

***[it] shakes my whole breathing being: Rethinking Gender with Translation in Anne Carson's "A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways"***<sup>1</sup>

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*Anne Carson's "A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways" expresses new possibilities for the contemporary retranslation of ancient Classical texts. My article argues that Carson's powerful, ground-shifting retranslation enlists significant procedural constraints to offer a progressive re-reading of the heteronormative, conventionally gendered garden in Ibykos Fragment 286. Carson retranslates Fragment 286 six times using only vocabularies from selected topical and literary source texts with contexts remote from the original. As a result, vocabularies and scenarios shift—from Romantic love to microwave operations—but the structural and rhetorical gestures of the fragment are retained. Conventional gender roles are not merely reversed nor is the garden simply transformed. Carson's six versions transcend the emphasis on gendered textual signals by leaving gender aside to investigate performative reading and translation practices more closely.*

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Anne Carson's "A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways"<sup>2</sup> expresses new possibilities for the contemporary retranslation of ancient Classical texts.<sup>3</sup> My article argues that Carson's powerful, ground-shifting retranslation enlists significant procedural constraints to offer a progressive re-reading of the heteronormative, conventionally gendered garden in Ibykos Fragment 286. Carson retranslates Fragment 286 six times using only vocabularies from selected topical and literary source texts with contexts remote from the original. As a result, vocabularies and scenarios shift—from Romantic love to microwave operations—but the structural and rhetorical gestures of the fragment are retained. Conventional gender roles are not merely reversed nor is the garden simply transformed. Carson's six versions transcend the emphasis on gendered

textual signals by leaving gender aside to investigate performative reading and translation practices more closely.

Translating the same source text multiple times presents the translator with a challenge to innovate, develop, or improve on the previous versions while preserving some connection to the original poem. The surprising and seemingly incongruent shifts in Carson's six versions invite the reader to look closer and look harder for consistencies and correspondences present in each version. Carson's six retranslations are comprised exclusively of words and phrases cited and quoted from the following texts: John Donne's poem "Woman's Constancy," Bertolt Brecht's FBI file, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, Gustav Janouch's *Conversations with Kafka*, stops and signs from the London Underground, and an Emerson microwave oven manual. It is crucial that the six ways be read chronologically in the order they appear.

The impact of Carson's versions is twofold: her retranslations convey the core movements and gestures of Ibykos's fragment and offer the reader a richer view (or views) of the original poem, as well as the novelty of a puzzle. When read in order, each of Carson's versions, or "ways," becomes more and more impersonal, less gendered and eroticized as her retranslations create distance from the conventional, heteronormative spring garden that figures prominently in the first section of Ibykos's fragment. The space created by this distance is the site where Carson frustrates conventional readerly expectations by performing what she calls a "catastrophizing of translation" (Nay 32). "Catastrophizing" is an urgent, creative response to cliché, insofar as clichéd words and phrases settle for stereotype in lieu of reaching for original expression, in part because no single adequate expression is possible. In translation terms, "catastrophizing" is a response to an untranslatability in the text, a way of responding with disaster to a silence that resists communication. Carson "take[s] a small fragment of ancient Greek lyric poetry and translate[s] it over and over again using the wrong words" (Nay 32). The iterative procedure is as crucial as the "wrong words."

Ibykos (6<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE) is one of the nine ancient Greek poets included in the canonical group of lyric or "melic" (from *melos*, "song") poets esteemed by

the scholars of Hellenistic Alexandria. Originally from Rhegium in Magna Graecia, Ibykos composed fragment 286 later in his life after moving to Samos during the reign of the tyrant Polykrates (c. 538–522 BCE).<sup>4</sup> The work of Ibykos survives only in excerpts quoted by ancient scholars, such as Athenaeus, who used his poems as examples to illustrate certain poetic features like amorous praise. The extant part of this poem consists of thirteen lines of lyrical, metrical, erotic poetry. Scholars argue that these lines must be fragmentary.<sup>5</sup> The poem’s structural, rhetorical features make it an excellent candidate for Carson’s exercise in catastrophizing translation because the paired rhetorical particles *μεν...δε* (“on the one hand...on the other hand...”) are easily noticed.<sup>6</sup> Carson explains why she was drawn to the poetic features of the original poem, writing that “This poem shines in my mind like a jewel and always has, since I first came upon it. With its changing lights and shadows, weird temperatures, sly shifts of sense and mood and wet and dry and weather, contradictions of stillness and motion, not to say the astounding nakedness of the poet himself at the end—who could resist it?”<sup>7</sup>

I include the Greek text of Ibykos here, followed by the first translation in Carson’s “A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways.”<sup>8</sup>

ἦρι μὲν αἶ τε Κυδώνιαι	
μηλίδες ἀρδόμεναι ῥοᾶν	
ἐκ ποταμῶν, ἵνα Παρθένων	
κῆπος ἀκήρατος, αἶ τ’ οἴνανθίδες	
αὐξόμεναι σκιεροῖσιν ὑφ’ ἔρνεσιν	5
οἴναρέοις θαλέθοισιν· ἐμοὶ δ’ ἔρος	
οὐδεμίαν κατάκοιτος ὤραν·	
†τε† ὑπὸ στεροπᾶς φλέγων	
Θρηίκιος Βορέας αἴσσω	
παρὰ Κύπριδος ἀζαλαίαις μανίαισιν	10
ἐρεμνὸς ἀθαμβῆς	
ἐγκρατέως πεδόθεν †φυλάσσει† (τινασσει)	

ἡμετέρας φρένας.

In spring, on the one hand,  
the Kydonian apple trees,  
being watered by streams of rivers  
where the uncut garden of the maidens [is]  
and vine blossoms  
swelling  
beneath shady vine branches  
bloom.

On the other hand, for me  
Eros lies quiet at no season.  
Nay rather,  
like a Thracian north wind  
ablaze with lightning,  
rushing from Aphrodite  
accompanied by parching madnesses,  
black,  
unastonishable,  
powerfully,  
right up from the bottom of my feet  
[it] shakes my whole breathing being.

By contrast, I include Claire Wilkinson's scholarly prose retranslation from *The Lyric of Ibycus* (2012) as well as G.P. Goold's scholarly prose retranslation of fragment 286 from the *Greek Lyric III* volume of the Loeb Classical Library. Goold's translation is notable because he includes Athenaeus' expository preface which precedes the excerpt.

Goold:

And the man of Rhegium, Ibycus, shouts and screams,

In the spring flourish Cydonian quince-trees, watered from flowering rivers where stands the inviolate garden of the Maidens, and vine-blossoms growing under the shady vine-branches; but for me love rests at no season: like the Thracian north wind blazing with lightning rushing from the Cyprian with parching fits of madness, dark and shameless, it powerfully shakes my heart from the roots.<sup>9</sup>

Wilkinson:

In Spring, the Cydonian quince trees, watered by the streams of rivers, where there is the uncut garden of the maidens, bloom, and the vines with their vine-leaves; but for me love rests in no season. Burning with lightning, the Thracian North wind, darting from the Cyprian, dark with parching madnesses, fearless, utterly †guards† my senses from the ground.<sup>10</sup>

Carson's and Wilkinson's retranslations are remarkably similar in imagery, diction, and turns of phrase. The major distinguishing features in Carson's version are that she retains poetic line breaks and crucial rhetorical markers "on the one hand" (μεν), "on the other hand" (δε), and "nay rather" (τε υπο). Wilkinson marks the structural shift in her retranslation with a simple "but." She also follows φυλάσσει ("to keep watch and ward, to guard") in line 12, so the final expression in her retranslation reads "the Thracian North wind...utterly guards my senses from the ground."<sup>11</sup> Carson's and Goold's versions, following τινασσει, create stronger emotional impact: "it powerfully shakes my heart from the roots" and "[it] shakes my whole breathing being." Goold's and Wilkinson's retranslations depict a scene quite opposite to the Thracian wind that "shakes my whole breathing being" in Carson's version.

The interpretation of fragment 286 relies on the structural device that splits the poem in half: *μεν...δε...* (“on the one hand...on the other hand”). The structural split and the contrast between the two halves are supported in Greek by the difference in the metrical patterns of each section. The first section consists of three lines of ibycean meter  $\bar{\text{v}}\text{v} | \bar{\text{v}}\text{v} | \bar{\text{v}}\text{v}$ , followed by three dactylic tetrameters  $\bar{\text{v}}\text{v} | \bar{\text{v}}\text{v} | \bar{\text{v}}\text{v} | \bar{\text{v}}\text{v}$ . The longer tetrameter line seems to make room for expansive description and explosive emotion. The content of the fragment changes to accommodate the different meters. The idyllic garden scene—shaded, well-watered, populated with flowering plants—is contrasted with blasts from chilly Thracian squalls. C.G. Bowra (272-276) favours the garden as representative of maidenhood, a time of innocence untroubled by love. This sheltered, protected time during youth is contrasted with the poet/speaker’s mind, which falls to unexpected and violent passion out of season, i.e. during old age. The peacefulness and vitality of the garden is disrupted by the sudden windswept arrival of the Thracian wind. The garden suggests eroticism and the natural development of love, rather than simply untroubled innocence, as seen by the concentration of vocabulary charged with fertility and immanent bloom. The “apples” or “quinces” (*μηλίδες*), “uncut garden” (*κῆπος ἀκήρατος*), “grape vines” (*οἰνανθίδες*) all represent images of youth and fruition. Finally, the contrast between the two halves of the poem are representations of, on the one hand, the seasonal consistency of nature and, on the other hand, the inconsistency of the poet/speaker’s life, which is visited by overwhelming love year round, regardless of seasonal shifts. The poet/speaker expresses distress at experiencing love at the “wrong” season/period of life (i.e. in old age as opposed to in youth) as represented by the disruption of the conventional spring garden of Eros. Conventionally, love is assumed to be confined to a certain period of life, represented by the protective, secluded, enclosed garden, and is supposed to correspond to youth. For the poet/speaker, love moves him no matter the season or period of life. This interpretation is supported by the double meaning of *ωρᾶν* as both “season of the year” and “period of life.”

In her book *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986), Carson portrays the “mixed sensations” of Eros in terms of the paradoxical sensations “bitter/sweet” and “cold/hot.” As for the “wet/dry” paradox in fragment 286, Carson emphasizes that the black thunderstorm of desire drives against Ibykos not [wet] rain, but [dry] “parching madnenses” (*Eros* 7). The dewy ripening apples, well-watered river streams, and fecundity in the first section of the poem describes the spring garden as the locus of heteronormative love poetry. It occurs at a predictable time (Spring) in a controlled manner (horticulturally). As such, the garden is a kind of locus at odds with Ibykos’s desire, which is exceedingly dry: windy, stormy yet absent of rain, accompanied with flashing fire (στεροπας φλεγων), parched (αζαλειας) and maniacal (μανιασιν). Both “wet” and “dry” are contained in Eros even if they describe paradoxical sensations. Ibykos expresses that “dryness” moves him more, even if it is destructive and unseasonable.

According to Carson’s reading, the very nature of experiencing Eros is oppositional, contrastive, and paradoxical. It is, on the one hand, “bitter,” and on the other hand “sweet.” Representing the sensations of Eros relies on maintaining balance between the two. The adversative correlative markers *μεν...δε* “on the one hand...on the other hand...” reflect the paradox of Eros in its structural expression of contrasting elements. Insofar as this is the case, I propose that the paradoxical gestures associated with Eros, modeled on fragment 286, are retained throughout Carson’s six retranslations representing different scenarios.

The structural features of *μεν...δε* are accompanied by *αλλ’ αθ’* in line 8, a contraction of *αλλα ατε*, literally “but just as.”<sup>12</sup> This phrase signals the beginning of the contrastive second section of each of the six poems. Carson translates this phrase as “nay rather.” She fixates on it, repeats it, makes it the title of her chapbook *Nay Rather* (Sylph 2013), and gives to it an importance similar to that in the original text. The contested emendations in the manuscript already draw attention to this line textually. The inclusion of manuscript daggers (†) around *τε* also separates and marks the word typographically and visually in the text. Choosing a contested point in the text gives Carson more freedom to experiment

and draw the reader's attention to her translations. Distinguishing Carson's version further is her decision to translate the Greek phrase using antiquated English. The word "nay" itself already suggests the contrastive sense of "rather," so Carson's insistence on including both words in translation doubles the contrastive force of the second section of the poem it announces.<sup>13</sup>

In order to better understand the particular ways Carson's retranslations of Ibykos' fragment 286 depart from traditional versions, it is useful to consider how other poet-translators have approached this poem. Retranslations by Lattimore, Barnstone, Fowler, and Pound offer a range of interpretations and translation strategies that show some of the recent ways fragment 286 have been retranslated in English. The retranslations by Lattimore, Barnstone, and Fowler preserve the protected sense of the first section with "secret garden," "girls' holy orchard," and "garden unshorn" respectively. Pound describes it as a "sylvan place," but his retranslation yields particularities that I will address separately. The fertility images of the first section are rendered by Lattimore with the requisite "Kydonian quinces," and grapes that "grow round" and "ripen." Barnstone writes that "quince trees ripen," and embellishes the garden with "luxuriant leafage," and "newborn shoots." For Fowler, "the vine blossom swells / beneath the leaves' / shadowing spray."

In the second half of the poem, significant variations transpire in each translation.

Lattimore writes:

Now in this season for me  
there is no rest from love.  
Out of the hard bright sky,  
a Thracian north wind blowing  
with searing rages and hurt—dark,  
pitiless, sent by Aphrodite—Love  
rocks and tosses my heart.<sup>14</sup>



Barnstone writes:

But for me, Eros  
knows no winter sleep, and as north winds  
burn down from Thrace  
with searing lightning,  
Kypris mutilates my heart with black  
and baleful love.<sup>15</sup>

And Fowler:

But for me  
there is no season  
the Love God sleeps.  
For from beneath  
the lightning's blaze,  
like the North Wind from Thrace,  
he leaps from the Kyprian's side.  
Black, bold,  
with shriveling madness,  
he shakes  
and utterly shatters  
my soul.<sup>16</sup>

Lattimore's and Fowler's retranslations use pacing to convey the urgency and breathlessness of affliction, whereas Barnstone relies on shifts in diction with words like "searing lightning," "mutilates," and "baleful love." The simplicity of words that don't call attention to themselves is more effective at depicting the intense, consuming condition of Eros than words from the sensational register of "searing" and "mutilates." The melodrama of Lattimore's "searing rages" is restrained by the retreating and scaling back of "hurt." The accumulated pile-up of adjectives and nouns gives the impression of the bombardment of the senses and emotions. This expresses the magnitude of the torrential disturbance more

vividly than words that simply declare themselves at louder volume. A more even-keeled diction paired with accelerated pacing insists on the erotic devastation's rushing effect as it unfolds and intensifies structurally, temporally, physically as the reader moves through the lines of the poem.

Pound's translation comes closest to being unconventional, but enlists an approach entirely contrary to Carson's. The reader can find Pound's "The Spring" here:

CYDONIAN spring with her attendant train,  
 Maelids and water-girls,  
 Stepping beneath a boisterous wind from Thrace,  
 Throughout this sylvan place  
 Spreads the bright tips,  
 And every vine-stock is  
 Clad in new brilliancies.  
 And wild desire  
 Falls like black lightning.  
 O bewildered heart,  
 Though every branch have back what last year  
 lost,  
 She, who moved here amid the cyclamen,  
 Moves only now a clinging tenuous ghost.

Pound's version offers three particularly notable features. Pound coins a neologism—"Maelids"—a homophonic rendering of the Greek μηλίδες. In doing so, he detaches the apples/quinces (μηλίδες) from their modifying adjective "Kydonian" (Κυδώνια), making no mention of the fruits at all. The spectral figure in the final couplet is also a Poundian invention. Thirdly, Pound confounds the structural features and the force of their rhetorical effect by changing the order of the components of the poem. Pound's retranslation retains the contrastive two-part structure, but the key *μεν...δε* correlatives are absent. More importantly, the

elements of the contrasting second section, with its dry “parching madresses” are, in Pound’s poem, scattered about in the translation. “Stepping beneath a boisterous wind from Thrace” appears at line 3, followed by the restored calm of “this sylvan place.” The adjective “boisterous” doesn’t bring with it any element of threat, but rather conveys rowdiness. “Wild desire,” which “falls like black lightning,” is followed by a “bewildered heart” lamenting a branch bereft of blossoms. It is almost as if Pound deliberately introduces the Erotic force (“wind from Thrace,” “wild desire,” and “black lightning”) only to pull back immediately with its mitigating pastoral opposite. This nervous shifting back and forth creates the effect of continuous fluctuation, and introduces the rhetorical contrast of “on the one hand/on the other hand” too early and often, ruining its effect. Pound insists that the garden remains a significant poetic trope by returning to the “cyclamen” and “hav[ing] back what last year lost.” Carson wants the garden gone.

Pound also seems to insist on maintaining gendered spaces. What is the effect of the female figure in Pound’s version, a sudden “She” “only now a clinging tenuous ghost”? The very mention of “She” seems like an afterthought yet at the same time the poem’s primary underlying motive. Pound sets up the seasonal shifts in order to contrast the natural perennial growth cycle with “She” who will not return yet continues to haunt the heart as a “tenuous ghost.”

In Carson’s first version of fragment 286, the sudden urgency of the second section of the poem is expressed structurally, precipitously:

like a Thracian north wind  
 ablaze with lightning,  
 rushing from Aphrodite  
 accompanied by parching madresses,  
 black,  
 unastonishable,  
 powerfully,  
 right up from the bottom of my feet

[it] shakes my whole breathing being.

The simile comparing the poet/speaker's contrastive state ("like a Thracian north wind") jumpstarts the wildness and agitation that characterizes the second section. This rushing sensation continues with a crescendo of subordinate clauses ("ablaze with lightning, / rushing from Aphrodite") populated by adverbs and adjectives ("black, / unastonishable, / powerfully"), emphasized by the line breaks. Allotting each adverb/adjective to its own line produces a cascading effect, an effect of acceleration as each line is more quickly read, more quickly met by the eye. At the same time, the line breaks also serve as a kind of punctuation, slowing the reader down. The overall effect is a combination of speeding up and stopping short.

Carson's uncanny ability to translate in a way that shakes the reader to reconsider the original word or phrase extends beyond the lexical and semantic levels of the poem. As I have shown above with Carson's first retranslation of fragment 286 in this series, her attention to how structure effects a poem's pacing and movements, as expressed by parts of speech and line breaks, conveys an often neglected vital feature of the rhetorical effect in the original poem. Throughout this article I have referred to the structural and rhetorical gestures of fragment 286, and how Carson retains these features from the original poem in her six retranslations. This next section will describe the inner workings of this structure, and show how certain structural elements are preserved, maintained and transposed from one version to the next. I will also show how Carson's six versions feature additional grammatical markers developed in her first retranslation that are consistently retained throughout her six versions, although the specific contexts in which the additional markers operate are changed. For example, where there is a plural noun (eg. "apple trees") in line 2 of the original poem, each of the six retranslations feature a plural noun at the same location, but on a topic entirely unrelated to apples or arbors. All six versions abide by a template of words that determines the poem's overall grammatical structure. For each version, I have compiled the corresponding

grammatical functions for the significant positions in each line, so the reader might readily observe how Carson's strategy retains the same parts of speech from the original poem.

With each version, Carson replaces the parts of speech with a matching part of speech selected from the vocabulary provided by the textual source listed in the title of each version, e.g. John Donne's "Woman's Constancy." In Figure 1 below, I have placed the parts of speech in a template of grammatical functions comprising the composition of each retranslation that serves as the overall structure.

In/at \_\_\_\_\_ *noun* \_\_\_\_\_, on the one hand,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *noun (pl.)* \_\_\_\_\_  
 being (or other present participle) \_\_\_\_\_ *passive voice verb* \_\_\_\_\_ (by)  
 where \_\_\_\_\_ *noun* \_\_\_\_\_ [is/were/verb]  
 and  
 beneath \_\_\_\_\_ *noun* \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *verb* \_\_\_\_\_  
 On the other hand, \_\_\_\_\_ *1st person pronoun, generally* \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *a negative* \_\_\_\_\_  
 Nay rather,  
 like \_\_\_\_\_ *noun* \_\_\_\_\_  
 accompanied by \_\_\_\_\_ *noun, or gesture* \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *adverbs & participles* \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *adverbs & participles* \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *adverbs & participles* \_\_\_\_\_  
 [it] \_\_\_\_\_ *1st person pronoun, generally* \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ *gesture of abandon* \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 1. Structural skeleton of Carson's "A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways"

The contrastive correlative markers "on the one hand...on the other hand" and "nay rather" both arise from the original Greek text. The prepositional and

participial words and phrases arise from Carson's first published English retranslation in this set. Combined, they form the template for Carson's six "ways" of Ibykos. The template gives the retranslations a physical, typographical shape, and skeletal structure which also ventures to direct the gestures and movements of each poem by suggesting programmatic grammatical features, like prepositional phrases or the passive voice at predetermined lines of the poem. "After all what else is one's own language but a gigantic cacophonous cliché. Nothing has not been said before. The templates are set" (Nay 24). This process ends with a final "version" or "way" that looks remarkably deranged from the level of lexis and the structure apparent in Carson's first retranslation. The words in each retranslation change—"Spring," for example, is replaced in turn with "woman," "a cocktail party," "your kitchen," "the end," and "hot snacks and appetizers," as each of the six "ways" displaces the original poem and its paradoxical erotic context. The vocabularies from which the words are selected come from different topical and literary sources. Even so, the six retranslations express some detectable trace of the paradoxical sensations of Eros, even if "Eros" becomes so displaced over the course of six repeated retranslations that it manifests as a commodity of convenience: a "frozen pancake." There remains a gesture of Eros's paradoxical sensations throughout, even if it is not exactly literally "wet" and "dry" as it is in the original's sense. Although the gestures of Eros are retained, the initial emphasis on gender gives way to the individual, ungendered "you."

In "[Ib. Fr. 286 translated using only words from 'Woman's Constancy' by John Donne]," "spring" becomes "woman." Safely within the topical realm of love poetry, Ibykos's spring garden is populated with "maidens," and Donne's "woman" singles out and individualizes one particular woman by whom the poet/speaker refuses to be settled, despite her constancy ("thy vow")—or perhaps because of it. Although this version suggests a more intimate and personal discourse between two people, the phrase "In woman, on the one hand" approximates a generalization about "In woman" that yields the specific

conditions for the poet/speaker's contrasting situation "on the other hand:" unconquered, "now disputing, / now abstaining," "lunatic."

"[Ibykos fr. 286 translated using only words from Bertolt Brecht's FBI file #100-67077]" marks the retranslation's shift to subject matters farther afield from the original's spring garden, erotic madness, and the topic and genre of love poetry. "In spring," via "In woman," becomes "At a cocktail party attended by known Communists." The natural, cultivated, seasonal garden has been modernized, interiorized, and politicized as a social mixer. The site of the love poem has changed radically. The heteronormative institution of "Eros" and the contractual "vow" become an investigative "Bureau." However, the "Bureau" has "no record" of the poet/speaker's name, just as "thy vow" fails to "conquer" and "Eros" refuses to "lie down." The regulating and surveilled features of this version—"known Communists," "5 copies"—is confronted by a series of "unknown" factors and identity shifts. "Charles Laughton" makes a stage come-back as "Galileo." The aggregate "name with a hyphen between Eugene and Friedrich" slips the notice of Bureau records completely, and the seemingly deliberate vagueness with which personal identities are named or unable to be named is persistent:

"the name of a certain Frenchman to whom Charles  
Laughton might send packages,  
accompanied by an unknown woman  
who spoke to an unknown man,  
or accompanied by an unknown man  
who spoke to an unknown woman..."

In Carson's version, the Bureau record fails to accurately represent "the subject" because of the persistence of shifting identities and multiple names. The subject is, however, "suitably paraphrased." This "failure" begins to approximate, in an analogous sense, the challenges presented in translation on account of the different historical, linguistic, and cultural elements and nuances of languages. Like shifting identities and multiple names, a word is rarely fixed by a singular

meaning or corresponding word in another language, just as “Charles” is, or is not, also “Galileo.” This “failure” also suggests the ineffectiveness of certain translations that rely on overused, outdated diction. And “in the event that all the captions are not correct,” reading “Ibykos-as-FBI file” in such a way enables this version—and Carson’s Ibykos retranslations overall—to challenge conventional translation strategies provoked by her repeated retranslations of Ibykos’s fragment.

Insofar as “A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways” is an intervention, a “catastrophizing of translation,” it must also suggest its critical positioning vis-à-vis the conventional, traditional translation practices it challenges. The Bureau fails to capture a singular identity in “Ibykos-as-FBI,” and such bureaucratic failure also represents the challenges posed by the translation process in light of historical, linguistic, and cultural elements and nuances of languages. Carson’s next two versions further pursue the venture of her critical positioning. In “[Ibykos fr. 286 translated using only words from p. 27 of *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett],” the implicit critique of conventional, traditional translation strategies continues. Cliché-ridden, outdated translations of Classical poetry could be characterized as “bright corpses / starting to stink of an idea,” in which the “whole universe / doesn’t ring and won’t work.” In fact, such an outmoded translation deters the reader’s interest and attention: “[it] kisses me goodbye. I’m dead. (Pause.)” This parting gesture—a kiss—perhaps Erotic in the Ibykonian sense, but more likely a condemning smooch *adieu*. The modern reader recoils “frankly, / angrily, / impatiently” from overwrought diction as from a kiss of death.

In “[Ibykos fr. 286 translated using only words from *Conversations with Kafka* by Gustav Janouch, pp. 136–7],” outdated translations “arouse suspicion.” They render the reader catatonic by “stock phrases, / with a gentle indefinable smile.” Readers no longer trust the outmoded translation’s capacity to effectively convey the original poem’s emotional, rhetorical potency. In this version, Carson seems to issue a charge of her own at the contrastive turning point “on the other hand” that “one who is afraid should not go into the wood.” What follows seems



to me to be a manifesto of sorts declaring her convictions for what the repeated retranslations of Ibykos aim to achieve:

fearlessly,  
 patiently,  
 unfortunately,  
 against myself,  
 against my own limitations and apathy,  
 against this very desk and chair I'm sitting in,  
 the charge is clear: one is condemned to life not death.

Carson's Ibykos retranslations are standard-bearers for going "into the wood" "fearlessly," "patiently," and "condemn[ing]" Fragment 286 "to life not death." Carson's "catastrophizing" retranslations resuscitate fragment 286 from the "bright corpses" of conventional retranslations, from the "whole universe" of translation strategies that "doesn't ring and won't work."

"[Ibykos fr. 286 translated using stops and signs from the London Underground]" sees the return of the original poem's "garden." Unlike the first "uncut garden of the maidens," in this version, there are "seven sisters / gardening in the British Museum." In a reversal of conventional gender roles, the women are not merely fixtures ornamenting the heteronormative garden, but are themselves the horticultural architects, perhaps even curating a cultural exhibit. This poem "ditch[es] old shepherds for new elephants" and Carson's "catastrophizing" calls on "angels" to "mind the gap" between conventional correspondences of original and translated texts.

Resistance to regulation also appears in Carson's final version, "[Ibykos fr. 286 translated using only words from *The Owner's Manual* of my new Emerson 1000W microwave oven, pp. 17-18]." At the contrastive turning point, Eros is transformed into a frozen pancake, and Eros's refusal to "lie down" when the seasons change becomes an analogous gesture of defiance, a recalcitrant defectiveness on behalf of pre-packaged griddled goods to deliver as expected:

“On the other hand, a frozen pancake / will not crust.” The image of where “the uncut garden of the maidens [is]” in Spring becomes a “browned appearance [is desirable]” in “hot snacks and appetizers.” The “vine blossoms / swelling / beneath shady vine branches / bloom” is a coded, symbolic image, loaded with precedence in conventional love poetry. Ibykos resists the “vine blossoms,” and in “Ibykos-as-microwave,” these overused images are matched by the unappealing “soggy crackers, / wrapped in bacon, / toughen.”

Eros’s refusal to “lie down” is depicted as a restless, rushing gesture “like a Thracian north wind / ablaze with lightning.” However, the pancake’s obstinate uncrustability suggests quite the opposite gesture. Unlike Eros, it lies flat. A soggy pancake hardly approximates gale-force Thracian wind and Aphroditic lightning storms. Rather, in this final version, Carson offers a twist. Ibykos writes that pervasive, destructive, and untimely Eros afflicts him, “ablaze,” “rushing,” “parching,” “black, / unastonishable, / powerfully.” In “Ibykos-as-microwave,” the Eros-pancake is subjected to “radio waves, / bubbling, / spattering.” Electromagnetic radiation changes temperatures from extremes, “frozen” to “burn[ing].” The paradoxical “wet/dry” sensations of Ibykonian Eros appear in the Emersonian microwave’s power to transform “frozen” conditions to “burning” ones. Just as Ibykos declares himself destroyed by “dryness”—literally lung-shaken from the ground up—the potential for “burn[ing] your nose right off” threatens the prospective heedless, unsuspecting microwave user. Just as the poet/speaker in Fragment 286 is violently shaken by Eros-as-lightning storm, in this final version, the microwave user (or reader) is threatened with a charred nose. The Eros-pancake will not crust; nay rather, it threatens to burn to a crisp.

The Eros-pancake is a masterful work of juxtaposition. Its comical properties are reminiscent of “the dry horror in the everyday, the nearly funny in the dreadful” (Ali 198). The genre-crossing and unlikely pairings in Carson’s “tactics of montage” (Steiner 2012) have, over the course of serial repeated retranslation, produced a connection between the menace of Eros and the latent menace of the pancake. The pancake’s threats are physical and somatic but not erotic, nor are they attached to any conventions of gender, like the spring garden.

Carson's six retranslations of Ibykos enlist conventions of literary gendered erotic tropes (spring, maidens, garden, fecundity) and re-read them via a "catastrophizing of translation," gradually distancing and replacing the gendered words and images over the course of six retranslations.

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### Appendix 1

Here the reader will find the text of Anne Carson's "A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways."<sup>17</sup>

[Ibykos fr. 286, *Poetae Melici Graeci*]

In spring, on the one hand,  
 the Kydonian apple trees,  
 being watered by streams of rivers  
 where the uncut garden of the maidens [is]  
 and vine blossoms  
 swelling  
 beneath shady vine branches  
 bloom.  
 On the other hand, for me  
 Eros lies quiet at no season.  
 Nay rather,  
 like a Thracian north wind  
 ablaze with lightning,  
 rushing from Aphrodite  
 accompanied by parching madnesses,  
 black,  
 unastonishable,  
 powerfully,

right up from the bottom of my feet  
[it] shakes my whole breathing being.

[lbykos fr. 286 translated using only words  
from 'Woman's Constancy' by John Donne]

In woman, on the one hand,  
those contracts  
being purposed by change and falsehood,  
where lovers' images [forswear the persons that we were],  
and true deaths  
sleeping  
beneath true marriages,  
antedate.  
On the other hand, me  
thy vow hast not conquered.  
Nay rather,  
like that new-made Tomorrow,  
now disputing,  
now abstaining,  
accompanied by Love and his wrath,  
truly,  
not truly,  
if I would,  
if I could,  
[it] justifies my one whole lunatic escape.

[lbykos fr. 286 translated using only words  
from Bertolt Brecht's FBI file #100-67077]

At a cocktail party attended by known Communists, on the one hand,

the subject

being suitably paraphrased as Mr & Mrs Bert Brecht,

where ten years of exile have left their mark,

and beneath 5 copies of file 100-190707,

Charles Laughton

returning to the stage as Galileo,

enters an elevator.

On the other hand, of my name with a hyphen between Eugene

and Friedrich

the Bureau has no record.

Nay rather,

like the name of a certain Frenchman to whom Charles Laughton

might send packages,

accompanied by an unknown woman

who spoke to an unknown man,

or accompanied by an unknown man

who spoke to an unknown woman,

and in the event that all the captions are not correct,

please turn to page 307.

[Ibykos fr. 286 translated using only words

from p. 47 of *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett]

In your kitchen, on the one hand,

bright corpses

starting to stink of having an idea,

where one of my legs [is]

and beneath sooner or later

the whole universe  
doesn't ring and won't work.  
On the other hand, I shouldn't think so.  
Nay rather,  
like a speck in the void,  
pacing to and fro,  
accompanied by the alarm,  
frankly,  
angrily,  
impatiently,  
not very convinced,  
[it] kisses me goodbye. I'm dead. (Pause).

[Ibykos fr. 286 translated using only words from  
pp. 136-37 of *Conversations with Kafka* by Gustav  
Janouch]

In the end, on the one hand, all those who sit behind us at the cash  
desks,  
being engaged in the most destructive and hopeless rebellion there  
could ever be,  
where everything human [has been betrayed]  
and  
beneath the burden of existence  
stock phrases,  
with a gentle indefinable smile,  
arouse suspicion.  
On the other hand,  
one who is afraid should not go into the wood.  
Nay rather,

like modern armies,  
accompanied by lightly spoken phrases in Czech or German,  
fearlessly,  
patiently,  
unfortunately,  
against myself,  
against my own limitations and apathy,  
against this very desk and chair I'm sitting in,  
the charge is clear: one is condemned to life not death.

[lbykos fr. 286 translated using only stops and signs from  
the London Underground]

At the excess fare window, on the one hand, the king's bakers,  
ditching old shepherds for new elephants,  
where east and west [cross north]  
and beneath black friars forbidden from barking in church,  
angels  
mind the gap.  
On the other hand,  
a multi-ride ticket does not send me padding southwark.  
Nay rather, like the seven sisters  
gardening in the British Museum,  
accompanied by penalties,  
tooting,  
turnpiked,  
hackneyed,  
Kentish,  
cockfostered,  
I am advised to expect delays all the way to the loo.

[Ibykos fr. 286 translated using only words from *The Owner's Manual* of my new Emerson 1000W microwave oven, pp. 17-18]

In hot snacks and appetizers, on the one hand, the soy, barbecue, Worcestershire or steak sauce, being sprinkled with paprika, where a 'browned appearance' [is desirable] and beneath the magnetron tube soggy crackers, wrapped in bacon, toughen.

On the other hand, a frozen pancake will not crust.

Nay rather, like radio waves, bubbling, spattering,

accompanied by you rubbing your hands together, without venting the plastic wrap,

without rearranging the pieces halfway

through, without using the special microwave popper, [it] will burn your nose right off.



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<sup>1</sup> This article is expanded from a conference presentation by the same title at the “Rethinking Gender in Reading” colloquium hosted by the University of Oregon’s departments of German and Slavic, Comparative Literature, 18-19 February 2016. Many thanks to organizers Sabine Golz and Jeffrey Librett for inviting me, and to the other participants and attendees for productive discussion. An initial exploration of the rhetorical structural skeleton in Carson’s Ibykos retranslations appears in my article “Retranslating Ibykos and Li Bai: Experimental, Rhizomatic, Multi-media Transformations,” *Intertexts* (2016) 19:1, pp. 83–98.

<sup>2</sup> *London Review of Books* 34:21, pp. 42–43, 8 November 2012.

<sup>3</sup> “Retranslation...denotes a second or later translation of a single source text into the same target language” Kaisa Koskinen and Outi Paloposki, “Retranslation,” in *Handbook of Translation Studies*, vol.1, p. 294.

<sup>4</sup> The exact date of his arrival is uncertain, but most likely during the 40s of the 6<sup>th</sup> c., and probably invited by Polykrates “who knew the fame which the presence if a renowned poet would bring to his court” (Bowra 258).

<sup>5</sup> C. Wilkinson 217–18 states that the opening lines must coincide with the beginning of the poem because there is no connecting particle at the beginning. Athenaeus 13.601bc, in whose text this fragment is quoted, does not make it clear whether or not the poem continued beyond his quoted excerpt, indicating that a longer poem may be possible. The fragment’s two sections, or strophes, are a similar length and structure, suggesting that Ibykos may have written a third strophe of six or seven lines of luxurious description that is abruptly cut off.

<sup>6</sup> μὲν...δε are often the first grammatical elements a beginning student of ancient Greek language learns to recognize and translate. I am grateful to Sabine Gözl’s superpowers in close reading in helping to recognize and draw out this structural feature in Carson’s versions of Ibykos. Carson illustrates her concept of “catastrophizing of translation” in the essay “Variations on the Right to Remain Silent,” published as a translator’s introduction in *Nay Rather* (Sylph Editions 2013) and *Float* (2016).

<sup>7</sup> Personal email correspondence with the author. July 5, 2016. It is also possible Carson was aware that “IBYCUS” is the name bestowed on the computer database created by the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) in the first iteration of creating a digital library of the corpus of Greek literature. I am grateful to Morten Schlutter for this observation.

<sup>8</sup> The Greek text follows the version Carson gives in *Nay Rather*, which follows Page in *Poetae Melici Graeci*. The text of the original Greek poem is omitted from the version printed in the LRB and reprinted most recently in *Float*. The full text of Carson’s “A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways” is included in Appendix 1 to this article.

<sup>9</sup> Goold 255.

<sup>10</sup> C. Wilkinson 217. Wilkinson follows φυλάσσει (“to keep watch; guard”). Carson follows τινασσει in her versions.

<sup>11</sup> φυλάσσει also appears in Homer, *Odyssey* 15.35 in the context of divine protection: “One of the immortal gods/ who’s watching over and protecting you/ will send you following winds.” (πεμψει δε τοι ουρον οπισθεν αθανατων ος τις φυλασσει τε ρυεται τε)

<sup>12</sup> There is a textual problem here. The transmitted manuscript gives the indeclinable particle τε, which when repeated means “both...and.” But τε can’t be right at the start of a sentence (Wilkinson 228). Hermann suggests αθ’ υπο and Mehlhorn αλλ’ αθ’ υπο, which is the version Carson follows.

<sup>13</sup> Another textually contested spot in the Greek poem is at line 12. The text gives φυλασσει (“to keep watch and ward, to guard”). Carson chooses to follow τινασσει (“to shake”), found at *Anth. Pal.* 11.379.6, *Philo* 3.116.16, and *Arist. E.E.*1232a 16. Wilkinson suggests that this word would have to have involved more textual corruption than λαφυσσει (“to swallow greedily, to gulp down”).

<sup>14</sup> Lattimore 38.

<sup>15</sup> Barnstone 100.

<sup>16</sup> Fowler 122–123.

<sup>17</sup> *Nay* 34–40.

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