# Brand new translation, same old story? The perpetuation of female and racial stereotypes in (re)translation

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# CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

## 1.1 European travels: how characters in novels may undergo a make-over in translation

The best ideas come when you least expect them. Twenty-odd years ago, having planned a holiday in Turkey, I decided to buy a discount copy of the latest Orhan Pamuk in English. Maybe a novel entitled *Snow* was not the most obvious candidate for a trip to a seaside resort, and it felt a little strange as a native speaker of Dutch to bring an English translation of a Turkish book instead of a translation in my own language. Little did I expect that my peculiar choice of holiday reading would turn out to sow a tiny seed for what would become this PhD research two decades later: a quartet of case studies into the impact of translation choices. Unbeknownst to me, my travel companion had purchased the exact same novel, but in its Dutch translation: *Sneeuw*. Both the English and the Dutch title are a direct, literal translation of the original Turkish title *Kar*. I started to read on the plane and was simultaneously transported to the sunny Turkish coast and the snowy landscape of Kars, a town near the Armenian border.

Ka, the story's protagonist, is a poet who has recently returned to his former home town Kars after years of exile in Frankfurt. He finds himself amidst great political upheaval: the murder of the town's mayor, a "suicide epidemic" among teenage girls, a nationalist coup against Islamist politicians. Pamuk, who wrote *Kar* around the time of the electoral victory of Erdoğan's AKP, recounts the grave subject matter of the various sociopolitical struggles in the region with a great deal of irony. Imagine my surprise, however, when halfway through the novel his narrator is no longer merely ironic, but instead displays an almost cheeky sense of humour. How come the overriding sense of melancholy and bleakness that that had gripped me until then was suddenly vying with an irreverent compulsion to laugh? Considering the grave situation and terrible events unfolding in Kars, it seemed odd to suddenly experience an impulse to frequently smile or even snigger out loud? Had *Kar* turned into a parody of Turkish society on page 201? Or could it have something to do with the fact that – on a whim – I had swapped the English translation of *Kar* for the Dutch one? If this was indeed the case, surely this change was not a result of Dutch being my native language? Obviously, I decided to put this to the test, and on the first page I compared I noticed several remarkable differences, of which the omission of a complete phrase presented below is just one example. The first version is a sentence taken from the 2004 translation by

Maureen Freely, the second version a rendering in English (my translation) of the 2003 Dutch translation by Margreet Dorleijn and Hanneke van der Heijden:

> 'Three gunshots sounded first over the radio frequency and then echoed outside the windows, albeit muffled by the snowy plain.'
>
> 'Three gunshots sounded through the walkie-talkie. A few seconds later the shots rang out once more, muffled by the snowy plain and Ka felt compelled to conclude that the pops sounded more beautiful when amplified by the walkie-talkie.'[1]

Not only had the incongruity of violence and beauty been erased in the English translation (assuming it was present in the original); with it, the opportunity had disappeared for a reader to quietly chuckle at the absurdity and flippancy of Ka's comment. For what kind of man thinks about the "beauty" of the sound of gunshots in the middle of political mayhem and social unrest? Although I did not have access to the Turkish original, and could therefore impossibly comment on the "quality" or "faithfulness" (however these terms are defined) of the respective translations, the numerous and considerable differences between them that I found on just a few pages sparked my interest: I started to wonder about the effect that translations may have on the way a character is portrayed or an idea is conveyed, rather than just on the aesthetics or understandability of a text. And while I was fully aware of the fact that I was reading a translation (or in fact two), my lack of command of the Turkish language meant that I would be unlikely to know what the degree of change involved in either.

It took almost a decade before I repeated the experiment, this time around with an English original and two Dutch translations. This meant that a difference in translational culture, if any, would be temporal rather than geographical. It also meant that I was sufficiently competent in both languages to make a comparison between the source text on the one hand, and the respective target texts on the other. The experiment was one I conducted out of curiosity about the way in which one of my former literary translation teachers at the *Vertalersvakschool* would have tackled a novel from almost a century ago that I remembered to be full

[1] The Dutch translation reads: 'Er klonken drie schoten over de portofoon. Een paar seconden later klonken de schoten opnieuw, gedempt door de besneeuwde vlakte en Ka moest concluderen dat het geknal mooier klonk als het door de portofoon versterkt werd.'

of male and female stereotypes. The differences between the 1947 and 2011 Dutch translations of D.H. Lawrence's 1920 novel *Women in Love* might have been somewhat less obvious than those in the English and Dutch translation of Pamuk's *Kar* (there were no instances of complete phrases being omitted in translation, for example) but they were no way less astonishing – perhaps even more so.

D.H. Lawrence, hardly a paragon of feminism (especially by today's standards), initially seems to portray his two female protagonists as modern and liberated women, although this "emancipated" image is rather flawed: female stereotypes still abound in this novel, and Lawrence makes his female characters submit to male dominance as the story progresses. Even so, the two sisters – a teacher and an artist – are presented to the reader on the first page as intelligent young women with a mind of their own. The image of emancipated young women, however, is altered to such a degree by the 1947 translator that there is little left of this impression – even before Lawrence himself wades in to put his female characters "in their place" in the original. Rather than 'sat.. talking', working on a 'piece of embroidery', and being 'taken aback' (Lawrence 1920, p. 5), the Dutch translator describes the women as 'chattering' ['*zaten… te babbelen*'], employs a diminutive form '*borduurwerkje*' (used to indicate that something is small, thus suggesting than they are engaged in a trivial activity), and turns a sense of surprise and shock into looking '*beteuterd*' [glum], a word in Dutch that one would say of a child rather than of an adult. These are just three of the instances that occur in the first ten sentences of *Liefde en Vrouwen* in which De Jonge, the 1947 Dutch translator reduces the women to girls who are not to be taken too seriously. In doing so, De Jong manages to make the text 'even more sexist than it already is', as one of my MA students remarked. The 2011 Dutch retranslation[2] by De Lange retains the characterization cues of the original: '*zaten… te praten*' and '*borduursel*' and '*verbouwereerd*'.

The above observations are just a small sample from a single novel, of course. Nevertheless, they beg several questions, one of which is: how large is the impact of a translator's choices on characterization? What are the implications of these choices on the perception of the reader? Even if it turns out that the impact of the translation choices is considerable, the sceptical response could be: does it really

[2] The definition of the term "retranslation" as used here is the one described in the *Handbook of Translation Studies*: "Retranslation (as a product) denotes a second or later translation of a single source text into the same target language" (Koskinen & Paloposki, 2010, p. 294).

matter if readers of a translation are presented with a text that differs from the original to a degree when it comes to literary works? The answer arrived at through the present research would be a resounding 'Yes'. When the differences in the way that female characters are portrayed in translation pave the way to enhancing negative stereotypes, it matters a great deal. The same applies to racial stereotypes being amplified in translation. Of course, sexism and racism are vastly different in many respects. Nevertheless, these two types of discrimination have something in common in that they both involve bias and stereotyping, and that a distinction can often be made between overt and covert discrimination and between conscious and unconscious bias. This thesis aims to address covert sexism and racism in the (re)translations of literary classics as a result of unconscious biases on the part of the translators, which in turn may result in the perpetuation of gender and racial prejudices in the readers of their translations.

## 1.2 Research gap and aim of the thesis

Up until fairly recently, retranslation was an under-researched area in Translation Studies (Deane Cox, 2014; Van Poucke, 2017). The term "retranslation" can refer to "indirect" translation, meaning the translation of a translation (Gambier, 1994), or to a second or later translation of a single source text into the same target language (Koskinen & Paloposki, 2010), as well as to the process of producing such translations. The object of study in this thesis comprises retranslations in the sense of second translations, in accordance with Koskinen and Paloposki definition of "retranslation".

While over the last decade translation scholars have published a great deal on the topic of retranslation, studies have largely focused on the motives for and contexts of the commissioning of retranslations (Vanderschelden 2000, Collombat 2004, Tahir Gürçağlar 2019, Saeedi 2020), and the linguistic or cultural reasons behind individual translation choices (Van Poucke, 2017). Serious efforts are made by scholars to bring together the various strands that form the complex web of issues related to retranslations, e.g. the studies conducted into the relation between retranslation and reception (Tahir Gürçağlar, 2020; Cadera & Walsh, 2022). Much of this more recent research centres around 'the relationship between the appearance of new translations and historical, social or cultural changes' (Cadera & Walsh, 2022), and investigates the way in which 'retranslations are

a part of social change and shifting (self)images of source and target cultures' (Tahir Gürçağlar, 2020). These studies provide extremely valuable insights. Yet there are many facets of the interface between retranslation and reception still to be explored. Alvstad and Assis Rosa, for instance, have commented on the surprising lack of research that combines the topics of retranslation and voice (which includes subjective translation choices), expressing the widely-shared belief that 'the multiple retranslations of a source text into the same target language constitute a privileged corpus to help uncover both broad contextual motivations… and also help analyse both textual and contextual voices' (Alvstad & Assis Rosa, 2015). Many scholars (e.g. Alvstad & Rosa, 2015; Hewson, 1995, Greenall et all, 2019; Monti, 2024) agree on the fact that studying retranslations can provide valuable insights into 'the traces that the translator leaves in their text' (Skibińska, 2010, translation mine).

Starting from the premise that retranslation research indeed 'helps reveal clues about the subjectivity of the translators' (Widman, 2019), this thesis' goal is to identify and analyze the translation decisions that can be attributed to the translator, i.e. the "translator's voice"[3]. This thesis posits that the combined topics of retranslations and the translator's voice have yet to receive the attention it deserves. In particular, the potential impact of subjective and individual translation choices on the average reader has been under-researched. Some scholars do mention the effects of translation choices, such as Kelly in her study on the ideological implications on 'stereotypes existing in the target culture regarding the source culture' (Kelly, 1998); nevertheless, comprehensive studies into the impact of translation choices, especially on the average reader, have been few and far between (Hickey 2003, Alvstad & Assis Rosa, 2015). The majority of research so far has been limited to "professional" readers (i.e. translation and literary scholars and critics), rather than "lay" readers or "real" readers, as they are often referred to (Assis Rosa 2006). Only a few years ago, Chan argued that 'critical evaluation of translated works remains only one mode of reading' (Chan 2016). Specifically (as far as I am aware), no extensive research has been done regarding the effects of translation choices on characterization or negative female and racial stereotyping, let alone into those effects on lay readers. All of the above certainly applies to (re) translations into Dutch.

[3] The concept of "voice" will be further discussed in section 1.4 of this chapter.

This thesis aims to fill the research gaps mentioned above – the lack of retranslation research into the potential impact of the translator's voice, in particular on negative stereotypes, and the lack of reception studies involving "real" readers – by taking a twofold approach: it will address the lack of studies on the consequences or effects of (re)translations noted by translation scholars (Alvstad and Assis Rosa 2015), while at the same time responding to the recent appeal to conduct more reception research (Cadera and Walsh 2017, Di Giovanni and Gambier 2018, Tahir Gürçağlar 2020, Cadera and Walsh 2022), 'since it seems to entail a different reception than "regular" translations.' (Monti 2024).

This thesis' main aim is to research the impact of translation decisions on gender and racial stereotyping. Its primary focus, therefore, is not on the reasons behind the translators' decisions, nor on the background of the translators or on the socio-historical context of the originals, translations and retranslations. Having said this, the fourth case study (chapter 5) does include a hypothesis that relates to the rationale behind the translation approach adopted in the retranslation. However, as is the case for the other studies, the main goal of this chapter, too, is to highlight the *effect* of the translation choices on the text and the potential *impact* on the reader of the translation in terms of negative stereotyping. Nevertheless, several extratextual aspects will be touched on briefly in section 1.3 of this introductory chapter, and in more detail in the following chapters, where relevant and insofar as the scope of the present research allows.

This thesis explores the potential ideological implications of translation choices – which in themselves are not necessarily ideological and not even necessarily conscious – and the way they may affect readers' perceptions. It focuses on the way women and Black Americans are portrayed in literary works (fiction and non-fiction) and in the (re)translations of these works, comparing the linguistic cues related to women or Black Americans in the source text (the original) to their translation in the target texts (the translation and the retranslation). The research concentrates on the role of the translators, and the question whether or not their translations show signs of increased gender or race stereotyping. It will also attempt to shed light on the extent to which actual readers' ideas about gender and race may be influenced as a result of translation choices. As pointed out above, this thesis in no way wishes to suggest that sexism and racism can be equated. Nor does it aim to be intersectional in its approach. There is, however, a common denominator that connects the following four chapters: negative stereotyping.

The claim made in these chapters is that the Dutch translations enhance negative stereotypes already present in the original, or even add negative stereotypes that were not present in the original. This thesis posits that the gender and racial prejudices displayed in the Dutch (re)translations are enhanced or brought about by decisions on the part of the translators, contending that these decisions may result from unconscious bias rather than being ideological.

In addition to contributing to the various areas of Translation Studies mentioned above, my aspiration is to bring greater attention to the power that translators have. I hope to highlight the importance of a general awareness of this power, and of the impact translators' own – unconscious – biases may have on characterization in fiction and the portrayal of groups in society, and thus potentially on the way that readers perceive women and people of colour[4], thus perpetuating female and racial stereotypes. Of course, each individual owes it to themselves and their fellow human beings to try and use their own moral compass. As to translational agents, the editors of a special issue for a Translation Studies journal on voice and ethics point out the ethic accountability of all participants engaged in translation (Greenall et all 2017). Though not involved in the translation and publication of texts, readers have a responsibility, too: to reflect on what they read, and to be aware and critical of their own interpretation of a text. Whatever the text type or genre, translators have a special responsibility. As literary translator and academic Gregory Rabassa once aptly put it: "A translator is essentially a reader and we all read differently, except that a translator's reading remains in unchanging print." (Rabassa 2005).

The following chapters comprise four case studies comparing two American canonical works and their Dutch initial translations and retranslations: *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin. I have chosen these American classics – which differ widely in terms of genre, style, readership and date of publication – for several reasons. First, both source texts have been translated into Dutch more than once. The fact that *The Great*

[4] I am using the term "people of colour" here as a collective term, and for want of a better one, despite valid concerns and criticisms that it may be too broad (erasing differences among specific groups). The preference for "people of colo(u)r" (both with and without capitals) when used to refer to different groups of historically marginalized people (at the moment of writing, at least) is discussed by scholars working in various academic disciplines such as Vidal-Ortiz in the Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Society. Throughout this thesis I will be using 'Black person', 'Black people' or 'Black American', depending on the context.

*Gatsby* and *The Fire Next Time* have been translated into Dutch twice will allow me to better identify the discursive presence of the individual translators. Second, they are still frequently read in both the source and target language – something that their retranslations and new editions attest to. Third, the originals include important identity markers (gender and race, respectively) that often involve stereotyping: *The Great Gatsby* contains female stereotypes as it deals with "The New Woman", a term that refers to women in the US in the nineteen twenties who challenged gender norms in the US (Fryer 1989), while *The Fire Next Time* is regarded as one of the most eloquent works of literary non-fiction to address negative white-on-black stereotypes in the US in the nineteen sixties. Given the interval between the publication of the first and second Dutch translations of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Fire Next Time* (four and six decades, respectively), the fact that Dutch society has evolved might make for an interesting glimpse into changes – if any – in the way female characters and Black Americans are portrayed in translation. A concise justification of the primary materials will be provided in section 1.6 below.

I am well aware that a handful of case studies on subjective choices made by merely four individual translators are by no means representative of general sentiments and attitudes in society as a whole. I am also aware that the observations made and conclusions drawn are those of a single person, and that I undoubtedly have my own unconscious biases. The studies conducted, however, will hopefully help to promote further insight into the workings of unconscious bias and its damaging effects on people. In addition to providing background on the source and target texts (section 1.3) and a discussion of ethics and translator subjectivity (section 1.4), this introductory chapter will briefly outline the issue of unconscious bias as well as the potential consequences of such bias on readers of translations (section 1.5), which pertain to the research gap this thesis aims to address (section 1.6).

## 1.3 Positioning the source and target texts

Even though this thesis focuses on the textual rather than the paratextual and contextual aspects of the retranslations of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Fire Next Time*, the following section will discuss the status of the source text and the target texts – a status evidenced by the fact that these texts apparently were deemed

worthy of being translated more than once. In addition to defining the two related terms "classic" and "canon", it will explain the importance and implications of these labels for the readers' expectations and perceptions as well as for the translators' decisions (section 1.3.1). After a short overview of the status and reception of the originals, the status of the original authors and the reception of the Dutch (re)translations (section 1.3.2), this section will provide some information on the Dutch translators (section 1.3.3). All three subsections aim to contribute to a more complete picture of the reception of the source texts and target texts. What these subsections explicitly do *not* aim to do is to provide the socio-historical setting of the originals or the socio-historical background of the translations and retranslations. Obviously, this contextual information is important, in particular where societal views regarding racism and sexism are concerned. However, this type of information has been included in the individual case studies in chapters 2 to 5, and the scope of this thesis does not allow for discussion of these issues in further detail. Moreover (as mentioned earlier), the focus of this thesis is expressly on the textual aspects of the source and target texts, that is, on the explicit and implicit linguistic cues used to portray the main female character in *The Great Gatsby* and Black Americans in *The Fire Next Time*. The decision to do so is the presumption that these cues will provide valuable clues regarding the effect of translation decisions, as will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

### *1.3.1 Great or greatest? Readers' expectations and perceptions*

The reason why it is necessary to briefly touch upon the issue of status is that the stature and reputation of a literary work affects not just the decisions of publishers to commission its retranslation, but that these may also affect translator behaviour, and quite possibly readers' perceptions or expectations as well, as Ziemann's study into extratextual factors shaping preconceptions about retranslation confirms (Zieman, 2019). According to Berk Albachten and Tahir Gürçağlar, Ziemann's study shows 'how extratextual factors and contextual information overshadow textual factors and determine the perception/reception of the retranslations' (Berk Albachten and Tahir Gürçağlar, 2019). It can therefore be safely assumed that the bar for the quality of retranslations is set high from the start: lay readers expecting to read a great work of literature by a famous author expect the translation to provide them with a similar reading experience, while professional readers such

as book critics might be comparing the retranslation to a previous translation. Translators are aware of these expectations and may treat retranslations differently than first translations (Schroth, 2014). Monti dubs producing retranslations as a 'typically self-conscious activity' (Monti, 2024), and this self-consciousness will probably be intensified by the idea that the stakes are higher when translating a literary work that has a high status in both the source and target culture, being labelled "a classic" or as "part of the canon". In a personal interview, the translator of the Dutch retranslation of *The Great Gatsby*, Susan Janssen mentioned that she was very much aware that she was asked to translate "a classic" (Janssen 2020, personal interview).

So what exactly *is* "a classic"? The terms "canonical" and "classic" are frequently used interchangeably. Although the two are related and sometimes overlap, they do not denote the same. Over the years, numerous writers and literary critics (Calvino, 1991; Coetzee, 2001; Bloom, 1996, 2000) have tried to both define the term "classics" and to describe which works are worthy of being included in "the canon". A fair few have been criticized for their American/European-centred approach, for their narrow interpretation of "Western" and for their failure to acknowledge the value – literary or otherwise – of authors as a result of their identity, as Malik observes in his obituary of one of the most prominent and influential writers of what the literary canon entails:

It's true that we should not value a work simply because of the identity of the author and that too much literary judgment today is rooted in the politics of identity. But neither should we be blind to the fact that many black, female and non-western writers have long been disregarded, refused entry to the canon precisely because of their identity. It's not for literary reasons that the likes of Rabindranath Tagore, Lu Xun or Zora Neale Hurston are neglected but because social and political considerations already shape judgment. (Malik, 2019).

Whatever the purpose of establishing a set of literary works deemed to be of importance to readers, 'canonizing acts as a kind of display, a showcasing of works that is meant to enhance and potentially control their reception by magnifying their significance.' (Ross, 2019). Moreover, while canonicity may influence readers' perception of a literary work, it does not define the intrinsic value of that work (nor, for that matter, does it necessarily determine a work's popularity). Ross clarifies the distinction between the idea of a work being canonical and a work being called a classic in a refreshingly down-to-earth manner:

Hailing it as a classic commonly prefaces an account of its value, while calling it canonical may be no more than saying that others have already agreed on its value, whether we concur with this agreement or not. (Ross, 2019, p. 9).

Furthermore, whereas the criteria for inclusion in a literary canon are a matter that many disagree on (literary professionals and the general reader alike), there seems to be more of a consensus on the definition of "a classic", even if (perhaps seemingly paradoxically) such criteria may vary over time. Classics may be defined as works that were both groundbreaking at the time they were written and offer food for thought for present-day readers because they have a story to tell that speaks to something universal, because they challenge how you can see the world.

### *1.3.2 Status and reception of The Great Gatsby and The Fire Next Time*

With Dutch translations constituting such a small market for booksellers – and retranslations thus being a relatively uncommon phenomenon – one might argue that when a decision is made to commission a Dutch retranslation of a literary work, it may truly be regarded as "a classic", even if being labelled as such does not necessarily guarantee a place in the Dutch canon.

*The Great Gatsby*'s journey was one of extremes, from a lacklustre reception when the book first came out to being hailed as "The Great American Novel". During his lifetime, Scott Fitzgerald was better known for his short stories, which he sold to magazines, than for the novel that made him one of the most famous twentieth century authors after the Second World War. His posthumous glory was largely owed to Edmund Wilson, one of the most influential literary critics in the US at the time, who edited and published a collection of Scott Fitzgerald's essays in 1945, and thus rekindled the interest in his other work. Another major factor that played a part in its popularity is the fact that an "Armed Services Edition" of *The Great Gatsby* was sent to American soldiers during the Second World War. Given its present status, it is hard to believe that a novel of such fame and stature as *The Great Gatsby* had such a slow start.

The renewed interest in Scott Fitzgerald's novels in the US, which prompted plans for a Hollywood production of *The Great Gatsby* that eventually came to the screen in 1949, was no doubt a factor in the decision by the Amsterdam-based publishing company *Van Oorschot* to commission the first Dutch translation in

1948. The other factor that led to the decision to publish a translation into Dutch was likely to be the increase of interest in American literature in the Netherlands caused by the changed world order after the Second World War. So how did *De grote Gatsby* fare after its publication in 1948? According to an entry in the Digital Library of Dutch Literature (*DBNL*), it is likely that Scott Fitzgerald's novel did not turn out to be an instant hit with Dutch readers either, at least not commercially: publishing company *Van Oorschot* decided not to keep the file in the archives, and the second edition of the translation – not even published by them but by *Contact* – did not come out until 1968.

The motley crew of literary reviews following the 1948 publication ranges from a rather lukewarm reception in a contemporary daily newspaper, which describes *The Great Gatsby* as 'a clever novel, not world-class' and 'not more than an ordinary novel with a remarkable structure, and a very well told story' (*De Tijd* 1948, translation mine) to being hailed as 'great literature' by a Dutch literary magazine (*Ad Interim* 1948), and even a 'warning' concerning the perceived 'decadence' of the novel (*Nieuwsblad van het Zuiden* 1948, translations mine). And while the judgment of Dutch novelist, poet and literary critic Vestdijk can be called benign at best (Vestdijk, 1948), the heading in the book section of one of the largest Dutch daily newspapers suggests that in literary terms it is a resounding success: a year after its publication *De Telegraaf* commends Scott Fitzgerald's work as a magnificent novel and declares *De grote Gatsby* to be 'a surprise in the desert of translations' (*De Telegraaf* 1949, translation mine). The fact that Cornils' translation, despite its initial lack of commercial success, was reprinted a number of times over the decades that followed, and a flurry of reviews in the nineteen seventies[5] both show that *The Great Gatsby* was recognized in the Netherlands as an important novel – enough to warrant a retranslation. This retranslation, made by Susan Janssen and published by *Atlas Contact* (Imprint *L.J. Veen Klassiek*), came out in 1985. It was well received in the press, and a revised edition was commissioned in 1999 by *Atlas Contact* (Imprint *L.J. Veen Klassiek*). The retranslation is into its 15th edition (2025).

[5] These reviews may have been triggered by the launch of the Hollywood production featuring Robert Redford and Mia Farrow in 1974. Pictures of this film are printed on the cover (both front and back) of the fifth reprint of Cornils' 1948 translation that came out in the same year. The film is also mentioned on the cover flap, quoting Wim Verstappen, a Dutch film director and producer, television director, and screenwriter, who despite being full of praise for the film concludes his review for *Vrij Nederland* by saying that he prefers the novel itself. The 2013 Baz Luhrmann film appears on the book covers of later editions of the revised version of the retranslation.

The interval between the publication of the two Dutch translations (1948 and 1985, respectively, both called *De grote Gatsby*) may be seen as representing an exemplary reflection of the maxim that every generation needs a new translation, and might invite the question if a new retranslation is needed for contemporary readers. The answer to that question depends, of course, on the novel's status in the receiving language and culture and whether or not a publisher thinks a new translation will be commercially viable. Both aspects are inextricably linked to a broader socio-historical context: is the literary work relevant to contemporary readers? In other words, what counts as "a classic" is far more fluid than what the word itself seems to suggest.

As for *The Fire Next Time*, this work of literary non-fiction sparked Baldwin's fame both in the US and abroad simultaneously, as many scholars have noted (Leeming 1995, Verdickt 2022). Baldwin's rising repute as an imminent writer and intellectual probably accounted for the "hot" (i.e. immediate) translation of the two essays into Dutch. In fact, in 1963 no fewer than three translations of Baldwin's prose appeared in the Netherlands: *The Fire Next Time, Another Country* and *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, all published by the same publishing company (*A.W. Bruna Uitgevers*), two of which were retranslated, in 2018 (*The Fire Next Time*) and 2019 (*Go Tell it on the Mountain*) respectively, both by another publishing house (*Uitgeverij De Geus*), who also brought out a new Dutch translation of *If Beale Street Could Talk* in 2018.

The reception of *The Fire Next Time* in the US seems to have paved the way for the translation of Timmers' translations (*Niet door water maar door vuur* and *Een ander land*) in the Netherlands, and of other Dutch translations of earlier works by Baldwin in a very short span of time: a first Dutch translation of *Go tell it on the Mountain* appeared in 1963 and *Notes of a Native Son* in 1964, both more or less a decade after their publication in the US, and *The Amen Corner* was performed in The Hague in June 1965 (in English, by Black actors) – all of which may serve an indication of Baldwin being recognized in the Netherlands as a writer and thinker of note. A regional daily broadsheet writes about him as 'a talented black author' (*Leeuwarder Courant*, translation mine), and one of the reviews in a national quality newspaper explicitly refers to the fact that *The Fire Next Time* appeared in *The New Yorker* highlighting its reputation as a respected and leading current affairs and literary magazine. The latter Dutch daily newspaper encourages anyone interested in racial issues to read Baldwin's 'brilliant, erudite analysis' (*Trouw*, translation mine).

A similar wave of interest can be observed more recently: in just seven years, no fewer than five of Baldwin's works were retranslated. New Dutch translations were made of *The Fire Next Time* and *If Beale Street Could Talk* in 2018 (both by Harm Damsma), followed by a retranslation of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* in 2019 (by Reintje Ghoos and Jan Pieter van der Sterre). Dutch retranslations (by Eefje Bosch and Manik Sarkar) of *Notes of a Native Son* and *Giovanni's Room* were published in 2024. All five retranslations were issued by *De Geus*, a publishing house that makes a point of giving translators the credit they deserve by not just mentioning them on the imprint page, but on the title page and cover as well.

Although Damsma is mentioned on the back of the cover of *Niet door water maar door vuur* (the retranslation of *The Fire Next Time*), reviewers in the Dutch media comment on the relevance and the literary value of Baldwin's writing, but not on the translation as such. The same was the case for Timmers' earlier translation: no comments or observations are to be found in any of the reviews archived in *Delpher*, the digital collection of newspapers, magazines and books management by the National Library of the Netherlands. The frequent absence of any discussion or more than a few cursory comments on the quality of a translation might be typical not just of literary reviews, at least in the Netherlands.[6] In a recent essay on the question of the need to recognize the art of translators without them necessarily being "visible" in the translated work, Translation Studies scholar Francis Mus discusses how most of the time translators remain fairly anonymous. The fact that they are more or less confined to the background is, however, not only a result of being ignored by reviewers failing to discuss their role, (the quality of) their work or even mentioning their name, nor just by publishers who do not give them a platform for their views in a foreword or afterword. Even when translators are given the opportunity to do so, it appears that they seldom take the chance to explain their interpretation of the original, the translation issues arising from differences in the source and target languages and cultures, and their translation decisions. Instead, they often 'cloak themselves in the guise of readers, critics, exegetist, literature specialists or spokespersons of the original author, before finally bringing up the actual translation, not seldom in the form of a "justification"' (Mus, 2024). This observation is largely confirmed by the translations and retranslations researched in the following chapters. The only

[6] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to comment on the phenomenon in other countries.

translation that comes with an afterword by the translator is the 2018 retranslation of *The Fire Next Time*, but Damsma's afterword indeed serves as a justification – and a very particular one at that: Damsma wrote his afterword to explain the difference in opinion between himself and the publisher on the use of the Dutch N-word in the retranslation. Since the nature of the dispute is inextricably linked to the topic of the close-reading study included in this research, it will be elaborated on in chapter 4. In the following section, I will include the scant information available regarding the four translators whose work features in this thesis: Cornils, Janssen, Timmers and Damsma.

### *1.3.3 The invisible ones*

One of the names that appears on the copyright page of the first Dutch translation of *The Great Gatsby* is "L. Cornils". The absence of the translator's first name – together with the lack of archival information on the translation itself – makes the identity of this translator hard to trace.[7] Cornils' "invisibility"[8] may be telling both about the position of translators in the Netherlands in general and the initial reception of the 1948 translation of *The Great Gatsby*. None of the newspaper reviews mentions a first name, and only one of the critics comments on the translator's ability to convey the 'playful, unexpected style' (*De Telegraaf* 1948, translation mine). It is only through a *DBNL* entry on Albert Helman, a Dutch-Surinamese author, journalist, translator, composer, resistance fighter and politician, that the translator's identity comes to light: Lily Cornils, or Elise Wilhelmine Cornils (1907-1962), a German sculptress who naturalized as a Dutch citizen when she and Helman married in 1939 (Van Kempen 2002). Cornils met Helman (a pseudonym for Lou Lichtveld) in Spain in 1932, where she had moved feeling she could no longer stay in Hamburg with nazi-sympathizing father, and where Helman had moved with his first spouse in order to fight against Franco's fascists in the Spanish Civil War. Helman was a cosmopolitan and Renaissance man, who had many contacts with artists, writers and publishers (Leuwsha 2017).

[7] No-one at the two publishing companies who published Cornils' translation (*Van Oorschot* and *Contact* respectively) knew anything about Cornils – not even her first name. (Personal correspondence with the publishers and with Herbert Binneweg, the cover designer for the 4th edition published by *Contact* in 1974).

[8] It should be noted that here I use the term "invisibility" to refer to the varying degrees of anonymity of literary translators, about whose work nothing or very little is mentioned in media outlets. The term "invisibility" as used in the discipline of Translation Studies will be discussed in section 1.4 below.

It may well be through these contacts that Cornils was asked to translate *The Great Gatsby*, although this remains pure conjecture, as no paratextual information whatsoever is to be found regarding Cornils' translation – not even in the letters she wrote to Nico Donkersloot (a Dutch poet, writer, translator and politician), which are kept in the archives of the Museum of Literature in The Hague and cover a number of years before and during the Second World War. There is a remarkable aspect to the correspondence (in that Cornils writes in German, whereas Donkersloot's replies are in Dutch), but no information can be gleaned that relates to translation. Was her translation of *The Great Gatsby* a one-off or did Cornils translate other texts (into Dutch or into German)? There is simply no telling either way.

The 1985 Dutch retranslation of *The Great Gatsby* was made by Susan Janssen. Janssen's credentials as a translator are much more transparent than those of her predecessor. In addition to her work as an archivist at the Amsterdam broadcasting company AT5 and several publications in literary magazines, she translated novels, memoirs and short stories – primarily by American authors. The novelists and poets whose work she translated in the nineteen seventies and eighties include Charles Bukowski, Diane Di Prima, William Levy (Janssen's late husband), Somerset Maugham, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Joseph Mitchell. When she was asked to translate *The Great Gatsby*, she accepted on the condition that the publisher would allow her to research Scott Fitzgerald's life and writings. The retranslation had many reprints and a new edition was commissioned in 1995, both facts being evidence of its positive reception. And although the fact that in the Netherlands the status of translators is such that their work often remains unacknowledged in reviews, a four-star appraisal from a large literary blog (*Alles over boeken en schrijvers*) and a ringing endorsement from the largest readers' platform in the Netherlands and Flanders says a great deal about the reception of Janssen's retranslation: 'By the way, kudos to the translator, Susan Janssen, who does real justice to the atmosphere of the story and its tone of voice throughout the translation' (*Hebban*, translation mine).

The identity of the translator who made the first Dutch translation of *The Fire Next Time* is easy to find as well: Oscar Timmers, a writer (publishing under the pseudonym J. Ritzerfeld), a translator of English and German prose, and an editor for *Bezige Bij* publishers. However, precious little can be found regarding Timmers' work as a translator, even though he was just as prolific in this profession as he was

as an author in his own right. Besides *The Fire Next Time* and *Another Country*, he translated no fewer than seven other literary works in 1963 alone. Timmers translated three quarters of the literary oeuvre by Jerzy Kosinski, which, judging from an interview with that author, was not merely down to a decision by his publisher. Timmers was present at an interview with Kosinski in Amsterdam after the presentation of the Dutch edition of his latest novel at the author's explicit request. The interviewer, Ischa Meijer was a Dutch journalist who was to become well-known for his in-depth interviews, awarded Timmers with the following accolade: 'he is the sublime translator of *Steps*, *Being There* and *The Devil Tree*' (Meijer, 1973, translation mine) – high praise indeed from Meijer, who was both famous and feared as an interviewer. And how many translators receive laurels for their work like these: 'To Oscar Timmers, who knows how language undresses us all, the Author dedicates the Dutch edition of this novel'? (Kosinski, quoted in Meijer, 1973).

While Damsma is surely as well-respected a translator as Timmers was in his day, his 2018 Dutch retranslation of *The Fire Next Time* caused a huge controversy (albeit only in a small circle) regarding Damsma's decision to use the N-word in his translation. Damsa felt compelled to write an afterword – a rare phenomenon in the Netherlands, as already mentioned earlier. (Translator's forewords and translator's notes, frequently included in retranslation in other languages, are few and far between in Dutch as well.) Damsma wrote his afterword as a justification for his decision to use the N-word and the Dutch word for "white person" that is gradually becoming outdated, following the publisher's decision to replace the disrespectful and objectionable words with alternatives that are broadly regarded as non-offensive and which are increasingly used in contemporary Dutch. In his afterword, Damsma explained why – even though he respected the publisher's considerations – he regretted that the two offending words had been replaced. Since this issue will be discussed extensively in chapter 4, the only two matters to be pointed out in this introductory section on the translator are the fact that, first of all, an afterword only appears in *Niet door water maar door vuur* (and not in the retranslation of *If Beale Street Could Talk* by the same translator, which came out in the same year) and that secondly, views diverge on the rights or wrongs of wishing to use two contentious words in *Niet door water maar door vuur*. The retranslation of *The Fire Next Time*, meanwhile, has already been reprinted several times over the past few years and has received positive reviews, notwithstanding the difference of opinion between translator and publisher, and whatever other people's views on the matter. As for the

latter, readers (critics and "lay" readers alike) were divided into two camps, some taking the side of the translator, some that of the publisher. The rationale put forward by the publisher, in that they aimed 'to do justice to the author in the language used in contemporary Dutch society, taking the principle of inclusiveness as a point of departure'[9] and the criticism Damsma received from a number of "professional" and "lay" readers, appears to tally with the observation that '… the passage of time may not necessarily "age" translations… but transforms audiences and producers, creating new segments of readers and new translational needs' (Berk Albachten & Tahir Gürçağlar, 2019). The debate regarding the use of the N-word in the Dutch retranslation of *The Fire Next Time* touches on the issues of ideology, "voice" and ethics in translation, notions that will be outlined in the following section (1.4) and which also apply to the other translations discussed in this thesis.

## 1.4 Ideology, ethics and voice in translation

The notion that readers of literary works may well be unaware of the influence of translators and publishers on the texts they read is one that has been widely discussed in the field of Translation and Interpreting Studies (Lefevere, 1992; Hermans, 1996; Venuti, 1995). The idea that the translator of a text more often than not remains "invisible" to the reader of a translation is perhaps even one of the most cliched adages in Translation Studies. The notion of the "invisibility of the translator" was popularized by Venuti, who argues that translators – at least in dominant cultures – tend to adopt a so-called "domesticating" translation strategy, erasing 'linguistic and stylistic peculiarities' of source texts in order to generate idiomatic, 'readable' translations that appear to reflect the original, resulting in 'an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving cultural values' (Venuti, 1995/2018). Venuti argues that these practices are the result of asymmetrical power relations and therefore favours "foreignizing" translations that allow their readers to be aware of the cultural and linguistic differences between a translation and its original.[10] His call to resist cultural hegemony and ethnocentricity clearly point to his view of translation as an ideological instrument.

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[9] James Baldwin, *Niet door water maar door vuur*, trans. H. Damsma (Amsterdam: De Geus, 2018), credits page (my translation).

[10] Although an influential voice in Translation Studies, Venuti has received a fair deal of criticism. While some have pointed out a lack of clear definitions, others have criticized his claim that a foreignizing approach is always the preferred approach (Gentzler and Tymoczko, 2002; Myskja, 2013).

Venuti's views on power relations, ethics and ideology in translation as presented in his influential work *The Translator's Invisibility* were part of the broader debate in the discipline of Translation Studies known as the "Cultural Turn". Representatives of the Cultural Turn emphasized the importance of placing translation in a wider context and of considering texts and translators in their socio-cultural environment. This development in Translation Studies came in the wake of research by representatives of the so-called Manipulation School, which owed its name to their assertion that 'from the point of view of the target literature all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose' (Hermans, 1985, p. 11). Many of the translation scholars associated with the Manipulation School (Bassnett, van den Broeck, Hermans, Tymoczko amongst others) were also proponents of the Cultural Turn. These translation scholars 'began to explore issues of power and translation' (Gentzler and Tymoczko, 2002, p. xiii), primarily in literary translation. They argued that 'translation is a rewriting of an original text' (Bassnett & Lefevere, 2004, p. vii) and that 'all rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way', whereby it should be noted that contrary to the usual connotations of the concept "manipulation" in the context of translation as a form of rewriting is expressly defined as potentially positive as well. In other words, "manipulation" is not necessarily an underhanded, objectionable act, resulting in the corruption and distortion of the source text brought about by deliberately misrendering its meaning and form, but simply a translation practice creating a representation of a source text that suits – as Hermans would describe it – 'a certain purpose'. This 'purpose' might simply involve the adoption of a translation strategy that caters to a particular target readership without ideology[11] necessarily playing a role. Nevertheless, translation may also be an instrument used to promote a particular world view through patronage (Lefevere, 2000). According to Gentzler and Tymoczko, the scholars of the Manipulation School 'demonstrated that translations were… one of the primary literary tools that larger social institutions – educational systems, arts councils, publishing firms, and even governments – had at their disposal to "manipulate" a given society in order to "construct" the kind of "culture" desired' (Gentzler and Tymoczko 2002, p. xiii).

[11] Lefevere defines ideology as "the conceptual grid that consists of opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time, and through which readers and translators approach text" (qtd. from Hermans, 2004, p. 127).

There is unquestionably a great deal of truth to the assertions that translation is a form of rewriting and that power dynamics play a role in translation. Bassnett and Lefevere's claim that 'rewriting is manipulation *undertaken in the service of power*' (Bassnett and Lefevere, 2004, p. vii, italics mine), however, ought perhaps not be accepted lock, stock and barrel, as this maxim suggests that those involved in translation are by definition ideologically motivated. Not only that, it implies intentionality as well. The fact that social institutions are in a position to use translations 'for their own purposes pertaining to ideology and cultural power' (Tymoczko & Gentzler, 2002) does not mean that they do so automatically. Certainly, the institutions mentioned by Gentzler and Tymoczko may play a role in what gets published and how, and their influence also extends to literary translations, in particular to retranslations of literary works: commissioning and publishing a second or later translation of the same source text constitutes a deliberate choice to produce a "rewriting", as can be concluded from the concise overview of motives for retranslation in the *Encyclopedia of Translation & Interpreting* (Monti, 2024). In her seminal article "The 21st Century: The Age of Retranslation", Collombat, too, explicitly mentions ideology as a factor that plays a role in the decisions to retranslate literary works, identifying changes in socio-political context as 'catalysers of ageing of a translation' (Collombat, 2004)[12]. According to Deane-Cox, 'Venuti frames retranslation as a purposeful act of differentiation which seeks to (re)inscribe particular cultural, religious, economic and so on values into a selected work' (Deane-Cox, 2014, p. 13). Naturally, translators, too, are part of this practice of "rewriting". This thesis does not deny the importance of ideology, nor does it dispute the influence of society on translators, the circumstances and conditions in which they work, and their own socio-cultural background. After all, 'translation is not made in a vacuum' (Bassnett & Lefevere, 2001, p. 14). Rather, it chooses to focus on what has become known as the translator's "voice", otherwise known as the "translator's discursive presence".

The term "voice" has been used in various ways within the discipline of Translation Studies (Venuti 1995, Schiavi 1996, Hermans 1996). In their seminal article 'Voice in Retranslation', Alvstad and Assis Rosa provide a clear and concise explanation of the different "voices" involved in translation:

[12] Unsurprisingly, the studies by Benhamou and Lavoie that Collombat quotes to illustrate her point are on retranslations of literary classics featuring Black main characters.

> Within Translation Studies it is relevant to distinguish between two main types of voice: textual voices and contextual voices. Textual voices are part of the product (narrative voice, the voices of characters and the translator's textually manifested voice), whereas contextual voices are related to the sociological translation process and hence to the multiple agents that produce, promote and write about translations. The contextual voices too are generally textually expressed, but they are labelled 'contextual' as they arise in the context around the translated text, and not as part of the translated text in its strictest sense. (Alvstad & Assis Rosa 2015)

This research focuses on what Alvstad & Assis Rosa refer to as 'the translator's textually manifested voice' (ibid.) and on the perception of readers, in particular the (re)translations themselves, although paratextual information and contextual voices included where relevant and available. It starts from the basic premise that translations are just as much shaped by the subjectivity of the translators – perhaps even more so – than by extratextual causes, and that "[a]ll literary translation in an act of interpretation which crystallizes a series of (un)conscious (mis)readings of a given source text" (Deane-Cox, 2014, p. 18). The translator's subjectivity is reflected in their translation choices, some of which – but certainly not all – will be conscious decisions. This thesis aims to show that a translator's subjectivity is not always a matter of intentionality, but that translation choices are frequently a result of unconscious bias. Whether conscious or unconscious, the translator's voice is a powerful one, especially given what Alvstad calls the 'translation pact', that is 'a rhetorical construction through which readers are invited to read translated texts as if they were the originals' (Alvstad 2014). In that sense, it could be argued that the translator is "invisible" no matter what their translation strategy. What is more, this "pact" implies a kind of "willing suspension of disbelief" on the part of the readers, encouraging them to rely on the translator to convey the original author's intention, or as Jansen puts it: 'The pact invites readers to "trust" the translation, promising that the translator has not tampered with the original and that the translation indeed "provides a true account of the foreign text"' (Jansen, 2019, quoting Alvstad, 2014, p. 275). Over the years, literary translators have started to become more assertive, appealing to publishers that they be mentioned on the cover of the translation. Literary translators not only wish to be given credit for what they do, some of them also question the desirability of the translation

pact, arguing that the practice is 'disrespectful not only to us, but to readers as well' (Croft, 2021) and that 'it doesn't hold us accountable for our choices'. Such views underline that the various forms of the translator's invisibility cannot be seen as separate from the translator's ethical responsibility and from the perception of readers.

As for the "voice" in retranslations: new translations are pre-eminently useful for determining the influence of translators' subjectivities, simply because they allow for a comparison of individual and unique translation choices with earlier translations – choices that are part of 'the translator's textually manifested voice' (Alvstad and Assis Rosa, 2015). According to Monti

> Retranslation… is the perfect place for the emergence and analysis of translators' subjectivity (Skibińska, 1994; Alvstad & Rosa, 2015). Retranslations are more rarely invisible, and their added visibility – as opposed to most "regular" translations – stems from their own status: doing something anew (against common sense) ends up drawing attention to the normally neglected aspect of translation. (Monti, 2024)

Conducting individual case studies of retranslations and applying the method of careful and scrutinous interpretation of texts, enables one to distinguish the "voice" of the translator, to determine to what degree their choices are subjective and hence to uncover the potential impact of these translation choices. Each of the studies included in this thesis aims to highlight the subjectivities of the Dutch translators likely to appertain to unconscious bias on their part and potentially have a bearing on gender or racial stereotyping, influencing their translation choices and consequently impacting reader perceptions.

## 1.5 Bias in translation

None of us are free of biases, whether unconscious or not, in particular when it comes to gender, race or class. This section will discuss the importance of acknowledging unconscious bias and the implications of translation choices resulting from such bias, tackling key notions related to sexism and racism. This section will also provide an overview of research conducted into sexism and racism in various academic disciplines – including Translation Studies – to point out an

under-researched topic in Translation Studies. The discussion of these issues will be brief for two reasons. First of all, the scope and focus of this thesis does not allow for a more extensive discussion. Secondly, the aspects of these issues that are the most salient to the individual studies will be explored in those studies themselves. What follows below, therefore, will thus be a very concise overview[13].

### *1.5.1 Covert sexism and covert racism*

The myth that gender and racial equality has been achieved has long been debunked. While outright sexism or racism may be less prevalent (at least in some parts of the world) in the twenty-first century, more subtle forms that are equally harmful have taken their place. These more "subtle" (that is, less blatantly obvious) forms of gender discrimination and racism are often rooted in unconscious biases, and are frequently unintentional. As a result, they are harder to identify (and therefore harder to address), which is why these forms of gender discrimination and racism are labelled "covert". (De Coninck et al., 2024; Lennartz, Proost, & Brebels, 2019; Sue & Spanierman, 2020; Williams, 2020)

Remarks, actions and everyday realities involving insults and indignities that may be less plain or evident to persons not personally affected by them, are referred to as "microaggressions". This term, coined by psychiatrist, Harvard professor and Sesame Street consultant Chester Pierce in the nineteen seventies gained traction when psychologist and diversity training specialist Derald Wing Sue defined this phenomenon as 'brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership' (Sue et al. 2007). Covert manifestations of sexism and racism may be less obvious and more difficult to detect; nevertheless, they are offensive, demeaning and harmful to those at whom such slights are directed, and who are confronted with non-inclusive behaviour on an everyday basis.

Although until recently most research into microaggressions has focused primarily on (covert) racism, there has been an increase into research on microaggressions experienced by other oppressed groups, including women (Nadal, 2008). A definition of the term, an explanation of the mechanics and

[13] For the same reasons, this overview does not include research into broader issues of sexism, which would include research into sexism regarding non-binary and trans persons. The same applies to the reason for not taking an intersectional approach.

impact of microaggressions (whomever they affect), with a concise list of seminal studies is provided by Johnson and Johnson. They explicitly mention the impact of microaggressions on negative stereotypes.

Across the board, contemporary scholars contend that microaggressions are now commonly understood as subtle affronts, directed towards a person or a group of people, as a way of putting them down – regardless of intent (or the lack thereof) (Sue et al., 2009; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Though widely accepted as pejorative, microaggressions remain distinct in their relation to more overt, deliberate acts of bigotry, such as the use of racial epithets. That is, those who micro-aggress often lack ill-intent and, thusly, are unaware of the harm they are inflicting (Berk, 2017; Campbell & Manning, 2014; Dovidio, Gaetner, Kawkami, & Hodson, 2002; Flagg, 1993; Lau & Williams, 2010; Paludi et al., 2010; Rowe, 2008; Sue et al., 2009; Sue, 2010; Wells, 2013; Yosso et al., 2009). These acts, according to Sue and colleagues (2009), tend to affirm or reaffirm stereotypes about the marginalized group or demean them in an understated, subtle manner." (Johnson and Johnson, 2019)

Over the past two decades studies have proven the detrimental effects of covert sexism on women (Criado Perez, 2019; Sieghart, 2021). Research has also been conducted into the effect of narratives on people's attitudes in various academic disciplines ranging from (cognitive) psychology and sociology, social psychology to sociolinguistics (e.g. Ellemers, 2018; Hoeken and Fikkers, 2014; Pennebaker, 2011; Ravenscroft 2012) and literary studies (Eberhardt, 2017). Language issues related to racial bias, both conscious and implicit, and both in terms of its causes and effects, such as covert racism, linguistic othering and racial stereotyping have also been researched by many scholars (Alim, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Coates, 2011; Essed, 1991; Hill, 2008; Kroskrity, 2021; Pandey, 2004; Wekker, 2016).

### *1.5.2 Sexism and racism in translation*

Translation Studies, too, has contributed to research on gender discrimination (Flotow, 2011; Ségerat, 2019; Federici and Leonardi, 2012; Leonardi, 2009 and 2011, Miletich, 2016; Massardier-Kenney, 2015; Simon, 1996; Baxter, 2021; Castro, 2013; Santaemilia, 2014) and racism in translation (Hanes Lopes Lourenço, 2018; Bradford, 2024; Wekker, 1991; Benhamou, 1990). Much of the research on women and translation focuses on translating feminist texts, activist translation, feminist linguistics, perceptions of gendered ideology, and the identity

of the translator. Studies that do discuss gender stereotypes are generally either on ideology and power manipulation, in particular regarding the translation of children's literature (Tsai, 2022) or on translating misogynist and sexist originals (Gutiérrez Lanza & Gómez Castro, 2023; Li, 2023; Wang, Yu & Chen, 2000). Most studies that highlight racism or unconscious racial bias in translations tend to either focus on the translation of racist source texts (Bradford, 2024; Kujawska-Lis, 2008; Sartori, 2016), racial slurs and racial epithets (Filmer, 2011; Mastropierro & Conklin, 2019; Mereu Keating, 2014) or on the translation of the language variety that has widely become known as African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) or African-American English (AAE)[14] (Berthele, 2000; Le Gall, 2022; Wekker & Wekker, 1991), which is used as a stylistic feature in literary fiction and sometimes translated in such a way that it creates or enhances negative racial stereotypes. To the best of my knowledge, however, hardly any attention has been paid to the effects of translation choices regarding more general semantic, grammatical and syntactical features of 'standard' English on the perpetuation of racist stereotypes. On the whole, the effect of translation decisions on negative female and racial stereotypes has not received the attention I feel it deserves. And while research into the perception of readers – both on those being stereotyped themselves and on others – has been conducted in literary studies (e.g. Hakemulder, 2000; Kneesker & Reeder, 2020), it is an under-researched area in Translation Studies. The present thesis aims to explore the effect of translator decisions on negative female and racial stereotyping and on the potential impact thereof on readers.

## 1.6 Research questions and methodology

### *1.6.1 Research questions*

In order to achieve the aim of this thesis, the following research questions will be addressed, in the full knowledge that the four studies making up the core of this thesis have a number of limitations:

1. What are the potential effects of translation choices on the way women and Black people are portrayed in works of fiction and non-fiction respectively?

[14] AAVE has been defined as a 'non-standard' language variety, an ethnolect, or simply as 'English as it is spoken by or among African Americans' (Mufwene, 2001). On names (AAE or Black American English) and definitions of this language variety, see Bloomquist et al., 2015.

2. What are the actual effects of translation choices on the perception of readers regarding female characters in works of fiction and regarding Black people in non-fiction?
3. To what extent may translators play a role in contributing to gender and race stereotyping in society?
4. What are the effects of "risk-minimizing" translation strategies that aim to make translations accessible and understandable to contemporary readers on the impact that translation choices may have on the reader?

### *1.6.2 Selection of primary materials*

The case studies comprise close readings of the Dutch translations of *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin respectively (chapters 2, 4 and 5), and a reader reception study of *The Great Gatsby* (chapter 3).

The main reasons for selecting these two works have already been explained in section 1.2 of this introductory chapter. A slightly more extensive justification of the primary materials covers a number of key variables of the source and target texts:

1. *The Great Gatsby* and *The Fire Next Time* have both been translated into Dutch twice, allowing for a comparison between the first translations and the retranslations, which will help detect the subjectivities of the translators.
2. Both works are 20th century American classics, still frequently read in English and in Dutch. The fact that they are still frequently read in Dutch makes them suitable for reader response surveys related to translation choices.
3. The interval between the first translations and the retranslations is sufficiently large (37 and 55 years, respectively).
4. At least one salient variable regarding the identity of the translators is the same: both the first translation and the retranslation of *The Great Gatsby* were made by translators of the same gender (and race), while both the first translation and the retranslation of *The Fire Next Time* were made by translators of the same race (and gender).
5. The source texts include important identity markers that often involve stereotyping: *The Great Gatsby* contains common negative female stereotypes in the US in the nineteen twenties, while *The Fire Next Time*

addresses negative white-on-black stereotypes and white innocence in the US in the nineteen sixties. These issues are still relevant in contemporary Dutch society.

### *1.6.3 Methods*

The methods adopted in the following chapters will involve:

1. the selection of: a) the linguistic cues containing gender-related identity markers in the first chapter of *The Great Gatsby*, in which the novel's female protagonist is introduced, and b) the linguistic cues pertaining to race and racism found in *The Fire Next Time*, which occur throughout both essays contained therein;
2. a close-reading and analysis of the differences found in the linguistic cues used to portray women and Black people respectively, comparing the linguistic choices made in the source text to the choices made in the (re)translations, using Culpeper's (2001) model for characterization to analyze *The Great Gatsby* and an analysis of the linguistic cues used to portray Black Americans and white people displaying white innocence in *The Fire Next Time* that is similar to Culpeper's model, except that the linguistic cues do not refer to characters but to groups of people (*The Fire Next Time* being a work of non-fiction);
3. the conduction of a reader response survey to gage the perceptions of real readers regarding gender stereotypes in the translation and retranslation of *The Great Gatsby*.

To conclude with, a few notes regarding the rationale behind the analyses and the chosen method may be in order. While it goes without saying that translation is an interpretative act, and that differences between the source text and a target text are part and parcel of translation, chapters 4 and 5 expressly refer to the importance of conveying the "essence" of a text. This does not necessarily imply a stubborn clinging to what Venuti calls "instrumentalism", a paradigm that sees translation 'as the reproduction or transfer of an invariant that is contained in or caused by the source text, an invariant form, meaning, or effect' (Venuti 2019).

Describing translations as "faithful" or "unfaithful" and 'evaluating translations merely by comparing them to the source text' (ibid.), as Venuti

points out, is unhelpful and potentially damaging. Indeed, the essentialist and instrumentalist views and practices that have dominated translation and Translation Studies for the longest time should be challenged. I agree with Venuti, who certainly is not the only scholar who has an issue with essentialist assumptions. Pym, for instance, postulates that 'There is very rarely just one purpose at stake' (Pym 2015, p. 77). Venuti's and Pym's views and statements are valid and valuable. Nevertheless, maintaining that every source text always invites multiple interpretations of every detail does not take into account that some texts do indeed have a principal aim and function. *The Fire Next Time* in particular, is such a text. After all, Baldwin's essays have a clear purpose: to expose white innocence, to make white readers aware of their collective denial of racism and their disavowal of their own accountability, and to show both white and black readers how race is a social construct. In other words, it is possible to refer to the "essence" of a text without necessarily adhering to instrumentalist views of translation. So while it is true that there is no such thing as 'just one ideal translation' and that 'there are many possible solutions to a translation problem and no infallible rule-based way of deciding between those solutions' (Pym 2025, p. 1), in the case of *The Fire Next Time* there are words and phrases that *do* have a fixed meaning contained or implied in the text. These words and phrases contain the essence of Baldwin's message – the message that there will never be justice unless white people acknowledge their racism and become conscious of the crimes they have committed against Black people in the past and continue to commit today. Or in Baldwin's own words: 'and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it' (*TFNT*, p. 14). Allowing for multiple interpretations of that message would defeat the purpose of the translation. It is also the reason why the examples taken from *The Fire Next Time* and its translations in chapters 4 and 5 are discussed at such length.

With regard to *The Great Gatsby* the practice of 'evaluating translations merely by comparing them to the source text' criticized by Venuti (2019) serves an express purpose, too. The individual words and phrases analysed in chapter 2 constitute the type of linguistic cues involved in the characterization of the female protagonist. It is through the comparison of the translations of these cues that a better understanding can be gained of the effect of translation choices on female

stereotyping. The model for characterization proposed by Culpeper itself, which is the method adopted for the case study on gender stereotyping in Dutch translations of *The Great Gatsby*, will be explained in the following chapter.

As for the practice of close reading, this method has gradually been pushed to the margins of the field of Translation Studies. I hope to show that now as much as before there is merit to be found in this method, since 'We still do not understand the cultural and social implications of the translator's verbal choices' (Venuti 2013).

Together with the reader response survey, the three close reading studies included in this thesis aim to explore some of the social implications of translator decisions and to make an appeal to translational agents and readers alike to examine their own biases.