 negroes of no belonging
 on board
 no rest
 came the rains
 came the negroes
 came the perils
 came the owners
 master and mariners

Adunni Akanni Akanni Alade Alayande

29

The following list shows the contexts in which *that* appears in *Gregson vs Gilbert* (FIG. 3).

Once the legal text is translated, this list could help the translator choose the word according to the context. But, actually, this is impossible because of more specular reasons. In the case above, *Zong! #17*, translating *that* into the Italian conjunction *che* would be the right

FIGURE 3

thrown overboard, it was held that these facts did not support a statement in the declaration, that by the perils of the seas, and the water on board was spent, that some of the negroes died for water. The declaration stated, that by the perils of the seas, and spent on board the said ship: that before her arrival at Jamaica, c. and on divers days between that day and the arrival of the said at the trial, appeared to be, that the ship on board of which the by mistake got to leeward of that island, by mistaking it for Hill was obtained on the grounds that a sufficient necessity did not e negroes overboard, and also that the loss was not within the tenth a measure; and it appears, that at the time when the first sla g, though she might have made that and other islands. The declaration states, that by perils of the seas, and consequently; but no evidence was given that the perils of the seas reduced is necessity. The truth was, that finding they should have a bad sely is not now the question, that a portion of our fellow-creature her any necessity existed for that act. The voyage was eighteen weeks between weeks instead of six, and that in consequence of contrary winds n three weeks; but it is said that [234] other islands might have the evidence. It is also said that a supply of water might have been obtained at Tobago; but at that place there was sufficient for not occurred. With regard to that mistake, it appeared that the to that mistake, it appeared that the currents were stronger than selves suffered so severely, that seven out of seventeen died after he rains. Nor was it the fact that the slaves were destroyed in order as been taken, and it is said that this is not a loss within the is stated in the declaration that the ship was retarded by peril Here it sufficiently appears that the loss was primarily caused great weight in the objection, that the evidence does not support ship being foul and leaky, and that certainly was not the cause of as proved, is not the same as that stated in the declaration. as effected be different from that laid. It would be dangerous [2 remedy. Suppose the law clear, that a loss happening by the negligence the defendant could not raise that point. Rule absolute on payment

solution. Line 43 of the legal text reads: «The *truth was, that* finding they should have a bad market for their slaves, they took these means of transferring the loss from the owners to the underwriters» translated into Italian as: «La *verità è che*, intuendo che avrebbero ottenuto uno scarso guadagno dai loro schiavi, essi utilizzarono queste motivazioni per trasferire la perdita dai proprietari agli assicuratori».

The rest of the text does not give the same certainty because of the incoherent and random sequence of words which does not permit a logical approach to the text. The challenge was to find the Italian equivalent, of *that* and all the other rearranged words, according to the closeness of the words in the legal text, but this strategy is not always reliable because it is weakened by the disproportionate number of *that* in the legal text and in the “Os” and “Dicta” sections, so a decisive ratio of 1:1 is not applicable. In fact, the 34 occurrences of *that* in the list above do not match the 9 in the “Os” and “Dicta” sections.

Finally, if the English word *that* can belong to more parts of speech maintaining the same form and sound, in Italian it would be translated into several words with a different sound – *che, cui, quello* etc. Here, the untranslatability involves the form, and, in *Zong!*, the form is the point.

A literal translation, where diffusion or condensation²⁰ are expected, could work in the pages where the form of the words play a decisive role, as explained at the beginning of this chapter about in relation to the i-mage disclosed by *Zong! #1*. Below, the source text on the left is compared to our Italian translation on the right (FIG. 4).

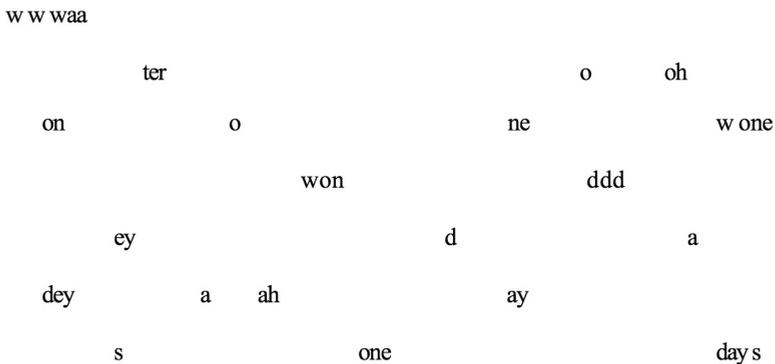
FIGURE 4



The visual impact is not affected at all. Zooming in on the pages, plenty of problems are revealed, mainly concerning the performance:

- a) Translating *water* into *acqua*, produces a change from the choked sound of the voiced labial-velar approximant *w*, to the clear sound of the open (low) central unrounded vowel *a*, less suitable, if not inappropriate to the image of drowning given to me by the page;
- b) Accordingly, the ratio *water/acqua*, *our/la nostra*, *good/buona*, *day/giorno*, is contrary to this image;
- c) Finally, observe the phonetic wordplay in the source text (FIG. 5).

FIGURE 5



Out of any canonical translation strategy, the following example of translation allows the book to achieve the previously mentioned aims of sonority and uncovering of this historic and historical moment, while, allowing the telling of sub-stories featuring their own characters, such as Eve, Grace, Ruth, Sue and all the other «WOMEN WHO WAIT»²².

An intuition achieved by translating *the weight in want* according to the scheme [(ENG-ENG)-ITA], as explained below:

“the weight in want” / ðə weɪt ɪn wɒnt/



“the waiting womb” / ðə ‘weɪtɪŋ wu:m/ (sub-story disclosed through assonance)



“il ventre in attesa” (literal translation into Italian)

The English into English translation, actually a play on word, is grounded on a “slant rhyme”. «Slant rhyme (sometimes called imperfect, partial, near, oblique, off etc.) is a rhyme in which two words share just a vowel sound (assonance – e.g. “heart” and “star”) or in which they share just a consonant sound (consonance – e.g. “milk” and “walk”). Slant rhyme is a technique perhaps more in tune with the uncertainties of the modern age than strong rhyme»²³.

Such a transformation opens itself to further implications: the weight of a desire or a need, a lyrical burden, is shifted to another desire, another burden: the foetus of a pregnant black woman. Or, as the accounts ledger reads, only a “ditto woman”²⁴ on board the *Zong*. Thus, the static nature of the text gains dynamism through this particular kind of translation. Philip’s “urge to make sense”, from lexical and systemic points of view, demands that forgotten stories be uncovered, history revisited and unheard words shaped.

5 Closing remarks

Before concluding, it is important to reflect on the way translation is involved, at different levels, in *Zong!*. To do this, it is useful to quote, verbatim, NourbeSe Philip herself who kindly replied to some questions we asked her.²⁵ The first point concerns the translation of “non-meaning into meaning”:

I was interested in how one, I could translate non-meaning into meaning. What do I mean by this: the massacre on board the *Zong* has meaning as a legal case but what meaning would the victims and the descendants of the victims assign it. What is the meaning of the transatlantic and trans Saharan slave trade in African bodies? Did the world need this enormous horrific sacrifice of human life? And to what end? It seemed ultimately meaningless to me and I set out to explore whether there was any meaning to meaninglessness. In other words, how would I translate the non-meaning of the *Zong* case? Could I? Should I? Because isn’t that what we do when we try to find meaning? We are carrying

over ideas, understanding, perceptions from one place, dimension to another. It's something I think we humans are cursed and blessed with, the desire for meaning, to find meaning in all around us. Translation is the carrying over of meaning from one language to another – in its most basic sense.

Thus, the clash makes sense because the “under-floating languages” are English-based creoles. The question is: what language should we choose to translate the African words contained in the poems?

The second point concerns the section of the book called *Ebora* which is intentionally written using a fading font and overlapping English and Creole words which make the text illegible (FIG. 8).

FIGURE 8

when did we... Dave ask/s that i... these words come from his lips
 though the hag seer... my hand shapes them... she... sh/h
 apes a... of dead... of died... not so loud
 they sang... sing/s... didn't the bell ring... I come from the north... a... oh oh... my ass
 land of mist... of hoar-frost... the time and... groan to... &... the... the...
 sow the seven seas... with ash... dying... decide when... the died... the dead... live rent... sing i say
 i come from... the north... dales the... land... hey hey ho... of hoar-frost
 there of... the time and date of hoar frost... of sin... i a sequence of
 he had an ace... queens... king... one... chu
 Sam... the rum... dear Ruth can a tale be
 mortality by the tail... if told... cold... a secret race
 calms... lives... of writ/s &... rent/s
 calms... the truth... to be sure
 to the right... this is but... an oration... a tale
 writ in sand... live in sand... live in sand... rent life... old... is new
 when did we decide

How should we translate it? Should we simply replace the English and Creole words with Italian terms? Quoting again NourbeSe Philip, «how do you translate the overwhelming silence – as a non-communication mode – that exists on board the Zong, Babel personified? Do you find another way of rendering silence, are words the only means of translation?».

To sum up, is an effective and respectful translation always possible? We stated previously that translation can be defined as «the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)»²⁶ and perhaps the transfer of textual elements aimed at a mere linguistic equivalence is easily attainable, but things get harder and the equivalent effect becomes a utopia when aspects such as musical coherence, deeply rooted cultural elements and the coexistence of different languages are utterly lost in translation.

Of course, many of these problems might be overcome by means of an effective compensation strategy in which the inevitable losses are balanced by gains in other parts of the text, but ignoring some parts while “improving” others may result in the creation of a new text greatly different from the original.

These considerations entail the – often ill-treated – concept of untranslatability theorized by Catford, Mounin and Popovič, among others²⁷.

A masterly balance of losses and gains is not always possible because many times losses are total, absolute as Eco points out:

Ci sono delle perdite che potremmo definire assolute. Sono i casi in cui non è possibile tradurre, e se casi del genere intervengono, poniamo, nel corso di un romanzo, il traduttore ricorre all'ultima ratio, quella di porre una nota a piè di pagina – e la nota a piè di pagina ratifica la sconfitta. Un esempio di perdita assoluta è quello dei giochi di parole²⁸.

As far as poetry is concerned, Jakobson, highlighting musical and rhythmical features, goes even farther when he claims that

In poetry, verbal equations become a constructive principle of the text. Syntactic and morphological categories, roots, and affixes, phonemes and their components (distinctive features) – in short, any constituents of the verbal code are confronted, juxtaposed, brought into contiguous relation according to the principle of similarity and contrast and carry their own autonomous signification. Phonemic similarity is sensed as semantic relationship. The pull, or to use a more erudite, and perhaps more precise term – paronomasia, reigns over poetic art, and whether its rule is absolute or limited, poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible: either intralingual transposition – from one poetic shape into another, or interlingual transposition – from one language into another, or finally intersemiotic transposition – from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting²⁹.

The concept of untranslatability has here been called “ill-treated” because recent trends tend to ban it claiming that everything is translatable, that both linguistic and cultural barriers in translation can be wiped out by a skilled translator, but what we claim is that maybe some texts have *the right to untranslatability*³⁰ and despite the awareness that everything can be translated, we are, at the same time, conscious and convinced that not everything can be

correctly translated if we want to respect the author's and the source text's communicative intentions.

Notes

1. Linda Barone is author of paragraphs 1, 2 and 5, Roberto Masone is author of paragraphs 3 and 4.
2. J. Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, Oxford University Press, London 1965, p. 20.
3. E. A. Nida, C. R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1969, p. 12.
4. Ivi, p. 134.
5. E. A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1964, p. 159.
6. P. Newmark, *Approaches to Translation*, Pergamon Press, Oxford 1981, p. 30.
7. *Ibid.*
8. P. Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, Prentice Hall, London 1988, p. 49.
9. On the translation of literature see also A. Lefevere, *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context*, The Modern Language Association of America, New York 1992; S. Bassnett, P. Bush, *The Translator as Writer*, Continuum, London 2006; S. Bassnett, A. Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon-Philadelphia-Toronto-Sydney-Johannesburg 1998; S. Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, Routledge, London-New York 1988.
10. On the compensation strategy see J. P. Vinay, J. Darbelnet, *A Methodology for Translation*, trans. by J. C. Sager, M.-J. Hamel, in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, Routledge, London-New York 2004, pp. 128-37 and K. Harvey, *Compensation*, in M. Baker, K. Malmkjær (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, Routledge, London-New York 1998, pp. 37-40.
11. I. Alonso-Breto, *Translating English into English in a Case of Symbolic Translation: Language and Politics through the Body in Marlene NourbeSe Philip's She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, in M. Muñoz Calvo, C. Buesa Gómez, M. Á. Ruiz-Moneva *New Trends in Translation and Cultural Identity*, Cambridge Scholars Press, Newcastle 2008, pp. 21-43.
12. The techniques used by NourbeSe Philip will be discussed in paragraph 3.
13. A. D. King, *The Weight of What's Left (Out): Six Contemporary Erasurists on Their Craft*, 2012, <https://www.kenyonreview.org/2012/11/erasure-collaborative-interview/>.
14. *Ibid.*
15. M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown (CT, USA) 2008, p. 195.
16. Ivi, p. 3.
17. The Dadaist writer Tristan Tzara invented the technique of the cut-up in 1920s, giving the following instructions in order to create a poem: «Take a newspaper. Take some scissors. Choose from this paper an article of the length you want to make your poem. Cut out the article. Next carefully cut out each of the words that makes up this article and put them all in a bag. Shake gently. Next take out each cutting one after the other. Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag. The poem will resemble you. And there you are – an infinitely original author of charming sensibility, even though unappreciated by the vulgar herd».
- Then other writers made use of this technique, in particular the Beat William S. Burroughs who, together with his friend and colleague Brion Gysin, refined this method and used it to write novels, among which worth remembering is *The Soft Machine* (1961), http://www.openculture.com/2011/08/william_s_burroughs_on_the_art_of_cutup_writing.html.
18. U2, 1991, *Love is Blindness*, Island Records Ltd.
19. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*, cit., p. 30.
20. Cf. J. L. Malone, *The Science of Linguistics in the Art of Translation: Some Tools from Linguistics for the Analysis and Practice of Translation*, SUNY Press, New York 1988.
21. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*, cit., p. 5.
22. Ivi, p. 186.
23. From the website *Daily Writing Tips*, <http://www.dailywritingtips.com/types-of-rhyme/>.
24. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*, cit., p. 194.
25. Quotations are taken from an email exchange we had with Marlene NourbeSe Philip.
26. Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, cit., p. 20.
27. Ivi; G. Mounin, *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction*, Gallimard, Paris 1963; A. Popović, *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation*, University of Alberta, Edmonton 1976.
28. U. Eco, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa. Esperienze di traduzione*, Bompiani, Milano 2003, p. 95.

29. R. Jakobson, *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, in R. A. Brower (ed.), *On Translation*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1959, pp. 232-9.

30. In this regard the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) of New York University has organized a conference whose title is *The Right to Untranslatability: Multilingualism, Translation, and World Literaricity* which aims to discuss what we tried to highlight in this paper. Here are some interesting considerations made by the organizers: «This concept of a right to untranslatability requires us to think beyond the technical, the institutional, and the market-pragmatic affordances of translation, and towards a newly vigorous line of thinking about literature, signification, and language as such, whether that thinking be global, planetary, or neither. How for instance in recent debates on World Literature has the right to untranslatability been so seamlessly eclipsed by a charismatic, neoliberal right to translation, translatability, translatedness, and communication? Why are the latter considered virtuous, convivial, populist, and progressive, while the former present as vicious, self-indulgent, elitist, and recalcitrant? What does this symbolic division of labor reveal about modern/postmodern/postcolonial conceptions of monolingualism/multilingualism? This seminar invites case studies about literary texts and other symbolic artifacts/constellations that may help us to flesh out, situate, and conceptualize what it means to claim a right to untranslatability in 2014». www.acla.org.