

Mind Your Language! Profanity and Promiscuity in Two English Translations of Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932)

Isabel Parkinson
University of Oxford

Introduction

This article, in common with my own wider research, has a twofold concern. Insofar as it examines the ways in which the historical and cultural situatedness of a translated text can impact the finished product, and seeks to contribute to ongoing conversations about style in translation, it operates within translation studies. However, it seeks also to generate questions about the particularities of translating subversive features in women-authored prose: to this extent, it is also a feminist project.

The questions which emerge in this space of intersection between the two disciplines will doubtless hold relevance and interest for those within and without translation studies, German studies, and gender studies: I consider what may be lost by reading a translation alone; what may be gained by comparing it to its woman-authored source text; and what may be at stake in the translation of a woman writer. What this article begins to bring to light about how disciplines overlap, interact, and mutually illuminate may resonate with those even further afield.

The author Irmgard Keun was born in 1905, spending most of her early life in Berlin before she and her family moved to Cologne in 1913. She turned to writing after a short and only moderately successful stint as a stenotypist and a trainee actress. In 1931, she published her first novel *Gilgi – eine von uns* (translated as *Gilgi, One of Us* in 2013). It was a tremendous success, selling 30,000 copies in its first year and with a film adaptation following shortly afterwards (Kosta 272). Keun's second novel, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, followed in 1932 and was more commercially successful still than *Gilgi* (Haunhorst 55). The novel is the fictional diary of eighteen-year-old Doris, who flees her small town for Berlin, leaving behind an office job and failed theatrical career.¹ She charts the relationships she has with men in Berlin and her gradual slide into poverty.

Das kunstseidene Mädchen was translated into English as *The Artificial Silk Girl* in 1933, one year after its publication in Germany. The work was carried out by London-based translator Basil Creighton, who had translated 34 German novels by the time of his death in 1989 ('Basil Creighton, Novelist, 103: [Obituary]' 29). In 2002, Katharina von Ankum carried out a second English translation, explaining in her preface that she felt a 'fresh' and 'accessible' version was required (xi), and would be a

¹ It is worth pointing out that Doris herself prefers not to think of her written account as a diary, finding it laughable for a sophisticated girl of her age. Given, however, that it is a private notebook in which Doris regularly writes about her adventures, it will be sufficient throughout this article to refer to it as a diary.

welcome addition to a readership enjoying the works of Helen Fielding (*Bridget Jones' Diary*, 1996), Candace Bushnell (*Sex and the City*, 1997), and Sophie Kinsella (*The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic*, 2000).

Despite her early success, in 1933 Keun disappeared from public view. The Nazis banned her books for supposed anti-German tendencies, and she was eventually forced into exile in Belgium (and later the Netherlands) in 1936. *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* was lambasted in contemporary reviews as 'gemeine Vorwürfe gegen die deutsche Frau' ['vulgar aspersions against the German woman'] (Berns 52). Certainly, Doris conducts a number of love affairs; privately rails against the hypocrisy of sexual morality and the different sexual freedoms afforded to men and women; and on one occasion is mistaken for a prostitute. The profane, non-standard language throughout had one male reviewer advising that 'wenn Irmgard Keun uns etwas zu sagen hat, dann möge sie deutsch schreiben, deutsch reden und deutsch denken' ['if Irmgard Keun has something to say to us, she might like to write in a German way, speak in a German way, and think in a German way'] (Marchlewitz 14). The language in her earlier novel, *Gilgi*, had similarly been dismissed as 'schauerlich' ['gruesome, ghastly'] on account of its low and colloquial register (Maier-Katkin, 254). It was criticised as part of a trend among women writers who wrote 'wie ihnen der Schnabel gewachsen ist' ['anything that comes into their heads', or 'chit-chatting' as Maier-Katkin has it, 254].

It is along these lines that the below translation analysis proceeds. I will consider each translation in turn, with both sections comprising comparative analysis of manually-selected extracts exemplifying Doris' sexuality, or her profane, non-standard language. I then consider the wider implications of each translation, with recourse to feminist scholarship as well as research into *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* and its context. What emerges is a consideration of how translation may emphasise or hinder an author's artistry, as well as the importance of understanding the politics of the original text, especially where said politics take aim at the very same norms which may impact translation practice.

A Note on Editions

Creighton’s 1933 text will, in line with standard scholarly practice, be abbreviated as ‘TT1’ in in-text citations, as an abbreviation for ‘Target Text 1’. In-text references to the 2002 edition of von Ankum’s text will take the form of ‘TT2’ (see further Appendix 1). For accessibility, literal English translations will also be supplied for each German excerpt; these are my own unless stated. Owing to the large number of German-language quotations throughout this article, the literal English translations will follow in square brackets, rather than footnotes, for ease of comparison with each published translation.

Das kunstseidene Mädchen has undergone a series of revisions since its first publication in 1932, meaning that Creighton and von Ankum were working with texts which, in places, were very different from one another – indeed, in the preface to the 2002 edition of her translation, von Ankum suggested that Creighton was deliberately ‘adding passages in the translation that were designed specifically to help readers position Keun’s novel in the context of then-recent German political developments’ (TT2 ix-x). A comparison of Creighton’s translation with an early edition of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* reveals no such added passages in his text. There is little doubt that von Ankum was referring to the inclusion of the N-word slur (TT1 202) and several derogatory observations about Jews (TT1 130, 195) – these appear in Creighton’s text where they also appeared in the 4th edition of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* from 1932 (Keun 157, 103, 152). That even von Ankum, who has written extensively on Keun, has fallen foul of this oversight, is emblematic of how little scholarly attention translations of Keun’s work have received. Despite the number of English-speaking scholars who have written about Keun’s first two novels, commenting on Keun’s intriguing manipulation of language and narrative style, Lawrence Rainey appears one of only a few contributors who have analysed the English translations, and even he only gives a little over a paragraph to this.

The rest of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, however, is unchanged; on the points I select for analysis, there is no difference between the earliest

available edition, and the 2020 Ullstein edition to which I will refer throughout. This 2020 edition of the source text will be abbreviated in the in-text citations as ‘ST’, in line with standard practice in translation studies (see further Appendix 1).

Let’s (Not) Talk About Sex, Baby: *The Artificial Silk Girl*, 1933

Creighton’s translation often gently hints at vulgarity, as did the original text, but stops short of committing to a profane phrase. When Doris is seething about how much women stand to lose from relationships with men, she writes in her diary ‘ihr könnt mich mal alle –’ [‘you can all – me’, normally a short form of ‘ihr könnt mich mal alle am Arsch lecken’, literally ‘you can all lick me on the arse’] (ST 183). Creighton’s translation is ‘you can all –’ (TT1 236). This is in keeping with the syntax of the original, but does not point to an established insult in the same way. Indeed, his chosen rendering could equally hint at an utterance as mild as ‘you can all leave me alone’, ‘you can all forget it’, or ‘you can all stuff yourselves’. A similar effect is found when Doris visits the fishmonger and asks about his business. He replies ‘Na, die Zeiten sind ja man besch–’ [Well, yes, times are sh–], with Doris interrupting the word ‘beschissen’ [‘shitty’] (ST 174). Creighton does not risk even writing the start of a vulgar word; Doris interrupts the fishmonger after ‘times are a bit...’ (TT1 224).

The extreme opposite is true in von Ankum’s text, as discussed below, while the censorious treatment of even mild vulgarity in Creighton’s text becomes even more stringent in his rendering of sexual references. For example, Doris describes how she feels about Hubert, one of her lovers: she loves him with ‘Kopf und Mund und weiter abwärts’ [‘head and mouth and further downwards’] (ST 19). This becomes ‘heart and soul and from there downwards’ in Creighton’s text (TT1 19), thus entirely changing the sensual, embodied, and sexual tone of the original. The result of Creighton’s lexical choices is a blend of a reference to something metaphorical and disembodied, and a physical directional term. The meaning of the latter, and its clearly sexual tone, is therefore obscured;

it is not immediately clear where ‘downwards’ from one’s soul is meant to be indicating.

On another occasion, Doris describes herself as making Marlene Dietrich-esque eyes, attempting to invite a man ‘husch ins Bett’ [‘quickly into bed’] (ST 23) – Doris deliberately picking out a different facial expression or emulating a certain star is quite common throughout, and in keeping with her fascination with the popular visual culture of the time. In this instance, she is attempting to distract her boss from the numerous errors in her typing: here, as elsewhere, Doris knows how to act the part, playing variously at being coy, sexualised, sophisticated, and naïve, most often for her own advantage. Creighton’s translation, however, has almost none of the original’s explicit sexual connotations: his Doris instead describes herself as looking like Dietrich ‘at the crisis of a love scene’ (TT1 24). Similarly, with reference to sleeping with her employer, Doris repeats in her diary ‘ich wollte’ [‘I wanted’] (ST 86). Creighton’s solution is ‘I was willing’ (TT1 107), suggesting far less active sexual desire on Doris’ part. As a result, the reader of Creighton’s translation does not have access to any of the desire, sassiness, and raciness of the original Doris.

Creighton’s treatment of the words ‘Erotik’ or ‘erotisch’ throughout [‘eroticism’, ‘erotic’] is also telling. When Doris boasts (untruthfully) to other would-be actresses about her relationship with a theatre director, she mentions acts that he has done for her ‘aus Erotik’ [‘out of eroticism’] (ST 50). Creighton, in contrast, has the theatre director doing such things ‘out of love’ (TT1 60), thus lending a far less lustful tone to his text. While one of Doris’ friends believes that ‘Flucht’ [‘flight, escape’] is an ‘erotisches Wort’ [‘erotic word’] (ST 64), for Creighton it is instead a ‘word full of romantic suggestion’ (TT1 78). Thus, Creighton shies away not only from references to eroticism, but from the word itself.

The reasons for Creighton’s translational choices are beyond my reconstruction, and I do not attempt to establish them here. What is clear, however, is that his treatment of sexual or profane themes is not to be attributed to the respective mechanics and grammars of English and

German. As I have occasionally indicated, and as the analysis of von Ankum's text will show, different options were in theory open to Creighton. His strategy of taming and tempering Doris appears indicative of contemporary discourse around female sexuality; a woman's place was to acquiesce to sex, rather than to want it, and uncontrolled female sexual desire was feared (Clark 54–92).

I turn briefly to offer other salient examples which point to the historical specificity of Creighton's text, and which illustrate how the stylistic options to a translator may change over time. Keun scholar Kennedy, for example, discerns a 'massive Verwendung' ['massive use'] of the pronoun 'man' throughout *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (Kennedy 84). 'Man' is a third-person impersonal pronoun similar to the English 'one', but lower in register and thus far more common in spoken German. Certainly, Doris frequently shares her wisdom about men in her diary, in the manner of dispensing gnomic, universal truths: 'Man kennt das ja, was Männer erzählen' ['one knows what men will say'] (ST 71); 'Und bei dem Glauben läßt man ja dann auch einen Mann' ['and one lets a man believe that'] (ST 17). Formulations with 'man' are also common when Doris is writing about the city around her: describing not only what she specifically can see, but what 'man' can see. The viewpoint becomes broader, shareable, with 'man' functioning as a tool of rhetorical persuasion and inviting the reader in.

'Man' often proves translationally tricky in German-English projects. Geoff Wilkes, the translator of Keun's earlier novel *Gilgi*, found that using 'one' as a translation of 'man' would be 'inappropriate' (Wilkes 227), presumably because it is of a sufficiently high register to be jarring, and out of place in a novel which makes so much of a conversational, colloquial style. He often uses 'you', 'we', or 'I' as a translation of 'man', which he finds more plausibly in keeping with *Gilgi's* own idiom. Von Ankum, as will be seen, does similar, and for similar stylistic reasons. Creighton, however, need not be troubled by 'man' in the same way – translating in the 1930s, the idiom and thus the suitable stylistic choices available to him differ. He almost always uses 'one' as a translation of 'man': 'One might get the sack any day' (TT1 4); 'one knows [men] better than they

know themselves' (TT1 12); 'one knows that sort' (TT1 30); 'one must allow her that' (TT1 45). He very occasionally uses 'you' for 'man', but never 'we'. 'One' is in keeping with 1930s idiom – or, perhaps, Creighton's own idiom – in a way which common twenty-first century English usage precludes. Here, the impact of Creighton's own historical moment on his translation is felt once again; the norms in his own time allow certain stylistic solutions as they simultaneously disallow sexual or profane language.

Consequently, a modern reader of Creighton's translation is likely to reach conclusions about Doris' formality, level of education, and even class which are at odds with the rest of the text. She cannot use commas correctly, and often does not know what words mean ('Rasse' and 'Gesellschaft', 'race' and 'society', are particular puzzles for Doris). The near century that has passed since the time of Creighton's translation is keenly felt. His treatment of sexual themes, and the availability of the pronoun 'one' in translating features of German grammar, betray the text's situatedness in 1933. For this reason, also, Creighton's translations of Doris' colloquialisms are unfamiliar to the modern reader: 'gone smash' (TT1 153), 'a goose' (TT1 103), 'swarmy' (TT1 56) are offered as translations of 'kaputt' ['broken'] (ST 119), 'doof' ['stupid'] (ST 83) and 'schwul' ['gay'] (ST 47).

These comparative examples reveal Creighton's text as a product of its time, reflecting English idiom, style, and norms which have shifted in the intervening ninety years. Creighton's translation has been overlooked in Keun scholarship, even seemingly by von Ankum. With her desire to create a text which resonated with other popular works of the 1990s, it is understandable why she felt a 'fresh' version was needed, and would be well-received. However, Creighton's text is still eminently worthy of study. It demonstrates the freedoms apparently afforded to translators in going against even that which made the original text noteworthy in its source culture. As will emerge fully later in this article, Creighton's text also bears out a well-observed benefit of comparative research: that the close analysis of a translated text draws renewed attention to features of

its source text, especially ‘those places where translation turned out to be especially difficult’ (Parks 14).

Bridget Jones, Carrie Bradshaw, Doris: *The Artificial Silk Girl*, 2002

Von Ankum, responding to the idiom of the early 2000s book market in which she sought to position her work, can comfortably retain the sexuality of the original as well as drastically emphasise the vulgarity. ‘Kopf und Mund und weiter abwärts’ is translated literally as ‘my head, my mouth, and further down’ (TT2 12), as is ‘erotisch’, translated as ‘erotic’ (TT2 54). ‘Aus Erotik’ retains its sexual overtones as it becomes ‘as a turn-on’ (TT2 42) and ‘ich wollte’, which Creighton translated passively, becomes even more active in von Ankum’s edition: ‘I really wanted to’ (TT2 73). The result, in short, is that von Ankum’s Doris is as sexually desirous as she was in Keun’s original text. Von Ankum also often makes her translation much more vulgar than Keun’s original text, favouring profane language where it did not previously appear. ‘Dreck’ [‘dirt, crap’] becomes the more vulgar ‘shit’ or ‘bullshit’ (TT2 39; 120; 149). In contrast, ‘Dreck’ had been, variously, ‘a misery’, ‘all up’, and ‘rubbish’ in Creighton’s text (TT1 57, 176, 220). For von Ankum, two instances of ‘Biest’ [‘beast’] (ST 180) become ‘bitch’ and ‘bastard’ (TT2 157, 158). ‘Thr könnt mich mal alle –’ (ST 183) is expanded considerably to become ‘you can fuck yourselves’ (TT2 160). Although Keun’s original text was felt by contemporary reviewers to break sharply with norms of propriety, it was ultimately milder and more implicit than the marked profanity which von Ankum introduces.

The result is that there is, in von Ankum’s text, a sharper juxtaposition between Doris’ adherence to public codes of behaviour, and her private language. Consider once more the exchange with the fishmonger, when Doris interrupts him before he can say ‘beschissen’, a word she is embarrassed or ashamed to hear: ‘falle ich ihm in ein Wort, was mir widerstrebt anzuhören’ [‘interrupting him in a word which I am reluctant to hear’]. (ST 174). In this instance, with the profanity strongly emphasised in the private language of von Ankum’s Doris, her adherence to moral codes in public becomes even more marked in this exchange.

What von Ankum draws out here is the pressure of the external performance, and the cynicism in Keun's prose about 'the parameters of emancipation actually allowed for the New Woman' (von Ankum, 'Gendered Urban Spaces' 180). Doris herself feels keenly the imposition by society of public codes of behaviour. One of her sexual partners, Hubert, leaves her to marry a virgin, explaining that 'wenn ein Mann heieratet, will er eine unberührte Frau' ['when a man marries, he wants an untouched woman']. He further advises Doris that she maintain a virginal, 'anständiges' ['decent'] appearance if she too wishes to attract a husband (ST 21).

These ostensible sexual freedoms curtailed by gendered expectations play out in other aspects of the societal picture for 1930s women in Germany. While women were able to enjoy new-found financial independence and freedom of movement, they were still dependent upon men at every turn. The New Woman as a visual object remained 'mediated by a fundamentally male gaze' (McBride 220); a woman 'could not move within the urban space without entrusting herself to male protection' (von Ankum, 'Gendered Urban Spaces' 168); and despite new frontiers in professional freedom, the options open to women were fundamentally limited by men. A woman could choose the traditional wife-and-mother role, be self-sufficient as a prostitute, or gainfully employed by a man. By drawing out, in her conversation with the fishmonger, Doris' awareness of codes of public behaviour, von Ankum emphasises the points that Keun was making about the expectations placed upon a woman by her own time and society, and how these may contradict sharply with her internal life. This, of course, is made possible by the translation's historical moment of production, coming on the heels of second-wave feminism and a renewed interest in women's writing. It is for this reason that feminist literary inquiry sheds a light on von Ankum's text and, retrospectively, Keun's work; I turn to this subject in the next section.

The rest of von Ankum's text betrays its 1990s influences in a similar way. 'You' as a frequent translation of 'man' imbues von Ankum's translation with a dialogic character, in a way which Creighton's 'one' did

not. Examples include ‘and of course you let a man believe that’ (TT2 11); ‘you know what men will tell you [...] if you want to strike it lucky with men, you have to let them think you’re stupid’ (TT2 60). Elsewhere, von Ankum takes care to insert other features of spoken language where they did not appear in the source text, including phrases such as ‘to tell you the truth’ (TT2 27) or ‘I’m telling you’ (TT2 86). Sometimes these are expansions of the original (where Keun had used ‘eigentlich’, ‘actually’, for example); occasionally they are entirely new additions. Additionally, von Ankum frequently translates ‘man’ as ‘we’, which lends *The Artificial Silk Girl* a tone discernible in other works which von Ankum considered as crucially similar. In Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’ Diary*, for example, Bridget often writes in terms of ‘we’: ‘We wouldn’t rush up to *them*’ (10); ‘suddenly we are all supposed to snap into self-discipline’ (17); ‘maybe they really do want to patronize us’ (40). Bridget, in these instances, is identifying with other thirty-something single women with shared experiences and frustrations. It is therefore unsurprising that von Ankum chooses to emphasise this notion of solidarity, given the importance she places on texts such as *Bridget Jones’ Diary*. It seems that von Ankum’s Doris, when she speaks in terms of ‘we’, is identifying with other (heterosexual) women who have had similar experiences with men, thus drawing out a collective identity which was not as obvious in the source text. Forging a bond between Doris and the reader may help to add relevance and readability to a translated text from a markedly different era.

On a grammatical and syntactical level, then, von Ankum is making changes which speak to her self-professed desire to update the language, and make the figural voice resonant to a contemporary reader just as *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* had been to Keun’s 1930s readers. Reviews of her translation praised her manner of ‘updating the slang’ of the original, noting that it results in a ‘remarkably readable translation’ (Rainey 336). Creighton’s translation, it is worth noting, was marketed by its publisher Chatto & Windus as a ‘poignant story of a girl living in a distracted Germany’ (‘Display Ad 78 – No Title’ 9). In 1933, a review of the English translation described *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* as ‘the story of a young lady of easy virtue in the distracted Germany of a year or two ago’ (‘New

Novels' 874). His translation does not need to recreate and reimagine Keun's text for a vastly different readership; it is an artefact of the very same time. Von Ankum, with a gap of seventy years to bridge, has clearly approached the text differently.

Implications

We arrive by now at a picture of two markedly different translated texts which speak to the historical moment of their own production. I turn here to consider how these features stand to impact the way in which the English-speaking reader may interpret Doris, and by extension Keun. After all, as Hewson points out, as far as a reader is concerned the translation 'is commonly perceived as being the same as the text it replaces' (1) – to the English reader, then, a translation of Keun *is* Keun.

In a 1980 public appearance, an interviewer praised Keun for her accurate recreation of 'die Sprache der Mädchen' ['the speech of girls'] (Kennedy 512). Certainly, Keun's prose reveals an attempt to create a portrait of (a certain class of) women at the time, a character in whom they could recognise themselves, even if the portrait was not a flattering one. Indeed, Keun dwelled upon how she was received by readers similar to her protagonists: 'Ich werde ja gerade von denen, die ich beschreibe, am wenigsten gelesen. [...] Keiner möchte sich ja selbst porträtiert sehen' ['I am read the least by those whom I describe [...] nobody wants to see themselves portrayed'] (Kennedy 512). In Creighton's translation, the portrait differs. To what extent his stylistic choices actually resonated with contemporary English women readers of a similar class is not known, but the censoring of the profanity and promiscuity would have disallowed a sense of identification between Doris, and a reader with a similarly unmentionable, taboo private life. In a different vein, by responding to other works of the 1990s which sought also to portray a certain class of young women, von Ankum attempts to have even a sixty-year-old German text exhibit the same feature. She is drawing on the 'Sprache der Mädchen' in 1990s/2000s English-speaking spaces to craft her translation of Keun into something equally resonant. This serves as a reminder – to reviewers, readers, and creators of translated texts – that

an original author's efforts and artistry may not survive the transition into a different language. The reader of a translated text may not have the voices and interpretative pathways open to them that were open to the source text reader, and it is through a comparative reading that the extent of this loss may emerge.

In this consideration of how far Keun's efforts at characterisation and representation have been emphasised or occluded by different stylistic choices in English, there is a gendered angle that cannot be overlooked. With recourse to feminist research, below I discuss how fitting each translation is in light of what we may discern about Keun's original aims and artistry, taking into account her status as a woman writer.

By a contemporary reviewer, Keun's novels were taken to '[stand] out in delightful contrast to the books written by men' (Reuter 16). The literary tradition in German-speaking spaces had not historically welcomed women writers – the socio-political conditions meant that 'the creativity of German women writers was more cramped, constricted, and confined than that of their counterparts in France and England' (Stimpson xvi). By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, interest in women's writing was dawning: 'Women themselves [...] were encouraged by Naturalism and feminism to produce arrestingly truthful accounts of female experience' (Robertson 338). Keun did precisely this and offered her own insights about the truth beneath the veneer of the modern German woman. It may not have made her popular with her critics, but it was responding to a 'new social reality for women' (von Ankum, 'Motherhood' 172). In the early twentieth century, women were being afforded space and visibility in public in a new way. Berlin in particular had become a 'city of women', with the percentage of female office employees in the city almost doubling from 6.5% in 1907 to 12.6% in 1923, while the percentage of women employed in domestic roles fell from 16.1% to 11.4% (von Ankum, 'Gendered Urban Spaces' 163–65). With rising rates of prostitution and improving access to contraception and abortion, the city had become a place of 'unbridled female sexuality' (von Ankum, 'Gendered Urban Spaces' 164–65).

The importance of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* as a text charged with sexuality and profanity lies not only in the society that it reflected, but also in Keun's innovation. She used the novel to offer her own insights into the private lives of women in a literary tradition that had historically been – and, given her censorship and exile, continued to be – hostile to this subject matter. Her brave, and ultimately professionally dangerous, subversion is not carried across in Creighton's text. Even with her voice tempered, Creighton's Doris was still judged in reviews as 'impudent, though the impudence has a very human side' ('New Novels' 874). The comparative analysis shows Creighton imposing on Doris – and Keun – the very same sense of sexual morality and gendered norms of propriety against which she railed. Although *The Artificial Silk Girl* was released in England shortly after Keun's German censorship and exile, her artistry and innovation was still silenced in the translated text.

The picture shifts as we move to von Ankum's text in 2002. The twenty-first century reader, presented with the promiscuity of Keun's original and quite extreme profanity, is allowed access to a sense of how far Keun was defying expectations, even with the language transposed to a different time. Indeed, feminist stylistic research suggests that even as patterns of usage and codes of behaviour shifted, milder expletives continued to be considered as typical or more acceptable for women, while strong swear words were felt to be more 'male', even into the 1990s (Mills 16). In this way, von Ankum retains the subversive politics of the source text. To my knowledge, von Ankum has never referred to her work as an example of feminist translation, and it would be an overclaim to label it decisively as such. However, in deploying this kind of 'over-translation', she makes use of a key feminist translation technique (Flotow, 'Feminist Translation, 69–70). Using a technique from this field, which is designed to shock and to subvert expectations, is a gesture, whether deliberate or not, towards the subversive politics at play in the source text.

Embodiment in a text has also been taken as central in feminist literary inquiry by other scholars in the field. Karin Kukkonen argued recently for a renewed focus on embodiment in literary studies, particularly in texts which explore the gendered subject. She argues that

given the importance of ‘embodied practices that are traditionally confined to the cultural sphere’, we cannot make sense of our embodied experience of the world without recourse to gender (978). This is not to assume an outdated identity of biological sex and gender identity; rather, Kukkonen’s view states that gender is at least partly constructed by and performed within the external, physical world with which a subject’s body interacts. Thus, considerations of what it means to be a gendered subject cannot afford to do without embodiment. The ‘embodied experience [...] is shaped by our muscle memory of movement and the feedback of our physical, social and mediated environment on our performance of this movement’ (979–80). A text, then, which seeks to represent the inner life of a gendered subject, may make particular use of embodiment. Creighton’s preference for cerebral, emotional, non-physical references such as heart, soul, and love, rather than mouth, lust, and eroticism thus obscures an important part of Doris’ gender identity, and her way of interacting with the world as a physical subject. Von Ankum, in contrast, ensures that embodiment and physicality is still a crucial part of Doris’ character.

By retaining other language which breaks with standard usage – Doris’ profanity, as well as her unusual metaphor and creative imagery – von Ankum is also able, as Keun was, to ‘signify the “other” who lingers along gender lines outside the dominating patriarchal culture’ (Maier-Katkin 255). Doris’ language use ‘deconstruct[s] grammatical, psychological and philosophical principles and categories of major discourse’ (Horsley 308), and has been taken as anticipatory of calls in the 1980s to ‘break the code, to shatter language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract’ (254). While Creighton similarly repressed the ‘unnameable’ in his edition of *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, von Ankum flagrantly names it, allowing Keun’s efforts to shine through, even in a different language, even seventy years later.

Throughout, I have spoken of Creighton or von Ankum’s ‘choices’ or ‘renderings’; I wish briefly to acknowledge that it is not always clear from where a translational choice may originate, and whether it is a conscious

choice or not. Perfectly illustrative of this is a letter of January 1935, written by Creighton to his publisher Chatto & Windus about the translation of a B. Traven novel. Creighton says, of a particular vocabulary query, ‘May I leave it to you to direct the printer as you see fit?’ (Correspondence File CW 564/8).² Establishing the logistical and cognitive processes of translation lies far beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth bearing in mind before we, as others have, judge Creighton too damningly for his ‘blunders’ (Murray 204) and ‘patchy’ command of German (Hoffman 10).

Conclusion

Mona Baker’s proclamation that, in translation studies, ‘identifying linguistic habits and stylistic patterns is not an end in itself’ has cast a long shadow (Baker 258). She elaborated, in the same work, that comparative analysis is ‘only worthwhile if it tells us something about the cultural and ideological positioning of the translator, or of translators in general, or about the cognitive processes and mechanisms that contribute to shaping our translational behaviour’ (258).

Baker’s is undoubtedly a rich vein of research, although there is much still to be gained from simple comparative analysis of the kind in this article. I have not attempted to establish without doubt a translator’s ideology or their cognitive processes, finding, as others have done, that such explanatory missions are ‘well nigh impossible’ (House 3). Nonetheless, my translation analysis of Keun’s work draws attention to the subversive, feminist politics at the heart of her prose. It has shown how translation practice, far from theoretical notions of how it *should* proceed, may pan out in reality. It has begun to show how the same character may be rendered very differently by English stylistic choices. Furthermore, research of this type has the potential to encourage ongoing research at the productive intersection of translation studies, literary

² Quoted here with kind permission of Basil Creighton’s estate.

studies, and gender studies.³ By operating at the intersection of these fields, research can ask how – and how well – insights into the reality of being a gendered subject, particularly where such insights break with convention, are translated into another language.

Eliana Maestri argues that ‘many researchers in Translation Studies and/or readers of translations claim that sometimes they understand an original text in a better way when they read a translation of it’ (63). Parks is one such scholar, finding that ‘by looking at original and translation side by side [...] we can arrive at a better appreciation of the original’s qualities and, simultaneously of the two phenomena we call translation and literature’ (14). The mutually illuminative potential of comparative translation analysis has been borne out in this article. Creighton’s censorship of Keun demonstrates how far her work pushed the boundaries of acceptable public behaviour in the 1930s. Von Ankum’s highlighting of the profanity shows how central this has been taken to be in characterising Doris.

The proportion of the Anglophone book market occupied by translated texts is very small, around 3%, and less than a third of these were originally written by women. Recent initiatives such as the Year of Publishing Women have sought to address this imbalance, but a lasting impact has yet to be seen (Castro and Vassallo 556). In a book market which is generally resistant to texts originating in different cultures, and apparently even more so to texts written by women, the extra visibility which can arise from this kind of research may be considered of particular importance.

Comparative translation analysis has the potential to lend precisely that visibility to Keun. How differently *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* has been treated by two different translators illuminates the points that she

³ For a full and recent investigation of this fruitful area of study, see Luise von Flotow and Joan W. Scott. See also Warhol and Lanser for a consideration of how gender may be a rich resource in narratological research.

sought to make in her work. Elfriede Jelinek praised Keun's novels particularly for how they highlight that 'men and women neither live in the same world nor speak the same language' (in Maier-Katkin 255). This is not to lapse into biologically essentialist notions; indeed, as Sally Johnson observes, 'There are very few generalizations which can be made about formal, structural aspects of language of one sex as opposed to the other' (in Page 181). What cannot be overlooked, however, is that Keun's artistry, her censorship, her exile, and her rediscovery in the 1970s stemmed from the fact that she was a woman in 1930s Germany. Doris, too, struggles to make herself understood in the accepted communicative structures open to her, is dismissed and ignored by men, and is keenly aware of the different sexual freedoms afforded to men and women: she interacts with 1930s society in a distinctly gendered way. Creighton's text speaks to the same historical moment in which Keun was writing, but from the other end of the gendered experience – in his text, he imposes on Doris the sexual morality and behavioural norms which she finds so hypocritical and stifling. Von Ankum, in contrast, is clearly thinking about how to create a woman character in her own 1990s/2000s literary climate, in a form which was popular at the time (the fictional diary). She – as Keun did – is drawing on the techniques available in her own historical moment in order to make the text newly resonant. In a text which makes much of women being silenced, dismissed, or misunderstood by men, and of standard language as being stifling, a new importance arises from any strategies which constrain – or, conversely, give new voice to – the character and her author.

WORKS CITED

- Ankum, Katharina von. "Motherhood and the 'New Woman': Vicki Baum's *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi—eine von uns.*" *Women in German Yearbook*, vol. 11, 1995, pp. 171–88.
- . "Gendered Urban Spaces in Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen.*" *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, edited by Katharina von Ankum, University of California Press, 1997, pp. 162–84.
- . translator. *The Artificial Silk Girl*. By Irmgard Keun, Other Press, 2002.

- Baker, Mona. "Towards a Methodology for Investigating the Style of a Literary Translator." *Target*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2000, pp. 241–66.
- Basil Creighton to Chatto & Windus, University of Reading Special Collection, Correspondence File CW 564/8, Letter 1108, dated 17 January 1935.
- "Basil Creighton, Novelist, 103: [Obituary]." *New York Times*, 10 May 1989, section D, p. 29.
- Berns, Anke. *Die Rezeption des literarischen Werkes von Irmgard Keun*. 2002. University of Cadiz, PhD dissertation.
- Castro, Olga and Helen Vassallo. "Women writers in translation in the UK: The 'Year of Publishing Women' (2018) as a platform for collective change?" *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender*, edited by Luisa von Flotow and Hala Kamal, Routledge, 2020, pp. 554–616.
- Clark, Anna. "Female Sexuality." *The Routledge History of Women since 1700*, edited by Deborah Simonton, Routledge, 2005, pp. 54–92.
- Creighton, Basil, translator. *The Artificial Silk Girl*. By Irmgard Keun, Chatto & Windus, 1933.
- "Display Ad 78 – No Title." *The Observer*, 8 October 1933, p. 9.
- Fielding, Helen. *Bridget Jones' Diary*. 2nd edition, Picador, 1997.
- Flotow, Luise von. "Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and Theories." *TTR: traduction, terminologie, redaction*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1991, pp. 69–84.
- and Joan W. Scott. "Gender studies and translation studies." *Border Crossings: Translation Studies and Other Disciplines*, edited by Yves Gambier and Luc von Doorslaer, John Benjamins, 2016, pp. 359–73.
- Haunhorst, Kerstin. *Das Bild der neuen Frau im Frühwerk Irmgard Keuns: Entwürfe von Weiblichkeit am Ende der Weimarer Republik*. Diplomica, 2008.
- Hewson, Lance. *Approach to Translation Criticism: Emma and Madame Bovary in Translation*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011.
- Hoffman, Michael. "Introduction." *Storm of Steel*, translated by Michael Hoffman, Penguin, 2004, pp. 7–14.
- Horsley, Ritta Jo. "«Warum habe ich keine Worte?... Kein Wort trifft zutiefst hinein»: The Problematics of Language in the Early Novels of Irmgard Keun." *Colloquia Germanica*, vol. 23, no. 3/4, 1990, pp. 297–313.
- House, Juliane. *Translation Quality Assessment: Past and Present*. Routledge, 2015.

- Kennedy, Beate. Irmgard Keun: Zeit und Zitat. Narrative Verfahren und literarische Autorschaft im Gesamtwerk. De Gruyter, 2014.
- Keun, Irmgard. *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. 17th edition, Ullstein, 2020.
- Kosta, Barbara. Unruly Daughters and Modernity: Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi – eine von uns*." *The German Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 3, 1995, pp. 271–86.
- Kukkonen, Karin. "A moving target: cognitive narratology and feminism." *Textual Practice*, vol. 32, no. 6, 2018, pp. 973–89.
- Maestri, Eliana. Translating the Female Self Across Cultures: Mothers and Daughters in Three Autobiographical Narratives. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2018.
- Maier-Katkin, Birgit. "Anna Seghers, Irmgard Keun: Literary Images on Emancipation and Social Circumstance". *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic*, edited by Christiane Schönfeld, Königshausen & Neumann, 2006, pp. 242–61.
- Marchlewitz, Ingrid. *Irmgard Keun: Leben und Werk*. Königshausen & Neumann, 1999.
- McBride, Patrizia. "Learning to See in Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*." *German Quarterly*, vol. 84, no. 2, 2011, pp. 220–38.
- Murray, John. "Reviewed Work: *Gustav Mahler. Memories and Letters* by Alma Mahler, Translated from the German by Basil Creighton." *The Musical Times*. vol. 87, no. 1241, 1946, pp. 203–04.
- "New Novels." *The Times Literary Supplement*, 7 December 1933, p. 874.
- Page, Ruth. *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology*. Macmillan, 2006.
- Parks, Tim. *Translating Style: A Literary Approach to Translation, a Translation Approach to Literature*. St Jerome Publishing, 2011.
- Rainey, Lawrence. "Fables of Modernity: The Typist in Germany and France." *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2004, pp. 333–40.
- Reuter, Gabriele. "A Group of Young German Novelists: German Letter." *New York Times*, 12 June 1932, p. 16.
- Robertson, Ritchie. "From Naturalism to National Socialism." *The Cambridge History of German Literature*, edited by Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 327–92.

Stimpson, Catharine. "Foreword." *Respectability and Deviance: Nineteenth-Century German Women Writers and the Ambiguity of Representation*, by Ruth Ellen Boetcher Joeres, University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. xv–xvii.

Warhol, Robyn and Susan Lanser, editors. *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions*. Ohio State University Press, 2015.

Wilkes, Geoff, translator. *Gilgi, One of Us*. By Irmgard Keun, Melville House, 2013.

APPENDIX 1: List of Abbreviations

ST – Source Text (Keun, Irmgard, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. 17th edition, Ullstein, 2020)

TT1 – Target Text 1 (Creighton, Basil, translator. *The Artificial Silk Girl*. By Irmgard Keun, Chatto & Windus, 1933)

TT2 – Target Text 2 (Ankum, Katharina von, translator. *The Artificial Silk Girl*. By Irmgard Keun, Other Press, 2002)