Warren Weaver's *Alice in Many Tongues:*
A Critical Appraisal

Emer O'Sullivan

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THROUGHOUT THE ESSAYS in this volume, a single name turns up over and again: Warren Weaver. Half a century ago, his *Alice in Many Tongues: The Translations of "Alice in Wonderland"* (1964) was published by the University of Wisconsin Press, an unprecedented documentation of the publishing history of Carroll's novel and its translations into, at that time, forty-seven languages, as well as an engagement with aspects of those translations. Weaver is the spiritus rector behind this study, *Alice in a World of Wonderlands*, which has continued his task to provide a current bibliography of translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* now into many more languages, dialects, and varieties. This essay offers an appraisal of Weaver's work in the context of his time. Part of his ambitious *Alice* project involved assessing the quality of a selection of *Alice* translations on the basis of re-translations or back-translations, and here the question will be asked whether this aspect of Weaver's work could possibly have been replicated in the current enterprise, not only bearing in mind the huge increase in the number of *Alice* translations but also taking into account the developments in the area of translation studies and the kinds of questions asked and methods implemented today.

WARREN WEAVER AND *ALICE IN MANY TONGUES*

For readers who know Weaver only as the author of *Alice in Many Tongues*, it comes as a surprise to learn that his professional background was in neither literature nor its translation. A mathematician by training, Weaver (1894–1978) was a distinguished scientist and disseminator of science. He pursued a university career in mathematics before going on to become director of the Division of Natural Sciences at the Rockefeller Foundation from 1932 to 1955 and, subsequently, vice president of the philanthropic Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.[1] His areas of research were theories of probability and statistics as well as communication in science, and he is credited with being the founding father of machine translation (see Somers 1998, 140). He wrote an internal paper for the Rockefeller Foundation called "Translation from One Language to Another" in 1949, "before most people had any idea of what computers might be capable of," which was "the direct stimulus for the beginnings of research in the United States" (Hutchins 2000, 17).[2] Weaver believed in a universal language, as yet undiscovered, which would offer an easier route directly from one language to another than translation.

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1. An extensive account of the various boards on which Weaver served as well as the awards he received can be found in Lovett (2000).
2. It was later published as the first chapter of *Machine Translation of Languages: Fourteen Essays*, edited by William N. Locke and Andrew D. Booth (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1955).

Among his many and wide-ranging interests, Weaver had a particular fascination with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its author. The first of numerous publications on Carroll,[3] a fellow mathematician also with wide-ranging extracurricular interests, "Lewis Carroll and a Geometrical Paradox" was published in the *American Mathematical Monthly* in 1938; in 1975, just three years before Weaver's death, two short articles appeared in *Jabberwocky*, one on the shorthand editions of *Alice*, the other on the ink and pen used by Carroll. Mina Rees (1987) records the great pleasure and satisfaction Weaver derived from his collection of translations of *Alice* which, by 1963, totaled 160 different editions representing forty-two of the forty-seven languages into which translations had then been made.

Weaver's (1964) *Alice in Many Tongues*, the first attempt at listing its foreign language editions, was a pioneering study on translations informed by Weaver's passion as an *Alice* collector, his interest in foreign languages, translations, and translatability, and his training as a scientist. This "small book" (p. vii), as he modestly calls it in his preface (it is 147 pages long), is divided into six chapters and an appendix, a "Checklist of Editions of Translations," based on Weaver's own collection, of which he says that it is "inevitably incomplete" (p. viii).[4]

The first chapter, "The Universal Child" (reprinted in this volume), reflects on what Weaver sees as the broad appeal of *Alice* to the world's children

> evidenced by the number of times that the story has been translated and the enthusiasm with which the translations—even those which do not seem especially skillful—have been received. For however British *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was in its origins, it has become known and loved all over the world. (p. 7)

Chapters on Carroll, his novel, the early translations, and "the flood of translations" follow, providing biographical information and a detailed account of the publication history of *Alice* and its translations. A final and extensive chapter called "How Can *Alice* Be Translated?" takes a closer look at some of these, and it is this chapter which will be examined in more detail here.

Weaver starts by asking what a translator seeks to accomplish when he sets about "transferring the contents of a piece of writing from one language to another" (p. 75). He compares the differences in the degree of "latitude" which must be allowed when translating poetry to the primacy of accuracy and "precision" when translating an article on mathematics. In the case of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which Weaver sees as "two books—a book for adults and a book for children" (p. 76), he writes that it is

> ideally desirable that there be preserved all the wonder and excitement and childish humor of the child's book . . . and equally desirable there be preserved all the delicious charm, the unexpected twisted meaning, the bits of paradoxical wisdom, the logical sense and nonsense, of the adult book. (p. 76)

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3. Weaver sometimes refers to the mathematician as Dodgson, sometimes as Carroll, and his professional assessment of his colleague was that "Dodgson was not a very good mathematician. . . . But he was as good as you would expect when he concerned himself with tricky and witty mathematical puzzles" (Weaver 1964, 12).

4. Originally intended as an article to be published in the *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, for which it became too long, *Alice in Many Tongues* developed from a talk Weaver gave at the Rowfant Club in Cleveland, Ohio, called "Alice in the Tower of Babel" (see Lovett 2000).

Alice in a World of Wonderlands

Weaver is ahead of his time in recognizing a phenomenon which was only later to become a topic in translation studies discourse: the dual address—to adults and children—of children's books and what becomes of them in translation.[5] He rightly identifies how difficult it is to judge properly "the success with which the adult features have been translated" (p. 77), and thus focuses on these in his chapter. His core question is: "Does the Swahili edition appeal to a Swahili-speaking African? Does the Turkish adult get, from the translated book, as much of the flavor of the original as is transferable into the language-culture patterns of that country?" (p. 77). He wants to be able to evaluate the translations and has to devise a means by which to do so. After hedging remarks on how superficial and limited it will probably seem, he comes up with the question which will guide his analysis:

> How good a translation does this seem to be when examined by an English-speaking person? That is, considering the translation into language *X*, how successfully *to an English-speaking person* does this translation capture and convey those aspects of the original which seem important to us? (p. 77, emphasis in original)

The question that poses itself to Weaver's reader at this stage is: how can an English-speaking person actually read the translation? The answer is, of course, that they cannot—unless they have a good working knowledge of the target language. To counter this, Weaver devises a scheme of "retranslation" (p. 78) whereby he asks friends and contacts,[6] many (but not all) of whom speak the target language of the translation in question as their first language, and all of whom are fluent speakers of English, to do a literal retranslation or back-translation into English of a passage from *Alice*, without consulting the English original.

Back-translation is a procedure performed especially in the context of machine translation, where it may be part of a so-called "round-trip translation."[7] Analogous to reversing a mathematical operation, a translated text is translated back into the source language without reference to the source text to check the accuracy of the original translation. The fourteen languages chosen for this experiment were German, French, Swedish, Italian, Danish, and Russian—six of the seven translations of *Alice* first published—and, because "they seemed especially interesting or especially curious" (p. 78), Japanese, Chinese, Hebrew, Hungarian, Spanish (Castilian), Polish, Pidgin, and Swahili.

The passage selected from "A Mad Tea-Party" (the same one which is used for the back-translations in Volume Two of this book) was ideally suited to the exercise as it contains what Weaver calls "the principal problems involved in translating *Alice*" (p. 80): parodied verses, puns, "specially manufactured words or nonsense words," jokes which involve logic, and "the otherwise unclassifiable Carroll twists of meaning" (p. 81). Using the retranslations or back-translations into English from these languages (and the extensive comments surely made by

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5. See O'Sullivan (2012) for an extensive discussion of this and other issues pertaining to children's literature in translation.
6. The impressive list includes the anthropologist Margaret Mead (Pidgin), the Nobel laureate biochemist Hugo Theorell (Swedish), and Theodore Kollek, deputy prime minister of Israel (Hebrew).
7. "Round-trip translation (RTT), otherwise known as reverse translation or back-and-forth translation, involves the translation of text from one language to another (the forward translation or FT) and back again (the back translation or BT)" (Aiken and Park 2010).

some of his "retranslators"),[8] Weaver then, as his own prototypical "English-speaking person," assesses the ability of the original translators to transport some of the most difficult features of Carroll's nonsense writing into their languages.

In Weaver's extensive discussion of the passage in different languages, the quality of the back-translators' explanations obviously plays an important role. When he writes that "the Russian version is especially clever and sensitive" (p. 90), this is a judgment which can only be explained by the Russian retranslator, "Mrs. George W. Bakeman" (p. 80), having given an intelligent and comprehensive meta-commentary on what the Russian translator (Vladimir Nabokov) did in his translation. And when Weaver says that in the Hebrew translation the "treatment of the parody is excellent" (p. 89) and goes to explain that the translator took "a number of well-known prayers and sayings, and mixed them up," the first line from the Havdalah prayer recited by the head of the household at the end of the Sabbath, the second from the Passover Haggadah inviting all those who are hungry to come and join the Seder table on Passover night, the third "a misquotation from grace after meals," and the final line "a nonsense mixture of part of the Passover Seder, along with the names of the more common vegetables eaten in Israel" (p. 89), then again this must be from meta-information provided by his retranslator, Theodore Kollek, as Weaver would presumably not have been able to identify these sources by himself on the basis of a back-translation alone. Weaver talks about certain translations deserving "a very high score indeed" (p. 91), finds others "not very inspired" (p. 93), and rates as either "excellent," "fair," or "missed" (p. 97) the translations for "to murder time," an expression which he says "is relatively easy to translate" (p. 97), although this is not actually the case if there is no equivalent idiomatic expression in the target language.[9] In the end Weaver finds that

> the Romance languages—French, Italian, and Spanish—seem to lag quite definitely behind the strange front group of German, Russian, Hebrew, and Chinese. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the tentative conclusion that the good instances are good because of the skill of the translators, rather than because of any inherent suitability or lack of resource of the language—with two exceptions to this remark: Swahili (which certainly suffers from lack of resource), and Japanese (which *seems* to suffer from the fact that this language communicates in a way which is really substantially different from English). (pp. 107–8)

WEAVER THROUGH THE LENS OF CONTEMPORARY TRANSLATION STUDIES

What do we make of this part of Weaver's study fifty years after his ground-breaking publication? Could a new, expanded version of the chapter "How Can *Alice* Be Translated?" be written now? One of the side effects of an ever-growing web of theoretical sophistication is that pioneering acts such as Weaver's cannot be simply replicated half a century later. And Weaver, a great

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8. Unfortunately, neither the complete back-translations nor the comments by Weaver's collaborators are published in *Alice in Many Tongues*.

9. In the annotations to the back-translations of both Japanese translations in Volume Two of this book, for instance, Kimie Kusumoto explains reasons for deviating translations of this expression, and Ida Hadjivayanis tells us in her annotations to the Swahili translation that the idiomatic equivalent to "to kill time" in Swahili is translated literally into English as "wasting, losing time."

supporter of innovation in all areas of scholarship, would probably be the first to acknowledge that progress in science and academic disciplines constantly calls for revisions of previous assumptions. His goal of comparing the back-translations to judge their respective qualities cannot be—and is not—replicated in this current, major *Alice* translation project because of the way we see language and translation today. Developments in contemporary translation studies would have made it impossible to update this particular part of Weaver's study.

When Weaver was writing, reflection on translation took place in two disparate academic areas with very different interests and objectives. On the one hand, translation was deemed to belong to the field of linguistics where the dominant assumption was that it was solely a transaction between two languages. This is the context in which machine translation developed in the 1950s. In 1965 J. C. Catford defined translation in his study *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* as comprising a "substitution of TL [i.e. Target Language] meanings for SL [i.e. Source Language] meanings" (quoted in Bassnett 2000, 15). While Catford's theory was important for the linguist, Bassnett comments, "it is nevertheless restricted in that it implies a narrow theory of meaning" (pp. 15–16). The other area was that of comparative literature with a (then) source-text–orientated literary approach to translation which made *a priori* assumptions about fidelity and equivalence. Normative and often essentialist theories were led by the question "How should/must one translate?" in an effort to convey the principles and rules of "correct" and good translation.

The end of the 1970s saw the emergence of the new field of academic study which went beyond prevailing linguistic and literary-cum-philosophical models; Susan Bassnett's (2000) brief handbook with the programmatic title *Translation Studies*, first published in 1980, is seen as one of the watershed publications. In a methodological shift from source orientation to target orientation, the guiding questions became: *what* has been translated *when*, *why*, and *how*, and *why* was it translated in this way? The descriptive study of translation attempted to identify the dominant norms of the target language and literature that influence translators' strategies and decisions, and also addressed issues such as who and what regulates translation.

Translation studies has constantly expanded since then, taking up a variety of discourses in the process to become, at the beginning of the new millennium, what Lawrence Venuti (2000, 334) calls "an international network of scholarly communities who conduct research and debate across conceptual and disciplinary divisions." Precise descriptions of translated texts and translation processes are linked to cultural and political issues such as gender, colonialism, and globalization. And ever since Venuti's (1995, second edition 2008) own famously provocative study *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, which shifts the focus of translation studies to the translator, sociological approaches have put a greater critical emphasis on the actors and agents of translation and their habitus. Rather than an act of Catfordian "linguistic substitution," literary translation is now seen as an intricate and individual negotiation on the part of a translator between two different cultures and not only between two languages. Since the so-called "cultural turn in translation studies," the unit of translation is "no longer a word or a sentence or a paragraph or a page or even a text, but indeed the whole language and culture in which that text was constituted" (Trivedi 2007, 280).

Weaver based his analysis and assessment of the translations not on the target texts themselves and his own observations of them, but on back-translations into English which he was not in a position to verify. Current academic practice regards only those sufficiently in command of the target and source languages and cultures as being in a position to make evaluative statements about translations on the basis of their own analysis. A translation studies scholar would not now presume to write with authority on a translation into a language which he or she did not speak based on a translation back into the source language by a third party. Back-translations are themselves also translations and, as secondary texts, can never stand in for the original translations.

The question in Weaver's chapter heading "How Can *Alice* Be Translated?" is source-text oriented; the question of translatability is posed together with the implication that there may be such a thing as a "faithful" translation. Today translation is seen as a culture-bound phenomenon which varies through time, and translation studies now would sooner ask "How Has *Alice* Been Translated?," putting the emphasis on describing and analyzing the target texts and on situating them within their respective times and cultures. The discipline has thus moved on since Weaver, and this development is reflected in the back-translations and essays in this set of volumes. In order to illustrate how these changes in approach since Weaver's time alter the perspective on and some of the results of his analysis, I would like to focus on three issues: the reliability of back-translations, the role of sociocultural and linguistic norms, and the agents of translation.

CHANGED PERSPECTIVE: THREE ISSUES

The Reliability of Back-Translations

Of translators Umberto Eco (2001) writes:

> We decide how to translate, not on the basis of the dictionary, but on the basis of the whole history of two literatures. . . . [T]ranslating is not connected with linguistic competence, but with inter-textual, psychological, and narrative competence. (p. 13)

Anyone who has compared translations of a literary source text by different translators into the same target language will know how widely they can differ. Not only the time in and conditions under which the text is translated, but also the experience, imagination, and aesthetic sensibility of the translators play a key role.[10] Each act of literary translation is therefore a culture-bound act of interpretation and creativity. By the same token, back-translations of literature are themselves interpretations of interpretations.

In his assessment of the back-translations, as quoted above, Weaver noted with surprise: "Indeed, it is hard to avoid the tentative conclusion that the good instances are good because of the skill of the translators, rather than because of any inherent suitability or lack of resource of the language" (p. 108). His basic assumption was obviously that translation is independent of an agent, so any "correct" translation from language A into language B undertaken by different agents should be the same. The extent to which these can actually differ is illustrated by the two

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10. An impression of the kinds of differences in translation that can be produced within a single language can be gleaned from my essay about the forty unabridged translations of *Alice* into German, "Miss Zimmermann and Her Successors: German Versions of *Alice in Wonderland*," in this volume.

different back-translations we have of Juan Gutiérrez Gili's Spanish translation of 1927. On the basis of the back-translation by Dorothy Parker, Weaver criticizes Gutiérrez Gili for simply translating the parodied verses rather than delivering a parody of a Spanish children's song, and he calls the version "surely not very inspired" (p. 93). This is the back-translation on which this judgment is based:

> Twi–twinkle, bat, lost in the blue sea,
> Your flight is weakened in a swaying,
> Fluctuation, a wavering of a bowl.
> Tw–twin–twinkle.

The back-translation of the same passage by Jacqueline Minett in this book reads:

> Bli . . . blink, little bat,
> Adrift in the blue sea!
> Your flight unravels
> Like a tray going to and fro.
> Bli . . . blin . . . blink . . .

These contrasting versions offer a fine example of how different back-translations can be, and how they themselves, like all translations, are acts of interpretation and creativity. The difference between back-translating "twinkle" and "blink," for instance, may have come about by Parker, as a native speaker of English, having been influenced by her memory of Carroll's original text. Beyond this, Minett and Juan Gabriel López Guix address Weaver's criticism in their notes on the back-translation of Gutiérrez Gili by providing a detailed description of what he actually did in Spanish, paying special attention to the poetic elements of meter and rhyme:

> Throughout his translation of *Alice*, Gutiérrez Gili endeavors to preserve the poetic form of the passages in verse. Here the song is translated into octosyllabic lines of no regular rhythm, with a consonantal rhyme scheme of *aa bb*, the fifth line assonating with the previous two lines. The semantic gap between the original and the translation is therefore *metri causa*. . . . This aspect of the translation is not reflected in Weaver's appraisal. . . .

In his analysis and commentary, Weaver focused only on the semantic level, and we may presume that his retranslator either did not recognize or else failed to comment on elements of poetic form; this oversight is criticized by Minett and López Guix, in whose opinion "Gutiérrez Gili's translation satisfies the requirements of poetic form in the target culture." In the same vein they write of Weaver's judgment of the Spanish translation of the "well/well in" pun, based on the back-translation by Parker: "Weaver does not explicitly go into how this pun is resolved, but rates it as 'missed.'" In fact, as they go on to write, the pun is actually maintained, even if with a slight semantic change.

This example illustrates how retranslations and accompanying explanations can vary, as well as the problematic nature of basing an evaluation solely on a back-translation, especially when it is not available for readers to be able to verify the result. It also shows how, if accompanied by informative, explanatory annotations and meta-comments, as is the case with the Spanish

example cited and many others in Volume Two of this book, back-translations can serve as a very useful vehicle to give readers an impression of language versions which they would not otherwise have been able to access. In this way the current book, while taking Weaver's design as its point of departure, has, in its realization, gone a long way towards addressing some of the major shortcomings of its predecessor.

Sociocultural and Linguistic Norms

Weaver is somewhat confused by the Japanese back-translations he received. He writes:

> The Japanese version both puzzles and intrigues me. The three retranslations I have, all being made from exactly the same Japanese passage, differ so much, one from another, that it seems clear that translation back and forth between English and Japanese must be a rather loose and vague business. (p. 107)

From his comments we can deduce that Weaver thought this had more to do with the Japanese language than with the very nature of retranslation itself. In this respect his concept of translation is aligned to that of his contemporary Catford; he believed that there was such a thing as a linguistic substitution of TL meanings for SL meanings. His focus was especially on the relationship between languages and on translatability as an interlingual feature rather than an intertextual one, hence his confusion when the results were unclear.

As Weaver's Japanese back-translations were not published in *Alice in Many Tongues*, it is difficult for us to reconstruct what the retranslators ("several Japanese gentlemen, all familiar with English, under the supervision of Miss Yuki Kosai attached to the office of the National Science Foundation in the United States Embassy at Tokyo" [p. 79]) made of the 1925 translation by Shigeo Masumoto. However, on the basis of Kimie Kusumoto's enlightening comments in the annotations to her back-translation of an earlier Japanese translation of 1910 by Eikan (pen name: Hakuya) Maruyama in Volume Two of the present book, we can speculate about the kinds of issues which may have caused Weaver's confusion. Most of them have to do with sociocultural norms rather than linguistic ones, but a few are rooted in the differences between the languages.

In the first category may have been adaptations undertaken in the translation of 1925 to lessen or eliminate the violation of contemporary Japanese sociocultural norms. Kusumoto tells us, for instance, that it was "unsuitable for a grown man to abuse another person to his or her face" in Japan at that time. This could have led to Masumoto deeming it necessary to alter the behavior or speech of the Mad Hatter accordingly, so as not to scandalize Japanese readers. Similarly the translator may not have been able to imagine—or may not have wanted to portray in his translation—"that a girl of Alice's age would argue against the adult man." This would have meant changing such "disrespectful" responses by Alice to the Hatter as: "You should learn not to make personal remarks" or "Nobody asked *your* opinion."

A third piece of information furnished by Kusumoto which gives us an insight into the differences between Japanese and British culture in the early twentieth century is that Japanese men were not supposed to serve food or drinks to women. This may have resulted in the Mad Hatter

not being able to offer Alice (more) tea in the Japanese translation. This is, as Kusomoto says, "another example of how the culture and the custom of our country prevented early translators from transferring into correct Japanese." All three examples are possible sources of modifications in the Japanese version of 1925 which may have been reflected in the different retranslations of the Japanese gentlemen.

But there are also features of the language itself which make what Weaver may have deemed a "correct" translation impossible. For example, he writes that "[t]he abrupt and unanswerable 'why not?' is handled very well in most of our 14 languages," except for the Japanese "which instead of 'Why not?' says, 'Why do you ask like that?'" (p. 105). In Japanese, as Kimie Kusumoto informs us in an annotation in Volume Two, it is difficult to express the lively short responses of "Why?" and "Why not?" There was, therefore, an explanation for this specific feature in the Japanese translation of which Weaver was not aware and to which the back-translators obviously did not draw his attention. Hence his negative judgment derived from a lack of awareness of the different linguistic means of expressing the same communicative act.

In the back-translation in Volume Two of her own Japanese translation of *Alice* published in 2006, Kusumoto names further difficulties in this vein—for instance, that it is rude in Japan "to say 'No' to another person, so we quite often say 'Sorry' instead"—and she points out some aspects which she says cannot be translated adequately—for instance, the passage which starts with the Hatter telling Alice to "Take some more tea," and goes on to ruminate about having some more (or less) tea:

> I checked a lot of translations, but most of them failed to convey the "gem" of Carroll's English so as to satisfy the reader with his mathematical logic. I found out that the reason lies in the Japanese word itself; when we translate "less," there are no appropriate Japanese words to express it. *Motto sukoshi* (もっと少し) means "more little" and *motto* (もっと) means "more"; these mutually contradictory words didn't make the meaning clear at all, so even though they are translated in a grammatically correct way, it isn't interesting at all. . . . I have to admit that as to this part I could not transfer the author's mathematical intention correctly. Even though I have opted for smooth flow of the story, according to Warren Weaver's understanding my translation will be considered an evasion.

On the basis of annotations such as Kusumoto's we, today, are given a privileged glimpse of the sociocultural and linguistic norms which influence the translators' decisions. They help non-Japanese speakers to understand the conditions of translating into Japanese, although they still do not permit these readers to form their own evaluation of the translations.

Agents of Translation

Today the issue of who or what regulates translation has moved to the center of translation discourse, with some of the relevant questions being: "What is selected for translation from the range of available texts, and who makes the relevant decisions, on what grounds? Who produces the translations, under what conditions, for whom, and with what effect or impact?" (Hermans 2000, 14). In the light of this, we may revisit Weaver's study to ask who the agents of the translations of *Alice* actually are.

When Weaver wrote in his chapter "The Universal Child" that the broad appeal of *Alice* to the world's children is "evidenced by the number of times that the story has been translated and the enthusiasm with which the translations . . . have been received . . . all over the world" (p. 7), he was aligning himself with a tradition of regarding international children's classics as the product of a universal culture of childhood and as proof that children all over the world are essentially the same, regardless of language, ethnic, class, and gender differences.[11] Apart from the ideological dimension of this universalizing vision, even the most cursory engagement with the workings of the literary market will show that children do not play the kind of role imagined here; it is not they who decide what is translated. Rather than evidence of global child preferences, Jeffrey Garrett (1996) sees among the widespread translations of *Alice* a novel "rendered lovingly into exotic languages by English missionaries or anglicized colonials—much like the Bible and for many of the same reasons" (p. 3). And indeed, when we look at the Swahili *Alice*, for instance, we find that its translator E. V. St. Lo. Conan-Davies became an Anglican nun when she was twenty-one and learned Swahili when working for the order in East Africa (see Ida Hadjivayanis's essay, "The Swahili *Elisi*: In Unguja Dialect," in this volume), even though she had left it by the time she undertook the translation. Her *Elisi* was published in 1940 in London by the Sheldon Press, an imprint of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK),[12] an Anglican mission agency which, ever since its founding in 1698, has "been working in the UK and around the world to help people to grow in the Christian faith, especially through Christian literature and education."[13]

Rather than being a translation undertaken by popular child demand, therefore, we find different agencies with a vested interest in having *Alice* translated into and published in Swahili. The SPCK was one of them. Another had active control over the actual translation, as it was done in the service of standardization of a language under colonial rule. Ida Hadjivayanis writes in this volume:

> The first complete Swahili translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was by E. V. (Ermyntrude Virginia) St. Lo. Conan-Davies (1940) . . . and has always been understood to be a part of the literary works resulting from the British colonial endeavor to standardize Swahili. . . . Swahili was formally standardized in 1930, almost two decades after the initial *Alice* translation [of Chapter I in 1911]. Standardization meant that Swahili then needed a body of literature to support and disseminate it. The literature had to be approved by what was then called the Interterritorial Language Committee, which oversaw Swahili usage. The 1940 translation of *Elisi* upholds this objective.

In this translation, Alice is made into Elisi—although the change in name is not among those noted by Weaver.[14] Hadjivayanis provides interesting background information on the names is-

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11. For a critical account of the idea of internationalism in relation to children and their literature which goes back to Paul Hazard's influential publication *Les livres, les enfants et les hommes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1932) and its English version *Books, Children and Men* (translated by Marguerite Mitchell; Boston: Horn Book, 1944), see O'Sullivan (2004).

12. In his preface Weaver thanks the SPCK for permission to reproduce a page from the Sheldon Press edition of *Alice* in Swahili.

13. http://www.spck.org.uk/about-spck/index. Accessed March 15, 2013.

14. Weaver (1964) tells us that in the fourteen back-translations he had done, "Alice remains Alice, except for the use of Marie (Mary) in Danish . . . Annya (Anna) in Russian, and Allisŭ in Chinese" (p. 106). We can only assume that "Mr G. C. Richards,

sue, citing a letter by the translator Conan-Davis to Weaver on May 16, 1965, after *Alice in Many Tongues* had been published. She wrote:

> There is no short 'A' in Swahili. So I had to choose between Alisi (pronounced 'Ahlisi') and 'Elisi'. The Uganda language committee wanted me to have 'Alisi', but I wrote and pointed out to them that it is too reminiscent of the name 'Ali'—a Mohammedan name disported by every other Moslem out here—Uganda saw my point and drew in her horns.

Hadjivayanis adds the following contextual information:

> Swahili language has, since its inception, been linked to Islam, hence the reference to "Mohammedan" in Conan-Davies's letter. It is quite interesting that, despite the fact that "Alisi" has nothing to do with the name Ali, the mere suggestion that there might be some kind of a link made the language committee choose "Elisi" instead. This is very telling of the situation in colonial Tanganyika, where colonial administrators did everything to distance Swahili from its Arabic origins.

The Swahili translation is therefore anything but a translation undertaken by child demand but is firmly entrenched in colonial structures. This does not lessen the value of the translation, but the development of consciousness of the links between colonialism, the ownership of literature, and the regulation of translations opens up areas of investigation with regard to the *Alice* translations which Weaver can be forgiven for having been unaware of, but which relativizes some of his findings today.

A further aspect of the regulation of translation, which also played a part in the Swahili one, is the role it may play to support minority or endangered languages. The enrichment of native languages through translations is demonstrated by Pradipta Borgohain in his aptly named essay in this volume, "*Alice* in Assamese: Vigorous Translations Can Revive Threatened Languages." Borgohain tells us how, when the language faced a serious crisis in the nineteenth century after the ruling British replaced Assamese with Bengali as the official language of Assam, translation had a "revivalist role. The vigorous Bible translations of American Baptist missionaries breathed new life into the Assamese language and paved the way for the creation of modern Assamese literature." This volume bears witness to the fact that a translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* into a specific language often coincided with a historical moment of nation-building, when that particular vernacular suddenly became an official or national language after decades, in some cases centuries, of prohibition, thus generating a sudden need for quality publications in that language, not least for use in educational settings. An example is the translation into Irish of *Alice* in 1922, the year of the founding of the Irish Free State, and the year in which the Irish language was reinstated as the first language of the country. Similarly, the translation of *Alice* into Galician in the 1980s came about because the structure of the new Spanish state in "autonomous communities" in the post-Franco era "led to a huge demand for teaching and reading materials designed for [children and young readers] who were beginning to receive their education in the Galician language" (see Juan Gabriel López Guix's essay "Spanish and the Other *Alice*

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director of the East African Literature Bureau of Nairobi, and a recognised expert in the Swahili language" (p. 80), who did the retranslation, failed to notice that Alice also has a different name in Swahili, or else he failed to mention it.

Languages of Spain: An Overview" in this volume). Indeed, as López Guix writes, the Galician, Basque, Asturian, and Aragonese translations all "owe their genesis to the initiative of individuals and publishing houses with a clearly defined objective . . . to foster the development of a national culture expressed in a language other than Spanish."

An educational impetus also lay behind the publication of *Alice* in the Australian Aboriginal language of Pitjantjatjara. In his essay "*Alitji* in the Pitjantjatjara Dreamtime: *Alitjinya Ngura Tjukurtjarangka*" in this volume, Byron Sewell tells us that the "bilingual Pitjantjatjara-English publication was supported by a grant from the Australian government's Department of Aboriginal Affairs, primarily as a learning resource for teachers who would eventually teach Pitjantjatjara children in their local schools." How important this was for the teachers is shown by a comment made by a Pitjantjatjara schoolteacher when a government official visited her remote outback school. The episode is reported by the translator, Nancy Sheppard (see her essay "The Pitjantjatjara *Alice*: An Aboriginal Language of Australia" in this volume), who was rightly gratified by it:

> The official observed, "There is little point in teaching literacy in the vernacular as there are no books in the Pitjantjatjara language!" The teacher drew herself up and with dignity replied, "But there are! We have the Bible and *Alice in Wonderland*!"

Alice has therefore also served, in translation, as an instrument of cultural regeneration and linguistic and literary support for minority and endangered languages.[15] Here, again, the agents are not, as Weaver suggested, the children themselves, but cultural and political forces that recognize translation as a tool for nation-building and as a stimulant to the development and enhancement of minority languages. It would seem that Carroll's novel has, in countless instances, been identified as an ideal candidate for the task.

CONCLUSION

What Weaver did in the 1960s was an extraordinary feat of documentary scholarship for his time. Nothing similar, to my knowledge, had been attempted before then and, although developments in the area of translation studies since then preclude analyses and evaluation of and extensive comparisons between translations based on back-translations alone, his legacy in the realm of *Alice* scholarship lives on. He closes the final chapter in *Alice in Many Tongues* with these words:

> Examining these fourteen instances of translation of a typical passage from Alice makes one (at least it makes me!) very curious indeed about the degree of success of other languages. What success do Arabic and Welsh and Thai and Turkish and Hindi have? I can only hope that someone will be inspired to find out. (p. 108)

Weaver would surely be gladdened to find, in this book, back-translations from these and many more languages as the result of a huge project which was indeed inspired by his own study. I imagine that he would agree, from today's perspective on translation, that no one English-speaking person could presume to evaluate the comparative qualities of all these translations

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15. Weaver can be forgiven for not registering this aspect of the translations. Research into minority languages and translation has, until relatively recently, been "largely invisible" in translation studies (Cronin 2003, 153).

of *Alice* on the basis of back-translations alone. But English-speaking readers can now, in this book, consult back-translations and their annotations as well as essays on the translations to get an idea of what is actually happening in all of them. *Alice in Many Tongues* is paid tribute to with this book, which has expanded not only its scope but also its depth and degree of linguistic and (inter-)cultural reflection in a way that would surely have gratified its spiritus rector, Warren Weaver.

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