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Into the Woods: Translation and the Transnational Transmission of Trauma on Minority Language Stages

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Abstract

This article approaches contemporary Catalan theatre as a translation zone, in which subjective limits are negotiated and identities (dis)articulated in the process. Focusing on works directed by Calixto Bieito and Oriol Broggi, who, despite their many differences, are known for engaging with interlingual and intercultural translation in the creative process, often beckoning overt reflection on the relationship between languages, environment and identity, the article excavates what three particular plays, *Forests* (2012), *Incendis* (2012) and *Boscós* (2017), all based on translations from more hegemonic languages, reveal about the place of minority languages on the global stage and about looking at the world from a minority-language perspective. In so doing, the article seeks to go beyond the more optimistic and celebratory readings of previous work on Catalonia-in-translation and to attend to the ways in which the asymmetries faced by minority languages in multilingual settings result in, or are experienced as loss, violence and/or trauma. Via diverse processes of translation, languages such as Catalan provide sensitive lenses for the transmission of narratives of transnational trauma, as a direct result of the daily negotiations of place, relatedness and resilience that they demand for survival. The title of the article, “Into the woods,” is intended to be read both literally and figuratively, in recognition of the increasing attention to eco-critical and environmental concerns in contemporary Catalan theatre and of the ways in which renewed attention to ecological survival often goes hand in hand with a commitment to language ecology. On a more figurative level, the article follows the cues provided by the metaphorical wordplay about woods and trees in the reception of Bieito’s *Forests* and Broggi’s *Boscós* in order to address the question of what the fact of different languages enables and prevents us from seeing and what we can learn from making the effort to look at the world multilingually from the perspective of a minority language speaker.

Keywords

Catalan theatre; Eco-translation; Multilingualism; Trauma; Shakespeare; Wajdi Mouawad

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On the evening of 31 August 2012, I found myself waiting with my then 80-year-old Barcelona-born mother outside the Old Rep theatre on Station Street in Birmingham, England, to see the premiere of *Forests*, directed by Calixto Bieito, a work that had been commissioned as part of the World Shakespeare Festival and co-produced with the Royal Shakespeare Company (and thus due to play later at London's Barbican, as well as in Madrid, Barcelona and Girona's *Temporada Alta*).¹ Some of the people around us were apprehensive, having heard that Bieito might be a difficult or controversial director; others enthused about the exciting visual quality of his other work, echoing the kinds of reviews that tend to be distilled on websites and in press packs.² When we were eventually able to enter the theatre, we found the stage already brightly lit with the artificial eco-hum characteristic of the contemporary art installation. At the centre was an enormous tree, the single avatar of the forests announced in the production's title. Here the photograph of the real tree that graced the programme cover, with a monstrous Caliban at its heart, had been transplanted to an artificial setting, just as we were being led on a paradoxical journey into forests at the heart of a post-industrial city. This was no natural world for humanity to enter and with which to interact, but a nature already and irrevocably transformed, mediated and reconstructed by culture, its artificiality, its cyber-presence, placed centre-stage as in a museum for us to observe. Here, in the Old Rep

¹ *Forests*, co-production BIT Produccions and Birmingham Repertory Theatre in collaboration with the Royal Shakespeare Company. Premiered 31 August 2012. Director: Calixto Bieito; dramaturgy: Marc Rosich; original music: Maika Makovski; cast: Roser Camí, Hayley Carmichael, George Costigan, Maika Makovski, Josep Maria Pou, Katy Stephens, Christopher Simpson.

² The promotional video for the show included the following from *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 November, 2011: "For the better part of the past decade, no season has been complete without a scandal involving the work of Calixto Bieito," among other sensationalising sound-bites. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3fgb4NFM7s>, 26 July, 2012, 0:12 [accessed 4 September 2021].

in Birmingham, the body of the other, of monstrous alterity, was on the outside, and there, on stage, was a body for me instantly recognisable as that of emblematic Catalan actor Josep Maria Pou – a staple of Spanish and Catalan theatre, cinema and television – who had previously played Lear in Bieito’s controversial 2004 production of *El rei Lear*.³

The entrance of the audience, which included Bieito himself, was followed by that of the actors, themselves cast as visitors to an exhibit in a museum, circling the tree, making their phone calls, stepping over Pou’s prostrate body. The only narrative at this point was a quotation from Joseph Beuys: “I think the tree is an element of regeneration which in itself is a concept of time.”⁴ We were placed in a scenario where the relationship between art and reality was to be seen in ecological terms, in terms of landscape, a landscape in which all present were inserted as part of the performance, collapsing boundaries between art and reality. This was not a show for the passive spectator, but one in which we were all required to perform cultural work: whether by trying to put together some sort of narrative or to spot the quotations from the twenty or so works of Shakespeare that formed the archive on which the production was based; by trying to follow the different characters on stage as they shifted between speaking, playing, dancing, singing, swapping clothes and performance styles; or by trying to understand the frequent slippage between languages and voices – primarily Catalan and English in the production I saw – and the relationship between spoken, written and sung words, breaths and silences.

The multiple perspectives offered on a range of familiar texts and scenarios were, of course, impossible to grasp and maintain simultaneously, drawing attention as they did to the shift from play to hard work that followed the actors’ literal passing of the ball into the audience’s court. The feelings of discomfort this at times created, as was apparent in many of the reviews and blogs,⁵ was magnified by

³ *El rei Lear*, translated by Joan Sellent, was premiered on 29 June 2004 in the *Teatre Romea*, Barcelona. See Delgado 2006, 135–50, for more on this seminal production.

⁴ The quotation is taken from a conversation about Beuys’ emblematic project *7000 Eichen*, inaugurated at *Documenta 7* in Kassel, Germany, in 1982. See Demarco (1982).

⁵ See, for instance: “Anyone who is tied to dramatic structure and narrative continuity will absolutely hate this performance” (Fisher, November 2012); “This was my second Calixto Bieito production in a matter of days having seen his Shakespeare ‘mash-up’ *Forests* at the Barbican Centre two nights before. I am a great admirer of his work and *Forests*, quite frankly, was a disappointment” (Operatraveller, November 2012); “This may not be your Shakespeare or mine. It is, however, emphatically Bieito’s. And what he memorably unearths is the idea of the forest as a place of both escape and terror. Above all, what he

reactions to the nudity and violence that followed,⁶ particularly in the later stages of the performance, after the deer hunt, which inaugurated a rapid collapse in human relationships with each other and with the environment.⁷

Reactions to the show were almost predictable: ranging from the confused to the angry, to a sense of audience violation and abuse, to the enthusiastic, enlightening and effusive.⁸ Some critics found it a praiseworthy production; others were hard-pressed to give it 2 out of 5 stars. The criticism was shaped by the tree-forest imagery, to the point of cliché.⁹ This was a production in which you could not see the forest for the trees, which was all surface and no content, where nothing made sense at all. This was a production in which the individual actors were considered talented, but were let down by the lack of a coherent reading or artistic vision, where the audience was left floundering, like the actors, without any structure. And even when the artistic vision was praised, there was a question as to why Catalan was there at all. The intermingling of languages was seen as a gimmick, tolerable for a few seconds but then tedious: it was too tiring to look at subtitles; the presence of Catalan was like another tree with nothing to contribute to the whole.¹⁰ Like Pou's prostrate,

discovers in Shakespeare is a tangible apprehension of the black chaos that lurks beneath the surface of social order" (Billington, 5 September 2012).

⁶ "I loved *Forests*, but don't go if you're easily offended. There's real violence and cruelty including sex scenes and a full frontal" (Price, 5 September 2012); "In a mixed gender production, only Camí's full-scale nudity occupies significant stage time – with a crude play on the word 'bush' at one point. There is not a clear enough meaning or aesthetic attached to these choices with the result of making this female aggression and nudity feel gratuitous" (Dustagheer, 11 November 2012).

⁷ The transition from the playful paradise of the Forest of Arden was inaugurated by the stag hunt in Act II, Scene i of *As You Like It*, which segues into the chaos of *Titus Andronicus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Macbeth*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *3 Henry VI* and *King Lear*.

⁸ My mother, incidentally, was thrilled by the opportunity to hear Catalan on a British stage at a time when all the news she was getting from Spain indicated a refusal to recognise its sociolinguistic legitimacy and attempts to reduce its presence in educational programmes in the Catalan-speaking areas through implementation of the controversial Ley Wert of 2010.

⁹ Examples include: "In Catalan director Calixto Bieito's *Forests*, it can be hard to see the wood for the trees" (Cavendish, 5 September 2012); "It is a bold idea to graft Shakespeare's thoughts about forests and make something original out of them – to turn over a new narrative leaf" (Kellaway, September 2012); "an epic arboreal mash-up" (Hickling, 3 September 2012).

¹⁰ Dubbed by Quentin Letts as "state-subsidised bilingual bilge" (September 2012) and Ian Shuttleworth as a "British Catalan Shakespearean mash-up" (8 November 2012), other critics appeared more indulgent at first: "*Forests* is bilingual – the actors switching between English and Catalan. Impressive at first, the novelty soon wears off. What does Catalan add to a performance staged in London?" (Tucker, November 2012). One of the few entirely positive responses to this trans-languaging was that of Francesca Roberts: "The Catalan, which is adopted by the bilingual cast sporadically throughout, seems to make love sing louder and pain cry out more. There is something about hearing Iago's howling cries of 'I would drown myself for love' repeated in Catalan that strikes right to the core" (Roberts, November 2012).

tramp-like body at the beginning of the show, like the voice of Maika Makovski, for some the Catalan language was out of place, unrecognisable, monstrous.

The same sort of ambivalence was to be found in the Spanish press, when the play travelled to the Peninsula later in the season.¹¹ Appreciation for the visual power of Bieito's work, and the charisma of the actors, was often tempered by complaints about the piece's purported lack of coherence. One review of the showing at the Teatro Valle Inclán in Madrid's *Centro Dramático Nacional*, for instance, returned to the forest/tree metaphor to claim that "Bieito se va por las ramas," which suggested both over-indulgence and confusion: "[e]l problema es que *Forests* es tan deshilvanado, tan errático e inasible en su dramaturgia, que no interesa ni atrapa: nos deja un sólido sentido estético y un puñado de llamativas acciones actorales" (Ayanz, 26 October 2012). Of the actors and the question of language, *La Razón*'s critic went on to write:

Brillan todos, claro, y eso que el experimento inglés/catalán no acaba de cuajar: el orden es tan impredecible que una frase empezada en un idioma acaba en otro mientras el espectador se esfuerza por comprender. Quedan momentos hermosos e impactantes, como en casi toda la trayectoria de Bieito. Pero en *Forests* la dramaturgia se va por las ramas y el efectismo deja paso al deseo de que el texto de Shakespeare hubiese sido menos un puzzle y más una tesis, una narración o alguna otra fórmula: un bosque, no árboles sueltos.

(Ayanz, 26 October 2012)

Meanwhile, Javier Villán, writing for *El Mundo* (5 November 2012), tempered his appreciation of the luminosity of director Bieito's and dramaturg Rosich's exploration of Shakespeare's mysterious forests with ambivalence over the mix of languages, which he simultaneously attributes to the production's international dimension (involving the Royal Shakespeare Company [RSC] and Barcelona International Theatre) and a sense of localised provincialism:

Y actores ingleses y catalanes que hablan en inglés y en catalán con sobretítulos en castellano... La dimensión internacional que tiene el espectáculo y la producción de la Royal

¹¹ See, for instance, "Como veis, es bastante especial el asunto, así que desde luego no es para todos los gustos. Pero sin duda, y aunque Bieito caiga por momentos en sus propias trampas, es un espectáculo indudablemente interesante. Una selva de sensaciones en la que en ocasiones te pierdes porque las ramas no dejan ver el bosque" (Gavaldón, October 2012).

Shakespeare y Barcelona Internacional Teatre, explica lo del inglés y el catalán, sin duda cara a la política lingüística de la Generalitat más que a un mercado limitado... En Madrid, en el Valle Inclán del Centro Dramático Nacional (CDN), nos arreglamos con subtítulos. Para quienes no entiendan el catalán, cosa no del todo impensable habiendo nacido en Palencia, Cáceres o Madrid, por ejemplo, Josep Maria Pou habla también inglés; quienes fuimos charnegos por los 60 en Barcelona, no es necesario pero también vale.

Parafraseando a Max Estrella en diálogo con el anarquista condenado a la Ley de Fugas “Barcelona es cara a mi corazón.” Max Estrella podía decirlo en alabanza a los anarquistas que ajusticiaban patronos catalanes en una cruenta lucha de clases. Ahora puede aplicarse a la hermosa lengua de Espriu, Carner, Foix, Gimferrer... en una cruenta lucha de idiomas [...] Los sobretítulos distraen un poco [...].

(Villán, 5 November 2012)

In drawing attention to the lack of an audience equipped to understand both languages in the play and attributing the presence of Catalan to the linguistic politics of the Generalitat, Villán portrays his own position in the landscape to be that of a former “charnego,” a subaltern Spanish-speaker of Murcian or Andalusian origin. I have quoted his review at length precisely because it reveals both the complexity of the socio- and ecolinguistic relationship between what Cronin calls “voice, place and belonging in different contexts and different situations” (2017, 16) and the difficulty of translating this relationship. Villán claims a very particular insight into the meaning behind the play’s multilingualism that is further legitimized, in writing for *El Mundo*, by harking back to Valle-Inclán’s *Luces de Bohemia* (1920). In so doing, he at one and the same time characterises the Catalan language, culture and society as bourgeois thus implying that the relationship between Catalan and Spanish is one in which the former is dominant and hegemonic and the latter dominated and subjugated whilst positioning himself as unusually capable of appreciating the beauty of a language (Catalan) unfortunately caught up in a crude linguistic conflict.¹² Villán’s self-

¹² Furthermore, I would suggest that there is deliberate ambivalence in the article as to whether the “crude conflict of languages” refers to contemporary Catalan-Spanish relations, at a time when there were beginning to be increasing calls for secession in Catalonia, or to the perceived asynchrony of the interplay between Catalan and English on stage. See Maria Josep Cuenca, “The War of the Languages” (2009), for an exceptionally insightful corpus-based study of the way in which linguistic conflict was constructed and represented in Spanish and Catalan media from the end of the 1990s onwards.

positioning is, however, only superficially nuanced or complex, as ultimately it reproduces the same gulf between the aesthetic and the affective that is a feature of many of the other reviews of the production at London's Barbican, above all in their attitudes towards the Catalan language: it's fine at a distance beautiful as local colour but ultimately provincial. For example: "[i]t [the theatre] wasn't full, and I have to say people in the audience speaking in Spanish (or Catalan) appeared to enjoy it, and there were quite a few. But I guess if I lived in Barcelona, I'd be pleased to see any stage play, however bad, in English" (Viney, 9 November 2012). Here the reviewer is very clearly marking the other, Catalan attachment to language and culture as provincial; one's own attachments are, needless to say, not in question at all.

If I have recounted this anecdote here it is in order to draw attention to one of the key moments when I began to think of translation and multilingualism in terms of trauma, perhaps because the reception of *Forests* took me back somewhat recursively and repetitiously to linguistic and textual relationships that I thought I had left long behind me, in my move from questions of translation history and translatability towards a focus on cultural translation as intersubjective negotiation and performance. In part, the anecdote draws attention to how what we see, hear and comprehend ultimately depends on our relationship to landscape as well as to how this has an impact on whether we can see the wood for the trees and, indeed, on whether we have to decide to see one instead of the other. In the interview with Bieito included in the programme notes, the director very clearly signals his interest in the relationship between language, landscape and identity as spanning the local and the global, the personal and the political, the emotional and the ecological:

I grew up in a little city surrounded by forests, and I love German Romanticism, where the forest is a key theme. Forests have been very important to me ever since I was a child, and they are always with me, everywhere I go. I love to walk around the forests. But I also think that trees are like people, like human beings. We have developed our lives and our world so much in a technological way but, in emotional terms, we haven't really changed much in comparison with other periods in our history. We are suffering, crying, in pain, in love, in a very similar way to our predecessors. Nature rules our lives. We are growing up, living and dying like trees.¹³

¹³ See also the video reproduction of parts of this interview in Bagnera (31 October 2012).

(Bieito in Peake 2012, 10)

On the other hand, the ambivalent reception of *Forests* signals the violence of translation and transplantation, as expressed in theoretical reflections by, for instance, Walter Benjamin in “The Task of the Translator” (1923) or by Antoine Berman in “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign” (1985), as well as by more recent historians and sociologists who study the role of translation in conflict.¹⁴ Bieito’s decision to allow Catalan and English to share the stage, his phenomenological interest in the encounter between the languages, ultimately placed language at the centre of a landscape that of contemporary European directors’ theatre so often associated with the visual and the performative (see Delgado 2010; Buffery 2013). According to his own account, the emphasis on language came from years of working with European theatre in different languages and from a desire to see, hear and play with the relationship between the hegemonic and the marginal, the dominant and the minoritised: “Both languages mix very fluently and well. They sound wonderful. We have a long tradition of translating Shakespeare into Catalan. And I love Shakespeare in a lot of languages. It is a real experience, very exciting” (Bieito in Peake 2012, 10). The actors themselves commented on the effects of this play, how it forced the British actors out of their comfort zone, as, of course, the Catalans spoke better English than they Catalan. The play set the encounter between the two languages as fertile grounds for intermingling, miscegenation and even anthropophagic incorporation, culminating in Pou’s denaturalising howl to “eat men.”¹⁵ Yet the question remains: was this notion visible, audible, for those who remained outside of the translation zone, for whom the language they speak does not have to be negotiated on a daily basis, but is a given?

Whether we see the wood or the trees depends, in short, on our relationship to landscape and on our relationship to language, in a manner similar to what Sherry Simon discusses in *Cities in Translation* (2012) or, more recently, Michael Cronin in *Eco-translation* (2017). But it is not as simple a matter as determining which language we speak or whether we have particular links to a particular locale. Such contingencies are inescapably interwoven with other cultural flows that affect the translatability and visibility of other, particularly

¹⁴ See, especially, Inghilleri and Harding (2010), Bandia (2014), and Baker (2007).

¹⁵ This particular scene can be viewed at: <http://teatro.es/guiarte/barcelona-internacional-teatre-bit-36392/estrenos/forests-60648/documentos-on-line/videos> [accessed 31 January 2020].

less-translated, languages and cultures, on a planet in which, as Emily Apter (2006, 5) observes, “distinctions between urban and rural, center and periphery, pre- and post-industrial, pre- and post-capitalist have melted away.” In developing and defining the notion of *Eco-Translation* as “covering all forms of translation thinking and practice that knowingly engage with the challenges of human-induced environmental change,” Cronin (2017, 16) points to the need for “ecological awareness of the connection between voice, place and belonging in different contexts and different situations.” He goes on to stress that:

[W]hat an ecology of translation must seek to do is to make available or communicable the commons of language itself.... Paying attention to what is in the background is re-calibrating attentiveness to produce new regimes of value that prize what we have in common if only because it is these things that ensure our common survival.

(Cronin 2017, 28)

At this point, it is useful to underline that the relationship between translation, multilingualism and trauma is inflected by place, resilience and relatedness and to recognise, with Cronin, both “how routinised, unreflective or narrowly utilitarian notions of language impoverish the Language Commons and deplete the expressive resources of future generations” (2017, 30) and how the “sense of estrangement” we glimpse in *Forests*, “the feeling that home can never be taken for granted or is increasingly difficult to define, is [...] the default condition of a minority language speaker” (2017, 140). In effect, I am invoking here again (cf. Buffery 2013) the heteroglossic nature of Catalan theatre, not so much in the sense meant by Marvin Carlson (2006), in his more literal diagnosis of the disruptive challenge of other languages on what for him was a primarily monolingual stage, as in terms of the significance of the use of Catalan (or any less-used or minoritised language) in a bi- or multilingual sociocultural context and the challenge such use presents to dominant, monolingual frames. In doing so, I am also reminding myself of the primarily social nature of theatre, the need to see it as performance, always in relationship to its environment and socio-cultural milieu, which frames the rehearsal process, the director, actors and other creative practitioners’ lives and their social and artistic interactions.

Having explored responses to the interplay between Catalan and English on an international stage, and the ways in which they often reflect a more or less ingenuous acceptance and naturalization of existing linguistic hierarchies and asymmetries, I wish to turn my attention to how these relationships play out at a local level, in the work of another Catalan theatre director, Oriol Broggi. Broggi's work with La Perla 29—the company with which he is most associated—has largely revolved around translation, whether in the guise of more or less faithful versions of theatre classics, such as *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, or in adaptations of modern European theatre and cinema (Rostand, Chekhov, Pirandello, Brecht, Stoppard, De Filippo, Fellini and Scola). Working mainly in Catalan, Broggi's and La Perla 29's repertoire has included productions in Spanish of *Luces de Bohemia* and *Bodas de sangre*, and has manifested a particular recent emphasis on contemporary Irish drama and the work of Lebanese-Canadian playwright Wajdi Mouawad, whose oeuvre has drawn widespread reflection on the effects of exile and trauma and might easily be seen as a case study in traumatic translation itself.¹⁶ Mouawad's work is taught widely in programmes about intercultural theatre in France and in Canada and has been translated into numerous languages, with productions across the globe, above all the cycle *Le sang des promesses*, comprising *Littoral*, *Incendies*, *Forêts* and *Ciels*. Beginning with *Incendies* in 2012, which was reprised in the 2014–2015 season, Broggi went on to direct *Cels* (2014), and *Boscós* (2017) and to co-direct *Un obús al cor* (2016) with Ferran Utzet; he also staged an interview with Mouawad, when the latter visited Catalonia, to present *Inflammation du verbe vivre* and *Les larmes d'Oedipe* at the Grec Festival (2017).¹⁷

It is, in part, the critical acclaim afforded to La Perla 29's versions of the Mouawad tetralogy that has drawn me to reflect on what they have to say about the relationship between translation, multilingualism, minority languages and trauma.¹⁸ However, it is also important to note that Broggi's choice of repertoire so far—largely

¹⁶ Buffery (2019, 300–4) explores La Perla 29's treatment of Irish themes in terms of the intergenerational and transnational transmission of trauma.

¹⁷ The other play in Mouawad's tetralogy, *Littoral*, was directed by Raimon Molins for Atrium Produccions at the *Teatre Romea* in 2013.

¹⁸ In his review of *Boscós*, Andreu Sotorra (2017) insists that “comença a ser hora de fer balanç d'aquesta llarga operació escènica i comença a ser hora de situar en un capítol de la història teatral catalana el que l'obra de Wajdi Mouawad ha representat.” Furthermore, in the recent Catalan edition of the plays, Broggi describes the affective impact he and the company registered on experiencing audience responses to *Incendies*: “Va ser com un ‘misteri laïc’... com quan es posa a ploure. Com quan les estrelles i els planetes es paren” (in Mouawad 2017, 13). *Incendies* received five of the major Catalan Butxaca theatre prizes in the 2012–2013 and sold more than half a million seats between 2012 and 2015.

centred on the translation and adaptation of acclaimed classics of an international theatre canon that, as Manuel Molins (2012) reminds us, revolves around the representation and negotiation of multifaceted rather than the eternal and inevitable nature of conflict – does not necessarily imply an overarching and intentional aim to focus on the transmission of trauma, let alone on how transnational cultural trauma narratives pertain to minority cultural settings. Whatever the case, I believe that analysis of Broggi's work is of relevance because it draws attention to a key feature of recent cultural production in Catalonia that distinguishes it from the all-too-familiar criticism of the period of normalization: to wit, its multilingual and cosmopolitan diversity, particularly in the city of Barcelona.¹⁹ Broggi's work thus allows me both to explore the role of translation in this landscape and to assess the ways in which place, resilience and relatedness have an impact on the perception and reception of other cultural trauma narratives.

Unlike Bieito, Broggi and La Perla 29 have maintained a much greater focus on textual theatre than on devised forms of performance, yet the collaborative and community-based practice that we associate with devised performance is very much a part of Broggi's approach to his role as director. He often co-directs, co-translates or adapts with other dramaturgs, and his experiments with opening up rehearsal processes to local audiences has also provided insights into the reflective nature of his practice. This fits in with Broggi's overall vision, transmitted across his repertoire, of a theatrical ontology rooted in the sharing of stories as a collaborative, cooperative and craft-like activity, which often becomes a key motif of his productions. It is also in keeping with his treatment of the emblematic space of many La Perla 29 productions: the *Biblioteca de Catalunya* theatre, a vaulted Gothic hall with a sand-covered floor. At times feeling like a barn and at others like a warehouse, a cave or a circus in which actors and audience are often in close proximity, it is an architectural space which gives many of the productions – indeed, perhaps, much of the repertoire – a site-specific feel. The disposition of the performance space and the adjoining rooms also means that the actors are often travelling across the whole length of the room, through and round the audience, which is often placed on three sides

¹⁹ As far as theatrical activity is concerned, the situation diagnosed by previous critics such as Lourdes Orozco (2007) of an increasing marginalization of non-Catalan theatre is almost completely unrecognisable, with even public theatres like the *Teatre Nacional de Catalunya* and the *Teatre Lliure* offering a mixed and multilingual repertoire to cater for a diversity of audiences.

of the stage. The need to travel that is imposed on the actors' bodies by the particular structure of the *Biblioteca* is often reflected formally and thematically within the plays themselves, in which the actors-characters are often portrayed as nomadic, evoking the travelling theatre troupes of the late medieval and early modern periods.

Furthermore, as has been increasingly the case with more recent productions, part of the budget is sometimes used for members of the company to travel in order to research the play, as was the case with some of the Mouawad productions, with the resulting photographic record of these voyages being used to frame and persuade of the loyalty of their versions and/or as evidence of genuine intercultural encounters. Rather than large ensemble casts, Broggi tends to work with smaller companies, meaning that each of the actors often has to double in numerous roles, at times producing the same sense of intergenerational transmission that Sergi Belbel used to great effect in an earlier Catalan play, *Forasters* (2004). But even though there are moments of "showiness," such as the use of a live horse in the 2017–18 production of *Bodas de sangre*, in general the focus is on the words and often the poetry of the works themselves, with the visual and the musical dimensions generally used as a frame rather than as the main focus of the spectacle.

The productions from the Mouawad tetralogy that have had the greatest impact are *Incendis* (*Incendies*), premiered in the *Teatre Romea* on Carrer Hospital in 2012,²⁰ and *Boscós* (*Forêts*), premiered in the nearby *Biblioteca de Catalunya* space in 2017.²¹ Recursive and repetitive in structure and themes, these works are characterised by a search for identity that has to be constructed from fragments, the shattered remains of extreme violence and conflict. Thus, they are, in many ways, obvious choices for the representation and discussion of the transnational transmission of trauma, both because of their focus on particular cultural trauma narratives and because of the way in which they explore the role of intercultural encounter and conflict on subject formation across the generations. Here, I am particularly interested in what the focus on place, resilience and relatedness

²⁰ *Incendis*, by Wajdi Mouawad, Teatre Romea, 21 February 2012. Translated by Cristina Genebat. Directed by Oriol Broggi. Cast: Clara Segura, Julio Manrique, Xavier Boada, Màrcia Cisteró, Xavier Ricart, Xavier Ruano. Space: Oriol Broggi and Sebastià Brosa; lighting: Albert Faura; costumes: Berta Riera and Bàrbara Glaenzel; sound: Oriol Broggi and Damien Bazin; assistant director: Ferran Utxet; projections: Francesc Isern (Piscolab Films). After a highly successful run, the production was reprised in the 2014–2015 season.

²¹ *Boscós*, by Wajdi Mouawad, Teatre Biblioteca de Catalunya, 29 March 2017. Translated by Cristina Genebat. Directed by Oriol Broggi. Cast: Màrcia Cisteró, Cristina Genebat, Marissa Josa, Clara de Ramon, Xavier Ricart, Xavier Ripoll, Marc Rius, Carol Rovira, Xavier Ruano, Sergi Torrecilla, Ramon Vila; scenography: Oriol Broggi; lighting: Pep Barcons; costumes: Annita Ribera; video: Francesc Isern; sound: Damien Bazin.

might reveal about the translation and reception of these works on a minority stage.

While Mouawad's plays are often read in terms of their portrayal of individual and collective trauma, and while the playwright does not deny their roots in his own experiences of displacement and loss as a child refugee from war-torn Lebanon in the 1970s, it is also generally acknowledged that Mouawad is more concerned with transcending specific histories in order to achieve the poetic and mythic impact of Greek tragedy.²² His most famous work is, undoubtedly *Incendies*, first published and performed in French in 2003, and translated into English as *Scorched* by prize-winning translator Linda Gaboriau in 2005. The play inspired a film version in 2010, directed by Denis Villeneuve, which was adapted to provide a more linear and realist account of the tragic story at its heart. *Incendies/Scorched* continues to be performed today and continues parallels are repeatedly drawn with the situation of war and conflict in the Middle East as well as with diverse experiences of immigration and multiculturalism. In 2016, it was performed in Spanish by the *Teatro de la Abadía* in Madrid; indeed, it was this version, directed by Mario Gas, that was playing in the *Teatro Goya* from 25 October 2017, when the clash between Spanish and Catalan visions of constitutional legitimacy was at its apogee, following the police violence at the disputed 1 October referendum on Catalan independence. As Maria Delgado's (2017) comprehensive review recognises, this version was very different from Broggi's, a fact that she attributes, in part, to the pace and power of the performances, but also to the sparseness of the staging, inspired perhaps by Mouawad's own vision of the play in French, which first travelled to Madrid in 2008. Delgado's review ends by linking the play's resonance to contemporary Spanish attempts to grapple with past political violence and injustices, and by citing and cites Núria Espert's words, "No hay un texto más actual que *Incendios*," before singling out revelations about stolen babies and illegal adoptions between 1950 and 1980.²³

In contrast, Oriol Broggi's account of his captivation by the play traces a far more complex multilingual and transnational process of translation and transmission, in part due to particular sociocultural

²² This has led to criticism of Mouawad's appropriation of the trauma of others, without acknowledgement of their agency. See, for instance, Holstun (2015).

²³ In the process, the focus is placed on the fate of Nawal's son, Nihad, who, after being taken from the fictional Kfar Rayat orphanage, later turns from victim to perpetrator, unwittingly raping his own mother and thus fathering the twin boy and girl, Jeanne and Simon.

and geopolitical contingencies like the location of Catalonia close to an international border with France or the presence and influence of transnational theatre practitioners in the region. Yet, as Stephen Greenblatt (2009) reminds us, these contingencies are crucial in understanding the international circulation of cultural texts and narratives. According to the account he gives in the prologue to the Catalan edition of *La sang de les promeses* (2017, 9–14), Broggi first heard of Mouawad from friends, the actors Ramon Vila and Xavier Ruano, who were trying to get him to go and see *Le sang de promesses* at Avignon in the summer of 2009. Another friend of the family, Manolo Brugarolas, brought back the French text for Broggi to read, but he admits that his French was not strong enough to understand it fully at the time. Later, he came across it again from another direction: during discussions with actors Julio Manrique and Clara Segura about the next play to work on, the former spoke of a copy of *Incendios* she had been given to read by Argentine director and playwright Javier Daulte, which had been used for a performance in Mexico City in 2011.²⁴ Actress Cristina Genebat drafted a translation into Catalan, and the group, now joined by Xavier Boada, Màrcia Cisteró and Xavier Ricart, as well as by members of the La Perla 29 production team, were drawn into a research and rehearsal process that involved documenting and reading about the Lebanese conflict and even a trip to Beirut, from where they were able to visit key sites: “Vam trepitjar la presó on va viure la Nawal, vam veure un autobús que podria ser l’autobus que apareix a *Incendis*” (Broggi in prologue to Mouawad 2017, 12).²⁵

Broggi’s omission of any mention of Villeneuve’s film adaptation, which was released in Spain in 2011, might be seen as a symptom of the anxiety of influence, in that it enables him to persuade of the priority of La Perla 29’s excavation of Lebanese spaces of conflict by failing to reference the work done by the film. More importantly, it draws attention to the way in which the company’s own journey of research, discovery and recognition became blurred with that of the characters in the play, sleading them to understand and portray their own process in terms of the transmission of trauma:

²⁴ Daulte was based in Barcelona for much of the first decade of the twenty-first century and has continued to be at the centre of Catalan-Argentine theatrical exchanges since then.

²⁵ See also: “d’alguna manera [...] ens sentíem com si estiguéssim fent el mateix viatge que fa la Nawal i el Simon buscant la identitat de la seva mare. El mateix viatge que va fer l’autor en reconèixer coses del seu país” (Broggi in Mouawad 2017, 12).

Hores i hores. Tots junts, en grup, i jo tinc el record de viure junts, tancats a la Biblioteca i abstrets del món...

El dia de l'estrena, nerviosos, ens preguntàvem què era aquell dolor gratificant de dir, de sentir, de portar a escena i de transmetre a l'espectador. Amb el temps hem anat veient que el nostre ofici és bàsicament això [...]: saber gestionar aquest dolor.

(Broggi in prologue to Mouawad 2017, 12)

A further journey taken by the translation, from rehearsals in the company's *Biblioteca de Catalunya* space to the emblematic *Teatre Romea* on Carrer Hospital, heightened its impact as a process of intercultural communication and place-binding between languages, subjects and worlds. The space of the *Romea*'s traditional, proscenium auditorium was transformed for the production by bringing the stage down to audience level and replacing part of the seating area in the stalls with a vast expanse of sand. The architecture of the theatre meant that rather than simply translating the sense of proximity characteristic of the *Biblioteca de Catalunya* space, the removal of boundaries between stage and audience produced a spatial continuum, which, when seen from the balcony, both transmitted the sense that the people in the stalls were somehow part of the performance and spurred reflection on the theatre's relation to the urban space around it. How conscious any audience member might have been of all this depended, perhaps, on whether they entered the Carrer Hospital from the direction of the Rambla, now populated by an almost continual flow of global tourists, or from the opposite direction, past the Arab cafes, saree stores, Halal restaurants, butchers and grocery shops that have reflected the multicultural diversity of the Raval district since the end of the 1990s.

The *situatedness* of the production was also, arguably, shaped, if not governed, by other, more strictly translational choices. For instance, the subtle removal of repetition in Genebat's version transforms the sometimes heavy, grave and portentous rhetorical style of Mouawad's original, whose aim at times appears to be to have the audience hang on every single word, into a more mercurial and breathless interchange that reflects the fluidity of shifts between characters, generations and settings, all conjured up on the same continuous stage. This transformation is perhaps most problematic in the treatment of silences, most significantly the silence of the twins' mother Nawal, in the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Nawal's silence is transmitted on stage both through the initial resentment and incomprehension of her Canadian children,

who already felt abandoned by her in life, and through the undecipherable texts left to them as a legacy to give to another, unknown receptor: their father and brother, whom neither knew existed. We attempt to listen to Nawal's silence, along with her daughter, via a cassette-recording made by her nurse. The twins' excavation of Nawal's story, in fragments, slowly recovers her voice and the promise at the heart of her silence: the story of a young woman in love who is forced to abandon her first child; a woman who learns to write in order to remember and record her debt to her grandmother and who teaches her friend Sawda to read as a way out of the cycle of violence and misery; her incessant search for her lost child leads to imprisonment in a Lebanese prison, where she becomes a woman who sings to maintain hope amidst extreme torture and violence.

An extreme example of the omission of repetition in Genebat's translation can be found in the short scene in which the twins, Jeanne and Simon, discuss the silence of their mother and in which Jeanne tries to get her brother to listen to the cassette recordings:²⁶

Jeanne: Là. Écoute. On l'entend respirer. On l'entend bouger.	Janine: There. Listen. You can hear her breathing. You can hear her move.	Jeanne: Se la sent respirar.
Simon: Tu écoutes du silence!...	Simon: You're listening to silence!	Simon: Escoltes el silenci!...
Jeanne: C'est son silence à elle. Derrière ce silence, il y a des choses qui sont là mais qu'on n'entend pas.	Janine: It's her silence. There are many things behind that silence, but we can't hear them.	Jeanne: És el seu silenci. (Mouawad 2017, 173)

Given that the scene is intercut here with a flashback to Nawal teaching her friend to repeat the alphabet in Arabic [Àlif, ba, tha, jim, ha, kha.../ Àlif, ba, tha, jim, ha, kha.../ Dal, dhal, ra, zay, sin, xin, sad, dad...] and hence to one of the moments when we are reminded of

²⁶ Here the Catalan version has been placed alongside the original French and Gaboriau's English version.

the multilingual asymmetries underlying the play, the reduced repetition might be interpreted both as a lack of attention to the relationship between words and silence and as a silencing of language worlds. However, other choices, such as the introduction of the wordplay between “ocell” and “osell” in the very first scene (Mouawad 2017, 139 41) to indicate the lawyer Hermile Lebel’s foreignness, or Nawal’s kindness in helping him to correct his pronunciation, reintroduce a tension between silence and voice that might perhaps compensate for other omissions. Furthermore, the scene in which we encounter the unidentified father/brother Nihad transformed into an amoral sniper, who is later to become the violent perpetrator of his mother’s rape, cleverly maintains the sense that the collapse of his respect for intersubjective limits is reflected in his use of language:

You know, well, I wrote this song when it was war. War on my country. Yes, one day a woman that I loved died. Yes. Shouting by a sniper, I feel a big crash in my hart. My hart colaps. Yes. I crie. And I wrote this song.

It will be a plaer to heare your love song, Nihad.

No problem, Kurt.

[...]

Nihad: You know, Kirk, sniper job is fantastic job.

Justament, Nihad, can you talk about this?

Yeah! It is an artistic job.

Because a good sniper, don’t shoot de qualsevol manera, no, no, noooo! I have a lot of principe, Kirk!

(Mouawad 2017, 219, 223)

By maintaining “solutions” from the French original (“*I crie*”; “I have a lot of *principe*”) instead of wholly shifting Nihad’s code-switching to English and Catalan, the translation preserves traces of the transnational mobility encoded within the play’s ontology: its reproduction of distant Lebanese/Arabic origins from the perspective of the new home produced via the place-binding of migration in Quebec. The play moves between cultural landscapes, languages and generations: villages where everyone is illiterate, traditional practices, roads and camps riven by gratuitous violence and bombs. It stages the quest of a mother and her son for each other; the quest of the twins Jeanne and Simon for their father and brother; the quest of an audience for answers to an enigma that hides and silences the enormity of a trauma not graspable in the everyday. Negotiating answers involves translations, understood as the

movement between different languages as well as the openness to interpretation, and the work of actors and company as “gestors” (managers) of all this pain. If Mouawad presents the trauma as something universal, as having the quality of myth, the tenor of reviews of the Catalan version, which focus on its multicultural dimension, indicate that Broggi’s version is much more about understanding the other, a key element of which is the process of othering and then inhabiting these other worlds, transmitted in the performance of multicultural relations as crucial to resilience. Unlike the presentation and reception of *Boscós* (2017), which will be discussed in my concluding remarks, no perceptible link is made to cultural trauma narratives in Spain, even though, as we have glimpsed in relation to *Forests*, it was a time of increasing conflict, underpinned by growing public awareness about the excavation and re-emergence of the crimes of the Civil War and the Franco regime.

In the programme to La Perla 29’s 2017 production of Mouawad’s *Boscós*, Broggi writes:

M’agradaria haver escrit aquest gran poema sobre el nostre temps, i el dels nostres pares i el dels nostres avis. M’agradaria haver-lo escrit i poder dedicar-lo als meus pares. No l’hem escrit nosaltres, però tenim la sort de representar-lo avui, davant vostre, de dir-lo, de fer-lo present.²⁷

What is it about this play that produces such identifications? In part, the answer is obvious: although the play is set in the same French-Canadian space of migration and multicultural diversity as *Incendies*, the quest of the central protagonist, Loup, for answers about her heritage involves a trip to Europe and an encounter with the violent legacy of European history. The play’s process of excavation of the past takes us back to the Paris Commune of 1871 before leading us through scenes of violence and trauma set during and between the two world wars. The bone fragment lodged in Loup’s mother’s head, which is at the centre of a tumour that ultimately kills her, turns out to match a missing piece from the skull of a woman bludgeoned to death by a German soldier in Treblinka, a woman whose commitment to the Resistance and whose comradeship with her Jewish friend Sarah Cohen impels her to swap identities in order to give the new mother and daughter a chance of survival. Along the way, we learn that intergenerational transmission does not

²⁷ The same words are also reproduced on the company’s blogspot, *La Revistilla*, <http://larevistilladelaperla.blogspot.com/2017/03/dins-els-boscós-de-mouawad.html> [accessed 31 January 2020].

necessarily need to journey via blood and DNA, but can be achieved, as in *Incendies*, through friendship, language, care for others, and the ethical relationships set in motion by gifts, promises and debts.

If *Forêts* is, in many ways, more excessive than *Incendies* in the demands it makes on the audience's suspension of disbelief, perhaps this is partly because of a residual resistance to see Europe as monstrous other. *Bosc/Forêts* is a play about resilience, about healing, and about the translatability of trauma. It is also a play in which the forest at its heart – here the Forest of Ardennes, rather than the Forest of Arden – is imagined first as a utopian paradise by the young Albert Keller, who seeks to escape the industrial capitalism of a father whose factories end up fuelling two major wars. Yet the desired communion with nature soon descends into darkness and chaos as isolation from the world gives way to incest, rape and parricide. In the words of Edgar, shortly before learning his sister is pregnant by his father:

La forêt. À perte de vue, la forêt et partout, partout, partout, partout, partout la forêt et au beau milieu de cette putain d'enfoirée de bordel de cul de merde de forêt, il y a nous, sans personne à aimer, sans personne à rencontrer et jamais, jamais le moindre espoir pour rêver!	Exactament, el bosc. Fins on arriba la vista, el bosc per tot arreu, per tot arreu, per tot arreu, per tot arreu, per tot arreu el bosc i al bell mig d'aquesta puta merda de refotut bosc dels collons hi som nosaltres, sense ningú per estimar i sense ningú a qui trobar-nos i mai, mai la més mínima esperança de somiar! (Mouaward 2017, 331)
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By linking *Bosc* so overtly to the memories of his own parents and grandparents, Broggi encourages us to link it to cultural trauma narratives in Catalonia and Spain.²⁸ Yet in the prologue to *La sang de les promeses*, at least, there is a suggestion that we might just as well draw on *Incendies* to encounter the same process of identification,

²⁸ It bears remembering that Broggi is the grandson of the eminent physician and pacifist Moisès Broggi (1908–2012), who was a field surgeon for the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War.

judging by the signs of retraumatization in the following anecdote about Broggi's father's reading of this play:

[L]avors, recordo que li vaig deixar el text al meu pare un matí perquè el llegís. Vaig tornar al vespre i el vaig trobar assegut, en una butaca, amb els ulls vidriosos i amb el llibre ja tancat a les mans. Semblava que fes hores que estava en aquella posició. Se'l veia quasi enfadat: "Què és això? D'on surt aquesta força? Aquesta brutalitat?"

(Broggi prologue to Mouawad 2017, 10–11)

The journey taken by La Perla 29 in order to “excavate” *Boscós* leads them to travel to the Ardennes, where they source some of the tree images projected during the performance and take many of the photographs of their creative process that are then published in a book to accompany the show. Once again, their physical and mental journey is evoked in parallel to that of the central protagonist of the play, in a process of witnessing that is capable both of seeing the entire landscape and of recognising one's own place within it:

LOUP: Mama,
El teu cos finalment a la terra,
Veig un horitzó complet que desplega davant meu
I és esfereïdor
Esfereïdor de grandària i de profunditat
Veig, de cop, l'espai que se'n va per allà
Fins al nord
Fins al sud
Fins a l'est
I fins a l'oest.

(Mouawad 2017, 369)

Perhaps all that I have really shown here are examples of different metaphorical, real, symbolic, desired, projected forests, where our capacity to see and understand is marred by repetition and blockage, by an inability to see our own place in the landscape, by an unwillingness to translate and, finally, by the relative unfamiliarity of a minority or minoritised language. Initially, I had intended to include other multilingual forests witnessed in the same period (2012–2017) as the rise of the Catalan independence movement and to reflect on what they reveal about the changing shape of Catalan culture, society, language and environment. Instead, I have opted for something far simpler, yet, I hope, more valuable: the importance of engaging with other languages, identities and cultures, of entering

the forest, of trying to see the wood and the trees simultaneously, as a witness, as a translator, as an actor, as a traveller, as a spectator, and, in so doing, to attempt to account for at least some of the gaps, silences and blockages. This ultimately involves taking account of one's own place in the landscape linguistically, socially, geopolitically and ethically and recognising one's own responsibility and agency along with those of others.

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