

**TANDARADEI AND THE LOVERS' BETTE:
A TRANSLATION EXPERIMENT OF *UNDER DER LINDE***

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ABSTRACT: This essay discusses an experimental translation class conducted as part of the 'Introduction to German Culture in the European Context' course at the University of Porto. The course focuses on medieval German lyric poetry, specifically the *Minnesang* genre, exploring themes of love, honor, and power. In the 2023/2024 edition of the course, 17 students from diverse cultural backgrounds translated the initial stanza of Walther von der Vogelweide's poem *Under der linden*. The essay reflects on the challenges and decisions involved in translating the poem across different languages.

KEYWORDS: Transculturality, Minnesang, Walther von der Vogelweide

The translations presented in appendix below are the outcome of an experimental class held within the framework of the 'Introduction to German Culture in the European Context' course at the Faculty of Arts, University of Porto. This course, designed for master's students in Transnational German Studies, aims to explore German and transcultural archetypes by delving into medieval German lyric poetry, particularly the poetry of the *Minnesang* – a literary genre created and propagated in the German courts of the 12th and 13th centuries, and which closely aligns with the troubadour tradition prevalent throughout medieval Europe. Within this genre, the lyrical I, often embodied as a knight, directs his affection and devotion towards a lady of higher social standing who, in turn, rejects his advances. Conversely, some poems also portray women passionately drawn to knights they cannot attain due to societal divisions and physical distance. As such, the *Minnesang* encapsulates an intricate realm of impossible and idealized relationships, where men and women typically do not unite. This was the chosen genre for this class, as it serves as a literary sphere housing a multitude of archetypes pivotal to German literature, including themes of love, honor, and power.

In the 2023/2024 edition, the class comprised 17 students from 17 different countries, each bringing unique and occasionally divergent perspectives on culture and its components. Consequently, translation became necessary, allowing students to approach the concepts under study by attempting to render into their own languages elements and motifs discussed in class. Yet, at times, divergence was inevitable. In an intercultural classroom, the challenge arose of how to define a notion such as *poetry* when, in Arabic (شعر) and Turkish (*şiiir*), the term is intricately linked to the perception and comprehension of the world, which does not happen in other languages. Similarly, the definition of *to love* became a nuanced endeavor, encompassing German's *lieben* and *minnen* (in the medieval sense), Spanish's *amar* and *querer*, or the rich diversity of over ten types of loving in Arabic

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(الْعَشْقُ، اللعاج، الْهَوَى، الْكَلْفُ، etc.). Likewise, the word *medieval* posed its own set of challenges, particularly as students from Africa and the Americas perceive this historical period as both temporally and spatially distant.

In this multicultural context and in this atmosphere of complete skepticism towards cultural elements and archetypes, I suggested to the students that we embarked on the translation of the initial stanza of a poem slated for study: *Under der linden* by Walther von der Vogelweide. Like many medieval poets, Walther von der Vogelweide remains a figure shrouded in mystery, with scant details available beyond what can be gleaned from his own poems or other textual sources. Born around 1170 and likely passing away around 1230, Walther composed numerous poems of various lyrical subgenres.

Under der linden, a poem that stands out as a quintessential representation of German culture and medieval creativity, probably dates from early 13th century. This text serves as a fresh portrayal of lovers within the *Minnesang* lyrical and troubadour tradition, expanding upon established ideas. Unlike most songs where lovers do not unite, *Under der linden* tells the tale of a young woman (potentially a lady) confessing to moments spent with her beloved beneath the lime tree, and reflecting on her passion and sin. I hereby present the first stanza of the poem¹:

*Under der linden
an der heide
dâ unser zweier bette was,
dâ mugent ir vinden
schône beide
gebrochen bluomen unde gras.
vor dem walde in einem tal,
tandaradei,
schône sanc diu nahtegal.*

The initial stage of the translation involved delving into the interpretation of the text (the poem has four stanzas, but for the purpose of this exercise, only the first stanza was translated). In it, a female lyrical persona – possibly a courtly lady – confesses her passionate transgression with her beloved. The text opens with an alliterative melody (*under der linde/auf der heide*) referring to the lime tree (l.1), on a heath (l.2) under which the lovers made their bed (l.3). Naturally, the bed serves as a metaphorical, almost metonymic representation of the space of transgression: it is the *locus amoenus* where the lovers reclined. Transitioning from the description of the space, the lyrical I leaps metaleptically to the tangible realm and informs its audience (or us, the reader) that we can find something ‘there’ (l.4): crushed and beautiful flowers and grass (l.4-5). In a normative troubadour poetic tradition where sexual acts are condemned (as mentioned above, troubadour love is invariably deemed impossible), the flower can be interpreted as

¹ I have myself edited the poem by having compared the two extant versions of it (in the *Weingartner Liederhandschrift* and *Codex Manesse* manuscripts). See Teixeira, 2021 (p. 693).

the lady's own virginity now breached; however, the feminine impulse of assertion affirms that the flower is still beautiful, thereby challenging the normativity of poetry and the audience/readers' expectations. The final three lines make it clear that the lovers were not alone in the heath, as there was a witness to the transgression: a nightingale, the symbol of poetry, singing beautifully in the woods. This singing is presented through the onomatopoeia *tandaradei* in the penultimate line, which emerges almost like a refrain in every stanza of the poem.

The interpretation of the poem naturally prompted a more extensive analysis of the entire poem in class. However, for the purposes of this article, I shall focus on just some of the insights that the participants had to retain during their translation.

After the analysis, a moment of methodological reflection about translation followed. It was decided from the outset that the translation could not be entirely free or excessi. On the other hand, even though we aimed to get close to the source language, the translation would not be too literal, as there are grammatical characteristics in Middle High German that do not correspond to the structures of the languages the participants would be working with. In fact, creating a translation methodology that made sense in all languages seemed utopian – and doing so could lead to the complete fragmentation of the original text or even a profound disregard for the possibilities of each target language. Nevertheless, we identified some points students should follow:

- The poem should be segmented into units of meaning, each to be translated as a distinct unit. Each line is, therefore, treated as an individual unit.
- The source text did not exhibit any syntactic awkwardness, and therefore, the translation should steer clear of syntactic structures that might introduce such sensation.
- The *topoi*, representing recurring themes or motifs, should not be altered to better align with the target cultures. That is to say, the translations should employ connotative equivalents (e.g., *nahtegal* should not be translated as 'bird,' 'creature,' or 'poet,' but rather as 'nightingale' – unless, of course, such an equivalent does not exist in the target language). The identified *topoi* include: *linden*, *heide*, *bette*, *bluomen*, *gras*, *tal*, *nahtegal*, as well as the onomatopoeia *tandaradei*.
- Formal elements such as rhyme, meter, cadence, or rhythm would not be considered for this translation exercise.
- Whenever the guidelines themselves came into conflict (as, for instance, when maintaining a given unit of meaning in a specific language resulted in awkwardness), participants should contemplate translation alternatives, providing justifications for their choices.

The overall translation process unfolded smoothly and with relative ease. This can be attributed to the text's intrinsic characteristics: the stanza possesses a notably narrative quality and employs structures and imagery that, according to participants, have

remarkably close equivalents in their respective native languages. While these may conjure specific ideas, images, or sounds, the main lexical items (such as flowers, woods, and nightingales) boasted direct counterparts in all the languages used in this exercise. Nevertheless, the stanza's translation posed challenges, prompting a discussion of a couple of specific issues within the text. These were the translation of *bette* and the rendering of the onomatopoeia *tandaradei*. The following reflections are, therefore, the outcome of the discussion I had with the students.

The initial challenge arose in the third line when participants tackled the translation of *bette*. This word, which we could translate into English as *bed*, denotes not only the piece of furniture, but also, through metaphorical extension, a place where someone or something lies or is lain down. In fact, the same happens in English: in the expression 'I'm going to bed', the term 'bed' differs from its usage in 'the seabed' or in 'flower bed'. The translation of the term into New High German or Luxembourgish proceeded seamlessly (both cases yielding 'Bett'), and the same seemed to be the case in Bengali (ব্যাগ), Hungarian (*ágy*), French (*lit*), Russian (кровати) and Lithuanian (*lova*). According to the participants from each language, a singular word adequately captured the essence of the term.

In the remaining languages used in the exercise, the different meanings are expressed by different terms. In Portuguese, Spanish, and Galician, for example, there is *cama* to refer to the piece of furniture, and *leito* (or *lecho* in Spanish) to refer to the sleeping surface (which could also be the part of the bed that supports the mattress, the seabed, or figuratively, marriage). The same occurs in Indonesian, where *bette* is translated as *ranjang* (as opposed to *tempat tidur*, which would refer to the material object), and in Thai, with *ที่นอน* as opposed to *เตียง*. None of the participants from this set of languages opted to use the word corresponding to the piece of furniture. Opting to translate *bette* into an equivalent that pertains to the act of lying down rather than the object itself implies that, in the poem (or shall I say in the translator's eyes and interpretation), there is no literal bed – *bette* only symbolizes a metaphorical conceptualization of space.

In Chinese and Turkish, a similar problem emerged, but the translations of *bette* in these two languages appears to intensify the notion of lying down, as well as the sexual encounter. In Chinese, *bette* is translated as 卧床, a combination of the characters for *lying/lying down* and *bed*. According to the translator, the concept of a bed exists only through the character 床; however, the text would seem peculiar without the character 卧, which means that *bette* had to be converted to *the bed where we lay down*. A similar situation can be seen in Turkish, where the translation of *bette* is rendered as *yattığı yerde*. Although *yatak* serves as the equivalent of *bette*, the translation explicitly refers to *the place [bed] where we were lying*. In contrast to the other languages where the image of the bed only implicitly alludes to the idea of a sexual encounter, the translation into these languages intensifies the idea of the lovers lying down together, hence transgressing the courtly rules.

The lovers' transgression on this bed of grass and flowers is, as previously noted, observed (and maybe even narrated) by a nightingale, who continuously sings *tandaradei* throughout the poem. Translating onomatopoeias poses a challenge, given their frequent use in literary works to evoke a musical resonance within the poem; musical quality, however, is often lost in translation. Nevertheless, the *tandaradei* had to be translated for this exercise to ensure the reader's comprehension of the source text. This has presented a unique challenge as this onomatopoeia is a neologism coined by Walther von der Vogelweide and lacks equivalence in the languages used for this exercise.

Among the 15 languages into which the poem was translated, six retained the onomatopoeia *tandaradei* as it is: German, Luxembourgish, Spanish, Galician, French, and Turkish. In Lithuanian, the sound that we imagine to be that of Middle High German (/ˈtan.da.ra.daj/) was maintained, with the diphthong *dei* changed to *dai* (*tandaradai*). In Thai, the sound was transliterated into pairs of sounds recognized by speakers of the language – *ทันดาราได* (/ˈ ta:n-'da.e-'ɛa.e-'daj/) – as was done in Chinese – 唐达拉达 (in pinyin, *tángdálādá*).

In the remaining six languages, the translators decided to translate the onomatopoeia, as they considered that the original term would not make it clear that it referred to the nightingale's singing. As it is a neologism, this was also the only part of the exercise that required a true adaptation:

Target language	Target text	Phonetic transcription
Hungarian	<i>tyú tyú tyú tyü tyü tyí tyí</i>	ti.'u ti.'u ti.'u 'tiü 'tiü t.'i t.'i
Portuguese	<i>Ó larai, ó larai</i>	'o le.'raj, 'o le.'raj
Indonesian	<i>trilili</i>	tri.li.'li
Russian	<i>Чук-чупук</i>	'tʃi'ktʃir'ɪk
Arabic	<i>عندلة</i>	ʕa'ndalæ
Bengali	<i>কিচিরমিচির শব্দে</i>	'kitʃir 'mitʃir 'ʃɔbde

The process of adapting *tandaradei* for Hungarian and Portuguese followed similar principles: the translators aimed to find onomatopoeic sounds that readers in the target language could interpret as mimicking the sound of a bird. However, the choice of phonemes varied significantly between the two languages. In Hungarian, the onomatopoeia retained the initial alveolar plosive /t/, which is repeated seven times, interwoven with closed vowels /j/ and /u/, creating a pattern reminiscent of a bird's song. Conversely, in Portuguese, the translator selected the lateral approximant /l/ to transition from the open vowels /e/ to /a/, and then closing them again in /j/. The inclusion of the interjection 'Ó' further enhances the musicality of the line, which aligns with the imagery of the bird and its song.

In Indonesian, a combination of these two principles was employed, using the alveolar plosive /t/ and combining it with the lateral approximant /l/. However, the use of *trilili* was inspired by an existing onomatopoeia in Indonesian, specifically taken from a

traditional children's song, *Burung Kutilang*, in which a bird sings *trilili* on a champak tree. Similarly, the Russian translator also opted for a choice already ingrained in Russian culture and language, selecting the existing onomatopoeia *Чук-чурук* (/ʲt͡ɕi'kt͡ɕirʲɪk/). The translator expressed concerns that using *tandaradei* in the translation might cause confusion for the reader, and introducing a new word might not effectively address the issue. Hence, the decision was made to use *Чук-чурук* (/ʲt͡ɕi'kt͡ɕirʲɪk/), this representing the commonly employed onomatopoeia in Russian to convey the sound of birds.

It is noteworthy that all four languages share the use of alliteration and repetition in this onomatopoeia, as in the original *tandaradei*. This repetition also occurred in Bengali with *কিচিরমিচির* (/ʼkitʃir 'mitʃir/), whereby the only phoneme that does not repeat being the transition from the plosive /k/ to the nasal /m/, and this occurs at the beginning of each word. It should also be noted that the translator considered that this option would still not be sufficient to understand the text, so he added *শব্দ* (/ʃɔbde/), which can be translated as a *call*. As such, the Bengali translation of *tandaradei* differs from all the others, as *কিচিরমিচির শব্দ* could be rendered as *the call kitchir michir*.

Finally, in Arabic, the onomatopoeia was translated as *عندلة* (ʕa'ndalæ), which does not have the same sonority or repetition which we can find in all the other languages. According to the translator, the auditory representation of the nightingale in Arabic can be encapsulated in the term *عندلة*, as this lexical choice, which already includes the image of the nightingale, functions as a linguistic alternative for the distinctive vocalization produced by the bird, even though it is not considered to be an onomatopoeia. This linguistic paradigm is consistent with the representation of the nightingale's sound in Arabic, *عندلة* being the already existing term for *the sound which the nightingale produces*, created by the process of making the noun *nahtegal* (in Arabic) into a verb (comparatively, as if in English one could say "to nightingale" to express the nightingale's singing).

Certainly, there are other problems and points worthy of consideration in this experiment. Regrettably, I find myself unable to delve into the intricacies of most of these aspects due to my limited proficiency in the respective languages. Nevertheless, what I wish to posit in conclusion is that this experiment has unveiled a previously undiscovered poem to me – a creation that would have remained obscured without the aid of translation. Without it, I would never have pondered on the *bette* where the lovers are and I would not have thought about the explosive and open sound of the nightingale in *tandaradei*, which seems so intrusive, and yet so melodic.

But there were additional discoveries which I will present briefly here for consideration. The main verb that I always read in line 4, *vinden* (in English, *there you can find*), acquired a new inflection when the Thai translator explained that its Thai 'equivalent' has a narrower semantic range, which led her to translate the verb as *see*. But is the lyrical I metaleptically asking the reader to see their bed? And what is that bed made of? The poem states that it is made of *gras*, but what would that look like in Galician – *herba*, *pasto*, or *céspedes*? And where are the lovers? The preposition *vor*, in Middle High German is so versatile, that the lovers might be in front of a forest, as in New High German (*vor einem*

Wald) or in Turkish (*Oradaki bir vadinin*), in a forest, as in Hungarian (*Az erdő előtt*), or just near the forest, as in Portuguese (*Perto do bosque, num vale*). And in *front of/near/in* this forest, was the bird singing continuously (*chantait*) or did it sing just once in a more circumscribed and completed fashion (*a chanté*)?

I read the poem for the first time in 2012, and since then have immersed myself in it, revisiting and scrutinizing its lines on numerous occasions. For a while, I was sure that the poem had achieved closure, in the sense that it no longer yielded new meanings or interpretations to me. Despite my persistent engagement, it was during this particular experiment that I understood I had to challenge my own certainties, as I was given the opportunity to unlock a poem that I believed to be inherently resistant to further exploration. In translating these poems into so many different languages, I had to abandon my convictions – and as such, I am now left with little more than an exciting landscape of uncertainties.

TRANSLATIONS

§§§

লিন্ডেন গাছের তলায়
সুদূর ঊষর প্রান্তরে,
যেখানে আমাদের শয্যা খানি পাতা ছিল,
সেখানে তোমরা খুঁজে পাবে
সুন্দর, মলিন
ঝরে পড়া পুষ্প ও তৃণাংশ।
কাননের সামনের বিস্তীর্ণ এক প্রান্তরে,
কিচিরমিচির শব্দে,
মধুর স্বরে গেয়ে ওঠে নাইটিঙ্গেল।

Aishik Surana (Bengali)

§§§

Debajo de los tilos en el brezo,
donde nuestro lecho estaba,
encontrarán
ambas bellas
flores y hierbas quebradas.
Frente al bosque,
en un valle,
tandaradei,
bello cantó el ruiseñor.

Ana Maria Cortés Madiedo (Spanish)

§§§

Sous les tilleuls
sur la lande
là où était notre lit,
là vous trouverez
tout à la fois
de belles fleurs et de l'herbe écrasée.
Dans une vallée à l'orée de la forêt,
tandaradei,
chantait le rossignol.

Bengaly Camara, Emilie Cayre and Larissa Tiwa (French)

§§§

Debaixo dos tilos
no brezal
onde estaba o noso leito
alí atoparedes
ambas as dúas belas
flores e herba
esmagadas.
Fronte ao bosque nun val,
tandaradei,
belo cantou o reiseñor.

Casandra Artacho Rodríguez (Galego)

§§§

Под липой
на пустоши,
где были обе наши кровати,
Вы можете
найти разбросанные красивые
цветы и траву.
Перед лесом в долине,
Чик-чирик,
красиво пел соловей.

Daria Sitnikova (Russian)

§§§

Ënnert der Lann
op der Heed
do war d'Bett vun eis zwee,
do kënnt dir
béides fannen
schéi gebrache Blummen a Gras.
Virum Bësch an engem Dall,
tandaradei,
schéin huet d'Nachtigall gesongen.

Dorine Weisgerber (Luxembourgish)

§§§

Ihlamur ağacının altındaki
Fundalıkta
İkimizin yattığı yerde,
Kırılmış çiçekler ve otları
Yerlere yayılmış bir şekilde
Görebilirsiniz
Oradaki bir vadinin önünde bulunan ormanda:
tandaradei,
Ne hoş şarkı söyledirdi bülbül.

Hakan Shen (Turkish)

§§§

A hársfa alatt
a pusztán,
ahol kettőnk ágya volt,
ott találsz
mindkettő szépet
virágot és fűvet szétzúzva.
Az erdő előtt egy völgyben,
tyú tyú tyú tyü tyü tyí tyí,
a fülemüle szépen énekelt.

Josephine Scharf (Hungarian)

§§§

Po liepa,
laukuose,
štai stovėjo mudviejų lova,
ten galit rasti
gražiai išbarstytas,
skintas gėles ir žoleles.
Slėnio pamiškėje,
tandaradai,
gražiai giedojo lakštingala.

Justina Vrašinskaitė (Lithuanian)

§§§

Debaixo das tílias,
Na charneca,
Lá onde estava o nosso leito,
Lá podeis encontrar,
Ambas belas,
Flores e erva maceradas.
Perto do bosque, num vale,
Ó larai, ó larai,
Cantou belamente o rouxinol.

Luís Dantas (Portuguese)

§§§

Di bawah pohon tilia
di hamparan lahan kosong,
dimana terletak ranjang kita,
di sana dapat kalian indahnya
temui tersebar
bunga-bunga dan rumput yang dipetik.
di depan hutan di atas lembah,
trilili,
burung bulbul bernyanyi indah.

Margaretha Inez Griandini (Indonesian)

§§§

Unter der Linde
auf der Heide,
wo unser beider Bett war,
da werdet ihr finden
beides schön
zerdrückte Blumen und Gras.
Vor dem Wald in einem Tal,
tandaradei,
sang schön die Nachtigall.

Sanja Henrike Lobeck (German)

§§§

ใต้ต้นลินเดน
บนผืนหญ้า
ที่นอนของสองเรา
ที่เธอจะได้มอง
ความงามของ
ดอกไม้ซ้ำๆและใบหญ้า
ตรงหน้าผืนป่าในหุบเขา
หันทาราใด
นกในดิ่งเกลกร้องเสียงใส

Wannapon Ngamlamom (Thai)

§§§

تحت شجرة الزيزفون
على المرج
حيث كان سرير استلقاءنا
ستجد في كل مكان
زهور واعشاب مفتتة
أمام الغابة في الوادي
عندلة
جميلة غناها العندليب

Washeel Almuwadea (Arabic)

§§§

在草地上，
菩提树下，
那儿是我俩的卧床，
你们可以找到采好的鲜花和绿草，
在那儿摊开的多漂亮。
山谷间的森林前，
唐达拉达，
夜莺在婉转歌唱。

Xingzi Liang (Chinese)

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