

# Space, (self-)translation and plurilingualism in the works of Tawada Yōko

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Tawada Yōko 多和田葉子 was born in Japan in 1960. In 1982, she graduated in Russian Literature from Waseda University. A key moment of her career became her travels on the trans-Siberian railway, which had a significant impact on her view of the world and her re-conception of the idea of borders. In 1982, she relocated to Hamburg, Germany, where she obtained a MA in German Literature, and subsequently a PhD in the same field. She now lives and works in Berlin.

Tawada is one of the most appreciated authors on the international literary scene. During her career she was the recipient of an incredible number of prizes, such as the prestigious U.S. National Book Award for Translated Literature, which she received in 2018, for 献灯使 Kentōshi (The Emissary, 2014). She writes novels, poems, plays and essays both in Japanese and German. In some rare cases she also includes English in her work, an example of which will be analyzed later on in this essay.

Tawada spends her life travelling around the world; this continuous nomadism echoes in her literary output where she explores the expressive potential of different languages such as the phonological and semantic combination of both Japanese and German in her poetic works, as shall shortly be seen.

Nevertheless, critics believe that it is incorrect to include Tawada's work within the so-called German *Migrantenliteratur*, migrant literature. In fact, Tawada Yōko's production does not fall into the category of literature of migration in the narrow sense. We can observe that her production lacks many of the characteristics of that kind of literature, which usually deals with situations and stories of complicated socio-economic conditions, discrimination and difficulties of adaptation to the new customs and situations of the foreign country in which the migrant subjects land. Tawada, on the contrary, does not leave her home country for economic or political reasons; she moves to Germany out of curiosity for other cultures and her literature reflects this attitude of fascination for what is foreign.

Suga Keijirō (2007: 21) observes that there are two main concepts at work in the poetic process of Tawada: first, what Suga defined as "translational poetics", second, a process called "exophony", an expression that became well known thanks largely to the author herself. Translational poetics can be defined as poetics that result not only from a process of creation, but also from the process of translation itself. Translation from one language to another participates in the poetic imaginary of the bilingual writer, and in this specific case emerges in the linguistic choices that Tawada makes. (Suga 2007: 21-6) This is, according to Suga, true on a double level: first of all because writing in two different idioms always implies, for the bilingual writer, either a conscious or an unconscious reflection on the process of translation. Furthermore, this reflection and awareness on the language expressive potential results in the stylistic and lexical choices operated by the writer in her text.

This is not a peculiarity of Tawada only. All modern writers, as noted by Suga (2007: 22), have been influenced in some way by the translation across national languages. He identifies this influence particularly in the motifs, structures and themes that are imported from outside. But there are also cases in which he talks about "in-flux", a phenomenon that he defines as a proper flux of words and expressions from a foreign language — or *oeuvre* — that enters into the writing of a certain author in a certain way (Suga 2007: 23). I believe that this last technique is truly distinctive of Tawada's writing. More specifically, since Tawada

is a writer in both a foreign language, German, and her mother tongue, Japanese, the process of translation develops alongside the process of creation. The former contributes to her own imaginary, transforming the language in which she writes and becoming one of the central themes of her literary production. Translation is, in Tawada, a key part of the process of creation of a literary work, not only when she writes in a foreign language, but also when she writes in Japanese (Suga 2007: 22).

As Margaret Mitsutani points out in a conversation with the Japanese literary critic Ikezawa Natsuki, Tawada observed that language is already a translation of thoughts from a shapeless form. It is this passage from thoughts to language that, in a certain sense, contributes to identify the nebulous original contents and what is being translated (Mitsutani 2007: 35). According to Tawada, every act of creation is an act of translation from a medium, the ideas, to another, the language. The act of creation can be identified with the process of translation of forms and figures from abstract ideas to a concrete visible shape, the text, which is spatially distributed on the page. More specifically, this act of translation legitimates the existence of the original, immaterial texts: if it is possible to translate it into words and spatially distribute it on the page, then it existed before that very process.

In addition to the topics above, Tawada came across another important theme. In her book of 2003, エクソフォニー 母語の外へ出る旅 *Ekusophonii: bogo no soto e deru tabi* (*Exophony: travel outside the mother tongue*) she introduces the key concept of her poetics: “exophony”. In November 2002, Tawada was invited to deliver a speech at a conference in Dakar. As she recalls in one of the first chapters of the book, it was there that she heard the word exophony for the first time. Literary speaking, the term means that no one writes in the way as he or she really speaks. She was immediately struck by the term. Exophony, in her words, indicates a state of living outside one's own mother tongue. She was fascinated by this term, because, according to her, it is able to convey a larger meaning than other critical terms, like “migrant literature” or “creole literature” (Tawada 2012: 3).

Exophony means living immersed in a foreign language and choosing to use this foreign idiom for one's artistic creations. The exophonic writer is thus a writer who lives surrounded by a language that is not his or her native language, a new idiom spoken in a new country or a new language imported or present in his/her own country for a multiplicity of reasons. Even if, at the beginning, it was used to describe African literature written in the language of the colonizers, nowadays this is a definition that can be applied to all those writers who write in a language that is not their native one. Tawada uses it to define her personal approach to writing when she writes in German.

Given these premises, it is clearly understandable why space is a very important component of her poetics. As Lucia Perrone Capano (2016: 95) notes, the concept of exophony is the decision to write in a space that is outside of one's own native language. Due to the nature of her life, Tawada is constantly traveling from one place to another and attending different events around the world, from book presentations to conferences and workshops. This is the main reason why, according to Silja Maehl, she remains untroubled by issues of cultural assimilation (Maehl 2015: 59). The majority of Tawada's text are set in spaces of transition and transformation, and these places in which her literature is set are never clearly defined. Her narratives develop in spaces that are often generally defined as "a city in northern Europe" (as in the case of *Talisman*, one of her most famous stories). These cities are very rarely called with their name, like Berlin, Tokyo, Hamburg or Moscow, and become unidentified locations that work as a background for the main character to move or temporarily reside.

In fact, as Perrone Capano again points out, and according to the theories of De Certeau, in Tawada's production there is a clear distinction between *Raum* (space) and *Ort* (place). Capano maintains that the places in which Tawada lives, Berlin and Tokyo, are not fixed places but stations from which she moves to various destinations around the world. De Certeau defines space as a place in which someone does something. In this sense, Perrone Capano interprets the concept of *Ort* as a reality of encounters, overlapping contacts, a place that is fixed, determined, but a place that is also for co-presence and connection. Moving from one place to another, from one *Ort* to the next, the space between these

places becomes, then, an in-between, or in German *Zwischenraum*. *Raum* is something not fixed, but very mobile (Perrone Capano 2016: 97-8). It is generally agreed that the writing of Tawada resides in these in-betweens. This, first of all, is because Tawada is a writer who is in constant movement between Asia and Europe, between Japan and Germany. Then, the fact that she normally uses two languages in her literary output, sometimes results in an experimental use of the poetic possibilities of languages themselves, as we shall shortly see. This playful approach to grammar that mixes Japanese and German is able to create a sort of language that can be considered in a state of transition, in an intermediate position between mother tongue and foreign language. Her characters, moreover, are sometimes people who, in a certain sense, exist between two realities as intrinsic features of their own essence, like translators or interpreters. Finally, her works range among diverse literary genres; the author experiments a variety of different genres, from poetry to prose and theater. As noted by Daniela Moro (2018: 104), this aesthetic conception is very well presented in *Ekusofonii* in which Tawada identifies the middle as a privileged position for her poetic creation. In the middle, she doesn't have to choose a fixed language or a determined identity.

It is generally acknowledged that translating means to convert something from one medium to another, or more specifically to render the meaning of something in another language; however, I would provocatively use the term in its original, etymological form, (bring across) in order to comprehend its implied meaning of physical mobility as well. I believe that this would better underline how, in the work of Tawada, the process of translation is linked to the idea of moving across different languages and cultures, from one place to another, and through physical space. This is a characteristic not solely of the migrant subject but is becoming all the more common in the contemporary globalized world.

Translation functions in Tawada's work as well as a spatial operation. I would argue that we can identify two strategies there that are the result of her attitude towards positioning "in the middle": self-translation and plurilingualism. These too can arguably be conceived as spatial concepts. I would like to offer some examples that will explain this theory even further.

First of all, what I mean by “self-translation” is the peculiar language of her works. This language seems in a constant process of translation from Japanese to German and vice-versa, or an idiom that belongs to an identified space between the mother tongue and the foreign language. This results in linguistic minimalism: when she writes, both in German and in Japanese, her syntax is normally very simple, with short sentences and a low degree of hypotaxis. Many of her narratives and works present this simple style, like *ペルソナ Perusona* (Persona, 1992), *容疑者の夜行列車 Yōgisha no yakō ressha* (Night train with suspects, 2002), *Ekusofonii* (2003) and *Talisman* (1996) among others. Obviously, this simplicity is to be read as a precise stylistic choice, that sometimes Tawada also uses to intentionally recall the interlanguage developed by L2 learners and to mirror a language that is still in evolution, in a state that we can consider a sort of “linguistic in-between”. Or, as Caterina Mazza notes:

Tawada’s novels, poetry and essays are written in Japanese *and* German, but more often in Japanese *or* German, — she doesn’t systematically self-translate her work, but her approach to the linguistic creative process goes beyond the conventional boundaries between “original” and “translation” [...]. Her writings are always composed in a language “in-a-state-of-translation”. (2016: 142)

Usually Tawada writes her work either in Japanese or in German. If she writes in Japanese, her works are normally translated into German, always by the same translator: Peter Pörtner.

Self-translation as a proper process, which means that Tawada first writes her work in either German or Japanese and then translates it into the other language, is a relatively rare case, and to my knowledge there have only been three cases so far: *Opium für Ovid* (2000) later translated in Japanese with the title of *変身のためのオピウム Henshin no tame no opium* (2001); *Schwager in Bordeaux* (2008), written in German and subsequently translated into Japanese (*ボルドーの義兄 Borudō no gikei*, 2009); and her last success *雪の練習生 Yuki no*

*renshūsei* (*Memoirs of a polar bear*, 2011), originally written in Japanese and self-translated in German in 2014 as *Etüden im Schnee*.

The first thing we notice is that the self-translation process is not unidirectional: this is to say that Tawada does not translate solely from her mother tongue to the foreign language, the process is actually reversible. As we have seen, there are cases in which Tawada writes in a foreign language and then translates her work into her native idiom.

In regard to the former, if asked about the process of self-translation of her own works, Tawada remarks that when she writes in Japanese she is governed by the intrinsic qualities of the mother tongue. So, when she translates her work into German, she ends up slightly changing it, in order to adjust it according to the new linguistic space in which she wants to situate her work. Language is for Tawada the expression of one's cultural legacy, therefore, she believes the process of self-translation implies a constant rewriting one's own work, relocating it in a different cultural space.

In *Schwager in Bordeaux*, a work written in German and then translated into Japanese, every chapter of the German edition is introduced by a Chinese character (*kanji*): this is a precise stylistic choice that aims at creating a sense of unfamiliarity in the German readers, mostly unaware of the Japanese language

In her own Japanese translation, on the contrary, Tawada decided not to have German titles in the individual chapters, and to use the same Chinese characters as the German version only reversed. Thus, she is able to recreate the sense of unfamiliarity in the Japanese reader, the same way *kanji* were unsettling for the readers of the first version. For Tawada, this feeling needed to be preserved in her self-translation. A semantic explanation would not have worked properly; therefore, she opted for the strategy of simply reversing the *kanji* in the Japanese version.

It is also important to mention that in other cases, such as 旅をする裸の眼 *Tabi wo suru hadaka no me* (*Der nackte Auge*, 2004), Tawada writes her work simultaneously in both Japanese and German. As we have seen, the themes of

translation and space are very well connected throughout all of Tawada's work, but it is in her 2002 collection of stories and essays *Überseetzungen* that it is possible to find some of the best and also the most amusing examples. In *Überseetzungen*, travelling between different languages mirrors geographical mobility, and the languages become the areas in which the narration develops (Kraenzle 2007, 91-2).

Published in 2002, the title of the novel is one of the best and most famous examples of the author's brilliant linguistic puns, a recurring feature of her literary production: *Übersee* in German means "overseas" and *Zungen* means "tongues", so the title can be interpreted as a movement of languages (both in its physical meaning of muscular organ and in its abstract meaning, contained therewithin, of idiom) from one side of the sea to another. Moreover, the title recalls the German word *Übersetzungen*, translations, so these journeys overseas among various idioms can also be read as a reflection on translation among different languages and cultures. Last but not least, *Seezunge* is the German word for the common sole (*Solea solea*), a very funny linguistic pun that draws an analogy between the tongue and the form of a fish<sup>1</sup>.

The travels narrated in the book are mostly travels through different languages. As noted by Kraenzle:

languages are imagined territories that can be navigated and explored. Within such a model, languages become sites through which individuals can move, locations where identities can reside or bounded spaces demarcating belonging or exclusion. (Kraenzle 2007: 99)

Moving the subject from one language to another, becomes therefore a spatial operation. The various protagonists of this book move between geographical spaces, and also between different languages and different cultural systems, in a constant process of self-translation; this is intended not only as a passage from one idiom to another, but also as a repositioning from one place to another, from one civilization to another.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed explanation see Ivancic (2017: 43).



As noted by Anderson, Kraenzle explicitly shows the use of travel as a spatial metaphor for the movement among different languages in Tawada's *Überseetzungen*; it is not a matter of self-displacement, but rather the crossing of a linguistic barrier and the protagonist's acquisition of the capacity to communicate in another language. This results not only in the territorial relocation, but also in the physical transformation of the narrator's body and identity (Anderson 2010: 51).

The book consists of a collection of fourteen narrative essays divided into three parts, entitled respectively *Euroasiatische Zungen*, *Südafrikanische Zungen*, and *Nordamerikanische Zungen*. As noted by Kraenzle, these *Überseetzungen* offer various thoughts on the act of translation (Kraenzle 2007: 104).

There are many examples that can be drawn from this brilliant collection of writings, like *Ein chinesisches Wörterbuch*, which consists of a single page with a simple list of words, paired together, separated by a colon: on the right of the colon there is a list of German terms, and on the left the literal translation in German of the Chinese characters that are used to write the same words. The page represents what Kraenzle has defined as a "disconnection between language systems" (Kraenzle 2007: 105).

This disconnection is also apparent in what, in my opinion, is one of the most brilliant narrative creations of the collection: *Die Botin*. It is the story of a woman, Mika, who once studied music in Germany and all of a sudden decided to return to Japan, for no apparent reason, and without providing a single explanation to her professor. Once she left, the man wrote Mika a letter, to which she always forgot to answer. In present time, Mika asks her friend Kayako, who is travelling to Germany, to take a message to him. However, since the old teacher is almost blind and can no longer read, she has to transmit it orally. Kayako does not know German at all, and the professor cannot speak Japanese. In order for Kayako to transmit the message, Mika finds homophones in the Japanese language which, if combined and pronounced one after another, will sound like realistic German speech:

Ich schreibe dir hier die zwei Ideogramme 少年 auf und du sprichst sie aus.

Shonen.

Ja, »schonen« bedeutet, einen Menschen oder ein Ding vorsichtig und behutsam behandeln. (Tawada 2002: 49)

Of course, the resulting texts make no sense in Japanese, either phonetically or semantically, and they don't make sense even if they are translated from Japanese into German:

Mikas Botschaft lautete folgendermaßen:

ein faden der schlange neu befestigte küste welche schule welche richtung der brunnen des jahres wurde zweimal gemalt das bild brechen und hinuntersteigen durch das reisfeld siehst du etwas wie eines weisheits-wurzel im gesicht [...]. (Tawada 2002: 49-50)

This is an example of how translation, in Tawada's writings, holds a plurality of meanings that go beyond the idea of simply making the text understandable from one language to another. The translation above is not a "correct" one, in traditional terms, but works as a passage of information between two places, a link that connects two different cultures. Kraenzle writes:

*Überseetzungen* reminds us of the double meaning of translation, which is at once to render the spoken or written word from one language in another, but also to move or carry from one place to another, a dual meaning that is perhaps more immediately present in the German *übersetzen*. Tawada reflects on travel and translation of various sorts: the geographical displacement of speaking subjects, the translation of lived experience and cognition into acts of speech and writing, the carrying over of significance from one language into another, and the translation of the subject into another cultural or linguistic medium. (Kraenzle 2007: 107)

The second strategy that is almost ubiquitous in the literary production of Tawada is plurilingualism. Tawada uses a very high degree of linguistic experimentation that sometimes results in the creation of a hybrid language. I believe that we can read this strategy to inscribe some of Tawada's works in a third space that belongs neither to Japanese nor to the German culture; a space of continuous negotiation with the purpose of collocating them on a transnational, global dimension. This collocation of her texts in the linguistic in-between recalls to a certain extent the condition of the author herself, always moving around the world among different places and different languages.

There are many examples, but I think that one of the best can be found in her 2010 work *Abenteuer der deutschen Grammatik*, a collection of texts on German grammatical features. Some themes from her previous works recur here, such as the differences between the personal pronouns, a topic that she had already explored in the story called *Eine leere Flasche* contained in *Überseezungen*. The third part of the collection, entitled *Die Mischschrift des Mondes*, is in my opinion extremely important, even beyond its linguistic relevance. It is constituted by only one poem that summarizes all the linguistic and expressive potential of Tawada's style: a rewriting, or a mixed-writing, as the title indicates, of a poem that appeared in one of her first works that carries the double Japanese/German title of あなたのいるところだけ何もない *Anata no iru tokoro dake nanimo nai / Nur da wo du bist da ist nichts* (1987). This collection contains several texts, written by Tawada in Japanese and translated into German by Peter Pörtner. In particular it is important to mention the poem 月の逃走 *Tsuki no tōsō*, which is translated in German as *Die Flucht des Mondes*, because in *Abenteuer der deutschen Grammatik*, Tawada fuses the German and the Japanese version together into a third, new poem entitled *Die 逃走 des 月 s*, whose first stanza follows here:

我 歌 auf der 廁  
da 来 der 月 herange 転 t  
裸  
auf einem 自転車  
彼 hatte den 道 mitten 通 den 暗喩公園 ge 選  
um 我 zu 会 (Tawada 2010: 41)

Mazza argues that the poem is crucial to understand the paradoxical approach of Tawada to language creativity (2016: 141). She connects the use of the alphabet to Tawada's conception of "opening wounds" on the page; it's a sort of physical operation that allows the poet to metaphorically cut open the space in the page and enter into the organism of language. It's not a matter of making two languages overlap and work in a synergic way, but rather "more than at the crossing of two languages, Tawada's literature can be found outside both of them. She can undoubtedly join the practitioner of what Umberto Eco has called "lunatic linguistic"

(Mazza 2016: 141). Again Mazza notes, writers like Tawada have the possibility to overlay their own grammatical logic to language: this results in creating a language that is almost unintelligible, an idiom that can be considered in a state – and she quotes Apter here – of semi-translation (2016: 141).

The first stanza of the text makes it immediately clear that we are dealing with a mixed writing of the two versions published in 1989. The poem is a combination of Chinese characters and the Latin alphabet; generally speaking we can say that in Japanese the Chinese characters are used to write the semantic part of the phrase, whereas the Japanese syllabaries, *kana*, are used for the grammatical information (verbal affixes, prepositions and articles). In this poem, the Latin alphabet is used for grammatical information, instead of *kana*, where the Chinese characters are still used to represent the meaning of the word (Barbieri 2016: 219).

The hybridization and interplay of languages does not happen only between Japanese and German, as the examples provided so far seem to suggest. In recent times, in fact, Tawada has started exploring the expressive potential of other languages too, such as Italian (Tawada 2016). Especially after the Fukushima nuclear accident and the subsequent tsunami that occurred in Japan in March 2011, Tawada's work has taken on a more intimate and dark turn. Additionally, while she is still dealing with the questions of identity that connote her first works, in her production she started inspecting themes related to ecology and the aftermath. In regard to this, I would like to present one last example, taken from a poem composed after the tragic events of March 2011: ハムレットの海 *Hamuretto no umi*<sup>2</sup>. It is a poem written in Japanese, but it contains significant examples of linguistic play, this time not involving German but mainly English. Entire lines of the famous “To be or not to be” soliloquy uttered by Prince Hamlet in Shakespeare's masterpiece are inserted in the text. These quotations

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes called also *Hamuretto* (or *Hamlet*) *no sea*, the complete text of the poem, as well as a translation in German made by the author herself, together with a mp3 with a reading of the poem by Tawada, can be found at the following link, with the title this time *Hamlet no see*: <https://www.lyrikline.org/de/gedichte/hamlet-no-see-13807> (last access: September 14th, 2020)

are not translated into Japanese, but are left in English, and are, therefore, written in the Latin alphabet. Visually speaking, as in the case of *Die* 逃走 *des* 月 *s*, the Latin alphabet and Japanese characters intersect and coincide on the page:

飛べ、飛べ、とんび、飛べ、とんび、飛び、  
飛ぶべきか、飛ばないべきか、  
To be, それとも or  
not to be:  
それは問題か、  
喰え、と言われても、喰えない、  
それが問題、que·stion (Tawada 2011)

These are only the first lines<sup>3</sup> of the poem, but they clearly show a new sort of mixed writing from the linguistic and thematic perspective. It is a rewriting, or if we prefer a translation in modern times of the famous scene of the Shakespearean tragedy. In this poem, Tawada represents the anxiety that permeated Japan in the period after the Fukushima disaster: the fear of the radioactive contamination of the air, soil, and, above all, of fresh food. The contamination was invisible to the naked eye. Nobody knew at that time whether produce from the rural area of Fukushima was considered safe for human consumption, or whether the fish had also been contaminated by the radioactive waste. Despite the many reassurances from the central government, people were frightened, and there was a general uncertainty about what could be consumed or not. Eating is one of the basic human needs, and therefore, if an individual is not able to eat, they cannot ensure their survival. Produce from Fukushima was feared to be dangerous, so, rewriting Hamlet, the question is rather, “to eat or not to eat”? The word 喰え *kue* in Japanese means “eat!”, but it also sounds very similar to the first syllable of “question”, which is a central word in Hamlet’s soliloquy. The poem is based on linguistic puns like this: similarly to the assonance between *kue* and *que-*, for instance, we can notice the pun 飛べ *tobe* (fly!) and “to be”. It also contains entire lines taken from the Shakespearean

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<sup>3</sup> The full text can be retrieved at the link above.

soliloquy, which dialogue and harmonize perfectly with the general topic of this wonderful piece of writing.

Also, the first part of Shakespeare's name, *shi*, towards the end of the poem, is phonetically equal to the word 死 *shi*, which in Japanese means "death". Moreover, *shi*, death, is also phonetically similar to sea (or at least how Japanese people would pronounce it), as to suggest that death that day came from the sea in the form of a *tsunami*, that sea of troubles which destroyed places and lives.

There is also an assonance and language pun between the Japanese words, “たべる な、ない、ないん、ないんだ” *taberu na, nai, nain, nainda* and the German word “Nein!” that recalls negation and prohibition, impossibility to eat (*taberu* in Japanese) that we feel from inside because “that is the question: Whether 安全か危険か” we don't know whether it is safe (安全 *anzen*) or dangerous (危険 *kiken*) to eat the food from Fukushima. As Robert Campbell points out<sup>4</sup>, if the poem is read aloud, with its lines in English and the text in Japanese, it is incredibly difficult to differentiate between the two languages, which are craftily mixed together, to the extent that the listener is not immediately able to tell whether the sounds belong to English, Japanese, or even German. The use of multiple languages leads to a series of doubts and misinterpretations. These convey a sense of uncertainty that recalls the general feeling of hesitancy about food and nutrition in the aftermath.

As Cattaneo points out, Hamlet is perhaps one of Shakespeare's most modern tragedies; the sensibility of the hero is close to that of contemporary man, haunted by doubts and paralyzed by his own indecision (Cattaneo 2019: 92-4) that reaches a climax in the most famous soliloquy of the tragedy. Hamlet is unable to come to a final decision, in the very same way the voice of Tawada's poem is paralyzed, and seems unable to make a decision: to eat or not to eat?

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<sup>4</sup> Yōko Tawada: *The Fascination of Exophonic Literature* (min. 22:48): <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/ondemand/video/2043047/>

Bertinetti (2010: 44-6) underlines how Shakespeare's work today is still relevant for contemporary sensibilities. Although deeply rooted in its own historical context, his work is still able to represent the most innate fears and feelings of humankind. This is probably what makes it a classic of world literature, and a masterpiece that is able to transcend boundaries and talk to a transnational audience. The poetic device of "in-flux", as presented by Suga Keijirō (2007: 23), is also important in this writing by Tawada; the direct use of words from a foreign piece acquire a meaning, and therefore poetic power, also in the new context where they are inserted. By constructing her text from the model of the well-known Shakespeare soliloquy, I believe that Tawada is addressing an international audience. As the nuclear incident of Fukushima echoed around the world, and people from different countries followed with great concern and involvement what was happening in Japan, the choice of "in-fluxing" a literary masterpiece can be seen as a strategy that helps the text speak to a truly international public.

Tawada's text becomes, then, a space in which elements of different cultures are transferred and translated; her page is a *mélange* of different languages and cultures that mirrors the complex asset of human experience in the global world.

In a recent TV programme, *Yōko Tawada: The Fascination of Exophonic Literature*, aired on NHK World on 28 April 2019<sup>5</sup>, Tawada was asked to choose a Chinese character to describe herself. She chose 流 *nagareru*, to flow, because she likes the idea of fluidity, being in a state of perpetual motion. She also stated that in her opinion, in the future, the way people live and act will continue to change, as human existence is in a state of constant movement. Nevertheless, she still believes that it is essential for her to put down roots somewhere at some point, and not to constantly change and continue flowing aimlessly.

Translation is a key point in Tawada's poetics: it contributes to shaping the language and the style of the author, but it is also used as a metaphor for spatial mobility. Tawada is a writer who writes outside her mother tongue, and self-

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<sup>5</sup> The program is available in streaming on the official NHK-World website until April 28th 2020: <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/ondemand/video/2043047/> (access: December 20th, 2019).

translation in her works is conceived not only as linguistic transformations, but also as a proper spatial and physical migration from one place of the world to another.

In her texts, Tawada combines elements from foreign languages and her mother tongue to represent the trans-national dimension of today's world. In doing so, she carefully uses all the semantic and phonetic potential of the languages that she combines, but she is also able to craft dialogues among different literary traditions. In fact, in her frequent rewritings and "in-fluxes" not only of German literature, but also English — as we have seen in the case of the poem inspired by Shakespeare — she is able to intertwine a plurality of elements that come from various locations in Asia and Europe. This ability to weave different languages and different cultural expressions, in order to create messages significant for a transnational audience, makes Tawada Yōko one of the most knowledgeable spokespersons of a literature that translates itself (both in its physical and linguistic sense) from one part of the globe to another, thus acquiring a global reach. The literature of Tawada Yōko, for its peculiar nature of collocating itself in-between languages, cultures, and countries, for its ability to translate meanings both on a linguistic and spatial dimension, is able to build bridges between cultures and languages and represent the desirable dialogue and the mutual intelligibility among people in today's world.

Her increasing success can therefore be interpreted as proof that, every day, more and more people recognize themselves in what she writes and are fully supportive of the issues she poses with her literature.

### **Works cited**

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