

Race and ethics in the translation classroom: Reflections on teaching the Amanda Gorman's translators controversies as a white British lecturer

Peter Jonathan Freeth, London Metropolitan University

1. Introduction

Ethical considerations have become an increasingly urgent topic in translation and interpreting pedagogy (Lambert, 2023, p.7). From literary translation to public service interpreting and post-editing in supranational institutions, students need to graduate from training courses with a clear understanding of the various codes of conduct and moral responsibilities that govern not only the labour of translation but also how the role of the translator or interpreter is understood by the clients, service users and audiences they serve. Indeed, as noted by Baker and Maier, 'practically all decisions they [the students] make as professionals will potentially have ethical implications' (2011, p.4) and so there is a need for educators to engage 'far more directly and explicitly with the issue of ethics' across translation curricula. Given that teaching on ethics usually comprises a limited number of specific sessions within broader theoretical or professionalisation focussed modules (Lambert, 2023, p.7), ethical discussions within the classroom often link to issues surrounding fidelity, agency and translator visibility — particularly in the case of courses focussing on written forms of translation. In such cases, the hypothetical nature of discussing these topics in general terms can make it difficult for students to understand what is at stake or the relevance of these issues to their work. A key challenge in translator training thus becomes how we make relevant often abstract and hypothetical ethical discussions to meet this urgent need for further training.

In this chapter, I present critical reflections on my attempts to make relevant the teaching of one specific ethical issue, race and representation, through my inclusion of the Amanda Gorman's translators controversies in practical, language-specific translation classes. In doing so, I aim to (1) encourage colleagues to embed discussions of ethics in pedagogy far beyond theoretical modules and discussions; (2) inspire reflexivity from others who choose to use the debate as a case study in the classroom; and (3) contribute to increasingly important debates surrounding race within translation studies in the UK. I will begin by providing contextual information on Gorman and the Dutch translation of her poem *The Hill We Climb* before discussing my own background and the pedagogic context in which I taught the translation controversies. Subsequently, I will reflect on my own pedagogic practice and will use these reflections to highlight four main ethical considerations that I argue must be taken into account when using the Gorman's translators controversies as a case study in any translation classroom: which aspects of the controversies do

we highlight; how do we frame the controversies; what kinds of classes do we teach them in; and how do we handle the Dutch source materials. I then conclude with some suggestions for further ways in which white colleagues in translation studies can support anti-racist work as we seek to decolonise and diversify our discipline.

2. Amanda Gorman, *The Hill We Climb* and its Dutch translation

In January 2021, the Black American poet Amanda Gorman performed her spoken-word poem *The Hill We Climb* at the inauguration of President Joe Biden. Gorman was invited to perform by First Lady Jill Biden and, in an interview with the New York Times, Gorman reports being given an open brief with no direction other than the event's theme of 'America United' (Alter, 2021). In the same interview, Gorman describes how she had struggled to finish the poem and had felt 'worried she wasn't up to the monumental task she faced'. Following a year of politically divisive COVID lockdowns and the #BlackLivesMatter movement sparked by the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Gorman had struggled to write more than a few lines per day. However, after watching pro-Trump rioters storming into the U.S. Capitol Building on 6 January 2021 on the news, Gorman completed the poem that same night (ibid.).

Consequently, like many pieces of great art and literature, the socio-political contexts that informed *The Hill We Climb* and in which it was performed are integral to understanding the significance of the piece and the origins of the controversy surrounding its translation. For instance, the issues of race and racial justice at the poem's core are not only linked to Gorman's own experiences as a Black woman in 21st-century America, but also to the systems of power and privilege that allowed (and continues to allow) Black Americans to be killed by those who are meant to represent and uphold national law and order, whilst armed white rioters were able to force their way into heart of the US government, assault approximately 140 police officers (one of whom died) and then simply walk away.¹ Furthermore, during her performance Gorman wore a ring featuring a caged bird as a tribute to previous inaugural poet Maya Angelou. Whilst this again makes explicit reference to the continued struggles faced by Black communities in the U.S. and the voices of Black poets before her, Gorman has also noted that it references Angelou's 'issues with speech' and connects with her own experiences growing up with a speech impediment (Brisco, 2021). As such, the medium of the spoken-word poem not only draws on a rich history of Black poetry but also serves as an act of defiance pertaining to Gorman's own experiences and struggles. Finally, when discussing her performance on Twitter, Gorman made explicit links to the feminism at the heart of her work, stating 'I would be nowhere without the women whose footsteps I dance in [...] Here's to the women who have climbed my hills before' (Gorman, 2021). Given the importance of the #MeToo movement prior to and

¹ Whilst I acknowledge that those responsible are still being arrested and held to account nearly three years after these events, the fact that US law enforcement are still only now managing to track down and prosecute all of those responsible supports, rather than contradicts, my underlying point here.

during the beginning of Donald Trump's presidency just four years prior to Biden's inauguration, then, Gorman's feminism and the platform given to her to share this message are also significant in understanding the socio-political significance of her poem, performance and visibility at Biden's inauguration.

The significance of *The Hill We Climb* and the context in which it was written, performed and received therefore presents a clear case for translating the text into other languages. In a Dutch context, the translation rights were bought by publisher Meulenhoff, who announced in a press release on 23 February 2021 that the white author Lucas Rijneveld had been commissioned as translator (Meulenhoff 2021 a). Following this announcement, an opinion piece by Surinamese-Dutch journalist and activist Janice Deul was published in the newspaper *De Volkskrant*. In this article, Deul argued that Rijneveld constituted an 'incomprehensible choice' as the translator for Gorman's work (Deul, 2021), instead arguing that the appointment of Rijneveld was a missed opportunity to commission a translator who is 'a spoken word artist, young, female, and: unapologetically Black' (emphasis in original).² What followed was described by Kotze and Strowe as a 'media furor over the suitability of the translators of Amanda Gorman's poem' (2021), beginning first in the original Dutch context and then spreading out internationally through both the mainstream press and social media. Indeed, British outlets including the BBC and The Guardian published articles on the initial controversy surrounding the choice of Rijneveld as the translator (see, for example, Holligan, 2021; Flood, 2021; and Michallon, 2021) and the consequences of this debate in other linguistic and cultural contexts, such as Catalan publisher Univers' later decision to not publish an already completed translation of the poem by white translator Víctor Obiols (BBC, 2021; AFP in Barcelona, 2021).

3. My pedagogic practice

As noted by Kotze (2021), the sudden shoving of translation and translators 'into the spotlight' as a topic of controversy 'in an unprecedented slew of newspaper opinion pieces and tweet-skirmishes' is an unusual position for our discipline and profession. In Anglophone and European contexts, translation is generally understood as an invisible practice, with translated texts being presented as though they are original texts written in the target language. This argument is most famously ascribed to the work of Lawrence Venuti (1995 [2008/2018]) and whilst recent critiques of his work have questioned the validity of his argument across all facets of our contemporary, digitally connected world (such as Freeth, 2024), continued endeavours for more explicit recognition of translators and their work such as campaigns like the Translators Association's *#TranslatorsOnTheCover* (Society of Authors, 2021) or Gameloc Gathering's *#TranslatorsInTheCredits* (Whyte, 2022) demonstrate the ever-present invisibility of translation and translators.

² The original article by Deul has been translated into English by Professor Haidee Kotze and published on her personal medium.com site (Deul, 2021). Where this opinion piece is quoted in English, it is therefore this version that I am quoting.

Thus, upon seeing a public debate about ethical issues such as race and representation in translation being covered in major British newspapers, I immediately scrambled to both make my students aware of this sudden societal visibility for translation and to engage pedagogically with the situation as it was happening. Having spoken to colleagues at several institutions during this period and at subsequent networking events such as the APTIS 2022 conference, it has become clear to me that I was not the only one to do so. In my case, the primary teaching I was undertaking at the time (spring 2021) was a block of German-to-English literary translation within a specialised translation module on the MA Applied Translation Studies at the University of Leeds.³ As such, I was able to follow Drugan and Megone's recommendation for an integrated approach to teaching ethics (2011) by using the Gorman debate as a case study within a practical translation module. Doing so allowed me to open up 'a space for critical reflection' (Baker and Maier, 2011, p.4) on both the students' translations and their own privileges, prejudices or experiences.

Based on the success of my teaching, which received 'the highest praise' for 'the topical nature of some of the work (e.g. feeding into the Amanda Gorman ethical debates)' at a course committee meeting in April 2021, I then reran the exact same session on the same module during the following academic year. However, without the immediacy of discussing the controversy as it was unfolding, I noticed a shift in both how my students responded to the debate as a case study and my own feelings about using the controversy in isolation as a vehicle to discuss translator ethics and issues of race and representation more generally. Where I felt that I had a clear rationale for its initial inclusion in the 2020/21 academic year, I began to question why I was singling out this specific case study, what the implications of doing so were given the whiteness of my classroom, and whether I was even the right person to be teaching this content in the first place.⁴ All of these questions culminated into the development of two primary fears. The first was that I was reductively using one case study to exemplify a far more complex issue that requires more time and nuance to adequately cover in a pedagogical context, whilst the second was if many white scholars such as myself were using the Gorman's translators controversy as a case study in isolation, this could result in the fetishisation of the debate.⁵ Indeed, hearing about a postgraduate teaching assistant being asked to run a one-off seminar on the 'ethics of the Gorman controversy' in the context of an non-language-specific, MA-level theory module with almost no other guidance not only served to justify my fears but also demonstrates the continued need to expand discussions of ethics beyond isolated sessions within general theory modules (Lambert, 2023; Drugan and Megone, 2011).

Another elephant in the room that I feel must be addressed at this stage is both my own positionality as a white, male and cis academic and the whiteness of the academic institutions and student bodies with whom

³ The specification for this module as it ran in 2020/21 can be found at <https://webprod3.leeds.ac.uk/catalogue/dynmodules.asp?Y=202021&F=P&M=MODL-5124M> [Accessed 29 February 2024].

⁴ For the two years I designed this scheme of work and taught on the relevant module, both myself and all the students enrolled on the module were white British.

⁵ To be clear, the term fetishise is here used in its non-sexualised meaning.

I have worked. Race cannot be decoupled from the poem or poet at the heart of this debate, not only in terms of the symbolic visibility given to Gorman as a young, Black, female, spoken-word poet through her performance at President Joe Biden's inauguration but also because it was Deul's dismay that Dutch publisher Meulenhoff had not entrusted or granted such visibility upon a 'young, female, *and*: unapologetically Black' translator that sparked the media debates and subsequent controversy. According to Higher Education Statistics Agency's most recent staff statistics, only 17% of UK academic staff were Black and minority ethnic (BME) in the 2020/21 academic year, whilst only 11% of Professors were BME (HESA, 2022).⁶ Furthermore, as noted by Tachtiris and Layne, Black scholars working in translation studies at institutions located in the Global North are 'few and far between' (2023, p. 1), a situation that has resulted in what Tachtiris describes as 'the unbearable whiteness of translation in the West' (Tachtiris, 2024, p. 2). Thus, both British academia and translation studies more specifically remain predominantly white spaces and the systems of power that underlie academic research and teaching in Britain privilege white members of staff such as myself. I argue that my decision to include a Black German author, a decision that predated the controversies, within my teaching can be seen as act of 'allyship' (Carlson et al., 2020) through which I sought to give more visibility to Black voices within my classroom and institution more broadly, thereby supporting increasing calls to decolonize our classrooms and enact education for social justice across higher education institutions in the UK. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that all such attempts are refracted through the prism of my own privileges and biases, despite my best intentions and attempts to mitigate against them.

I would also like to acknowledge that although Rijneveld's non-binary gender identity was not an active factor in the debate surrounding the translation of Gorman's work, I was keen to ensure that all mentions of him during classroom activities or discussions used the correct pronouns. At the time of the debate, Rijneveld identified as non-binary and so used they/them pronouns, which were the pronouns used by all participants in the pedagogic context given as an example throughout this chapter. At the time of writing this chapter (December 2023), however, Rijneveld is now known as Lucas Rijneveld and has chosen to be addressed by male pronouns (see Rijneveld, 2022). As such, I will be using Rijneveld's chosen pronouns of he/him in this chapter and caution should be taken in classroom environments either when discussing Rijneveld and his work, or when utilising news articles from the time as primary sources that discuss him use different pronouns.

⁶ I use the term 'Black and minority ethnic' here as it is defined by the HESA themselves on the same webpage, as a term to collectively refer to 'Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnicity categories' (HESA, 2022). However, it should be noted that the term is now falling out of usage in Britain as it 'emphasise[s] certain ethnic minority groups (Asian and black) and exclude others (mixed, other and white ethnic minority groups)' (gov.uk, 2021).

4. Ethical considerations when teaching the Gorman's translators controversies

Now that I have introduced Gorman and her work, provided a brief overview of the controversy surrounding the Dutch translation of *The Hill We Climb*, and outlined my own personal and pedagogic backgrounds, the following sections reflect on four significant questions that, based on my own pedagogic experience, I think must be considered when using the Gorman's translators controversies as an ethics case study within the translation classroom.

4.1 Just the one controversy?

As noted in section 2, the cultural and political significance of *The Hill We Climb* presented a clear case for translating Gorman's poem into other languages. In a Dutch context, the translation rights were bought by publisher Meulenhoff, who then announced in a press release on 23 February 2021 that the white author Lucas Rijneveld had been commissioned as translator (Meulenhoff 2021a). The press release noted the many accolades Rijneveld had won for his poetry and literature, including the 2020 International Booker Prize for the English translation of his novel *The Discomfort of Evening*. As such, Meulenhoff seemingly justified the selection of Rijneveld as translator based on his prestige and literary achievements both in Dutch and in English translation. Furthermore, according to the press release, Gorman had been 'direct enthusiast' [immediately enthusiastic] about the selection of Rijneveld, who had been publisher Meulenhoff's 'gedroomde vertaler' [dream translator] during the auction for translation rights. Following his own sharing of the news, Rijneveld also claimed in a Facebook comment that he had been Gorman's own choice as translator.⁷

However, immediate responses on social media and in the Dutch press made it clear that Rijneveld was not the dream translator for everyone. One of the first notable responses came from the Surinamese-Dutch spoken-word poet Zaire Krieger on the day of Meulenhoff's press release (2021a), who noted the names of several female, spoken-word artists of colour who 'beter hadden kunnen doen' [could have done better] (2021b)—including herself—before stating that when she had previously mentioned there was 'geen ruimte' [no room] for spoken-word artists of colour, 'this is exactly what I meant' (2021c). For such critics, the commissioning of Rijneveld therefore served as concrete evidence of the marginalisation of Black voices in the Dutch literary space, even when they possessed the requisite language skills and poetry acumen to undertake the translation. In such cases, social media criticisms of the selection of Rijneveld all pertained to the question of why a translator who more closely matched Gorman's own profile was not given the opportunity, rather than a suggestion that Rijneveld could not, or should not, translate Gorman's work.

The following day, Meulenhoff published a statement responding to such criticisms (2021b) in which they highlight similarities between Gorman and Rijneveld, such as the international recognition that they

⁷ The comment can be seen in a screenshot shared on Twitter (PatrickGrayham 2021) and reads 'Het is de keuze van Amanda Gorman. Denk [sic] dat zij self mag bepalen wie zi kiest om haar wekr to vertalen' [It is the choice of Amanda Gorman. Think she gets to decide herself who she chooses to translate her work].

received at a young age and that ‘zijn ze beiden niet bang om zich uit te spreken’ [they are both not afraid to speak out]. Within this response, Meulenhoff also made several references to discussions held during the selection process to argue that the choice of Rijneveld matched the ‘zeer duidelijke eisen’ [very clear requirements] set by Gorman and her team for translators of her work; that Gorman and her team had ‘direct positief reageerden’ [immediately responded positively] to their suggestion of Rijneveld as translator; and that they had agreed with Gorman and her team that the translation would be read by ‘sensitivity readers’ from ‘verschillende achtergronden’ [varied backgrounds] regardless of who translated it. Here we can note several interesting points. Firstly, the publisher’s response frames the debate around Rijneveld specifically and why he would have been a suitable translator for the text, which fails to address Krieger’s criticisms because arguing why Rijneveld specifically was a good choice does nothing to clarify why a Black translator was not chosen for the task. Secondly, the frequent references to Gorman and her team throughout the statement serve as an attempt to silence critics by legitimising their actions with the weight of Gorman’s authorial voice, whilst also presenting a different account of events to Rijneveld’s claim that he had been Gorman’s choice (Patrick Grayham 2021). Finally, the acknowledgement that sensitivity readers were being commissioned indicates that they were themselves already aware of potential inadequacies in Rijneveld’s ability to handle the Blackness of the text on his own. This admission demonstrates the publisher’s problematic willingness to engage people from ‘verschillende achtergronden’ [varied backgrounds] to undertake this work invisibly whilst the white Rijneveld was positioned publicly as the translator of the text. From the very outset of the controversy, then, we can see a disconnect between criticisms of the choice of Rijneveld from the likes of Krieger, in which the primary argument was that it provided continuing evidence of the marginalisation (and arguably exploitation) of Black voices within Dutch literary and translational spaces, and the publisher’s rebuttal, which focused solely on why Rijneveld should be permitted to undertake the translation.

The following day, Surinamese-Dutch journalist and activist Janice Deul’s opinion piece on the choice of Rijneveld, which echoes many of the sentiments raised by Krieger on Twitter, was then published in the newspaper *De Volkskrant* (Deul, 2021) and the ‘media furor’ (Kotze and Stowe, 2021) began in earnest. What followed morphed into an international debate on who can and should be allowed to translate who, with coverage in the British media coming under titles such as ‘Why a white poet did not translate Amanda Gorman’ (Holligan, 2021) and ‘Amanda Gorman’s white translator quits’ (Flood, 2021). However, as noted by both Kotze (2021) and Kotze and Stowe (2021), as well as made clear in my discussion of Krieger’s tweets above, the reduction of the controversy to such questions demonstrates a clear misunderstanding of the issues raised by critics such as Krieger and Deul, and risks developing into a narrative of white victimhood in which the focus remains on translators such as Rijneveld. Indeed, within British mainstream coverage of the controversy there was no visibility given to any of the Black, female, spoken-word artists named as potential candidates by either Krieger or Deul. Rather, the focus remains squarely on the

experiences of white translators, who are framed as “victims” (Kotze, 2024, p. 12–14), and white institutions such as Meulenhoff.

Consequently, the use of this media debate to discuss who can or should translate a text within the translation classroom similarly risks framing this debate within a narrative of white victimhood, or at least problematically frames these debates through white perspectives. Indeed, whilst news articles from institutions such as the BBC, The Guardian and the Independent (to speak only of the British coverage) may initially seem like an exciting opportunity to discuss a case study that has entered the mainstream, we also need to critically evaluate how these institutions covered the story and how this coverage prioritised the interests of white stakeholders such as Rijneveld — a clear example of white privilege (as defined by Bhopal, 2023). Taking a further look at the articles published by those three publications, for instance, the Guardian and Independent pieces by Flood (2021) and Michallon (2021) serve only to recount the narrative of the controversy through published statements by the major parties involved (Deul, Rijneveld and Meulenhoff) and whilst Flood mentions contacting Gorman’s team for ‘further comment’, none is given.⁸ The BBC article (Holligan, 2021) does include original quotes from an interview with Deul conducted by Holligan but presents the subsection ‘Who is Rijneveld’ and a large photograph of him before any explicit reference to Deul, which then comes with quotes from their interview under the next heading ‘Why the outcry?’. Notably, the by-line and introductory paragraphs similarly frame the debate in terms of Rijneveld and public outcry because ‘the translator is not black’, which again presents the controversy in terms of white experience rather than Black. When seen through this lens, even the title of the article seems to be a reversal of what the original criticisms were addressing: rather than why a Black poet was not originally selected to translate Amanda Gorman, the article is called ‘Why a white poet did not translate Amanda Gorman’. Finally, in the case of all three of the articles discussed here, it should be noted that they were written by white authors. As such, the specific framing of the controversy through the white lens of Rijneveld and publisher Meulenhoff demonstrates how the media ‘select out limited aspects of an issue in order to make it salient for mass communication’, and so present this discourse through the ‘white racial frame’ (Feagin, 2013, p.9).⁹

What the above discussion has aimed to demonstrate is that there are actually two controversies at play here. The first pertains to what Kotze and Stowe (2021) refer to as ‘representativeness’ and the selection of Rijneveld over a Black, female, spoken-word poet, as expressed both on social media by Krieger and in the Dutch media by Deul. The second relates to the subsequent representation of Deul’s criticism and the ‘media

⁸ See Tachtiris (2024, pp. 103–104) for a discussion of Gorman’s silence on the matter.

⁹ A similar argument is put forward by Kotze (2024, pp. 13–14) in her analysis of Twitter discourse surrounding the controversies, where she notes that Twitter users often shared and commented on these same articles and in doing so foregrounded the figure of the ‘injured’ translator Rijneveld and positioned him as the victim of racism, whilst Deul’s opinion piece was invisibilized. In Tachtiris’ words, Deul was instead “characterized as overly emotional as well as insurrection, reproducing the stereotype of the ‘angry Black woman’” (2024, p. 99)

furere' (Kotze and Stowe, 2021), in which the debate shifted to white-centred discourses of who can or should be allowed to translate who. Indeed, as noted by Tachtiris and Layne (2023, p.2),

Rarely do issues in literary translation reach so widespread an audience, but the translation community did not rise to the occasion in a sea of hyperbolic handwringing about 'cancel culture' and straw-man arguments claiming that those calling for a Black translator were insisting that only Black translators should translate Black authors.

From a pedagogical perspective, then, the biggest decision we must make when teaching the Amanda Gorman's translators controversies is which of these controversies, and so which of these debates, we are choosing to bring to our classrooms—or, indeed, whether we will address both. Such a decision must not be taken lightly. As noted earlier in this chapter, as well as by Tachtiris and Layne (2023, p.1) and Tachtiris (2024), UK higher education remains a predominantly white space and so if we are choosing to teach the first of these two options, we must be properly equipped to handle the subject matter, relevant work from Black scholars, and our students' responses. The latter is important in terms of protecting students of colour, especially Black students, who may find such debates triggering or who risk becoming involuntary spokespeople or representatives for Blackness more generally simply from being present in the classroom, which constitutes a clear form of microaggression that prioritises the educational growth of white students over the student of colour (Sue et al., 2009, p.188). It is also important in terms of white students who may need guidance or support in confronting their own whiteness and privilege when discussing these issues due to the fact that white privilege constitutes a 'normalised' and 'seemingly invisible' structural advantage that has become a 'normative baseline' (Bhopal, 2023, p.113). Consequently, such discussions can lead to a situation where white students' 'entire sense of self and their social world is called into question' (Johnson, Rich, and Cargile. 2008, p.120). As such, great care must be taken when choosing which aspects of the controversies we are highlighting when we choose to use the topic within a translation studies classroom setting.

4.2 How to frame the controversies?

Beyond making the decision as to which aspects of the controversies to focus on within the classroom, the question of how we then present the controversies to our students is equally important. Indeed, it is key that the very introduction of this topic in module handbooks and similar overviews of module content avoids presenting the controversies through a 'white racial frame' (Feagin, 2013) that perpetuates the white narratives found in the media coverage discussed in the previous section. The relevance of this question becomes clear when we think about how we refer to the controversies. For instance, was this the Amanda Gorman controversy? The Amanda Gorman translation controversy? The Amanda Gorman's translators controversy? Or even the Lucas Rijneveld translation controversy? Arguably, it is none of those things, as the controversy had very little to do with Gorman specifically outside her authorship and, in the end, Rijneveld's translation never came to fruition. The controversy belongs to us and our societies; to an

inability to give visibility, space and power to Black voices; to constantly permitting white people to dominate social and cultural spaces to the detriment of everyone else. Yet, the centrality of Gorman's identity and authorship, as well as the cultural capital surrounding Rijnveld, makes it difficult to move beyond the two of them when even choosing a name for the debate.

In naming and framing the debate throughout this chapter, I have opted for the 'Amanda Gorman's translators controversies' as a title. This choice marks an attempt to keep attention focussed on translators in the plural, rather than on Rijnveld specifically, and so seeks to prevent a white-centric focus on the debate of who can or should translate who. The use of the plural 'controversies' also clearly communicates the fact that there are different levels and discourses co-occurring at various levels across the original Dutch response and within a transnational context. Arguably, however, doing so fails to explicitly centre the debate around Black experiences. As such, a subtitle of 'Why a Black translator was not chosen to translate Amanda Gorman' could remedy this whilst also serving as a provocative reversal of the BBC article title 'Why a white poet did not translate Amanda Gorman' (Holligan, 2021). Furthermore, retaining Gorman's name but utilising it as an adjectival possessive can support independent research or flipped classroom models in which students research the discourse surrounding the controversies on their own before the primary teaching event, as much of the English-language discourse is framed around Gorman's authorship. Thus, the inclusion of her name provides necessary details and context. However, I believe the ideal solution would be to frame any teaching events in terms of the broader issues and themes of race, white privilege and systemic injustice in translation contexts, thereby preventing any risk of fetishising or presenting the controversies as an unusual or isolated case. One potential solution would be to follow Kotze and Stowe's lead (2021) and focus on questions of representation and representativeness, though other possibilities surrounding themes such as diversity and identity politics also exist (see for instance Tachtiris' discussion in Chapter 3 of *Translation and Race*, 2024, pp. 90–117).

4.3 In what kind of classes?

As noted by Lambert, the inclusion of ethics as a single session within a broader theoretical module is 'prevalent on many courses in translation' (2023, p.7) and so the temptation when teaching the Gorman's translators controversies is to use it as a case study within such a context. However, not only have such approaches been long criticised in favour of an integrated approach that links ethics to professional practice (notably Drugan and Megone, 2011), such an approach also fails to alert our students to 'the ethical implications of behaviour that they might regard as routine, unproblematic, and hence not experience as challenging from a moral point of view' (Baker and Maier, 2011, p.3). Indeed, given the white privilege that underpins the translation industry and higher education in the UK, linking the debate to critical reflections on the students' own practice and experiences is key to fully engaging with the racial injustice at the heart the controversies.

In my own case, in-class discussion of the Amanda Gorman's translators controversies took place as part of a practical translation class that was run with a flipped approach. As such, students completed an independent translation task at home that we then workshopped in class to construct a 'fair copy' translation as a group. For the class in which we discussed the controversies, students were tasked with translating a section from *1000 Serpentine Angst*, a novel by Black German author Olivia Wenzel that opens with her reaction to Donald Trump's election victory in 2016. As such, clear links could be made between Wenzel and Gorman as authors and the socio-political climates in which they wrote their respective works. This class came several weeks into the semester and the source text was presented unproblematically in the same way as all prior source texts: with no explicit references to race in the task. The only accompanying material was an optional task to read a BBC news article about Rijnveld being chosen as Gorman's translator (Holligan, 2021), which was presented as an unusual case of translation being in the news and was not linked explicitly to the Wenzel source text. Optional readings such as this were provided every week and were presented as an opportunity for the students to expand their knowledge, rather than as a necessity for in-class participation.

When it then came to the class, I simply presented the students with two questions before we began discussing their own translations:

Who is Olivia Wenzel?

How does this relate to the Amanda Gorman controversy?

The ensuing discussion lasted for over 30 minutes in both instances that I ran this particular class (2020/21 and 2021/22) and so these simple questions worked well as a stimulus for class discussions on race and ethics in an otherwise white, German-to-English translation classroom. More specifically, the broad phrasing of these questions gave space and agency to the students to lead our exploration of these ethical questions, whilst the fact that they had already completed a translation of a text by a Black German author gave them practical experience relating to these largely hypothetical and theoretical discussions to inform and challenge their opinions. Of course, the students did not all agree with each other. Nevertheless, the classroom served as a 'supportive environment' that allowed them to 'rehearse both sides of an argument freely, and to think through its ethical implications from different perspectives' (Baker and Maier, 2011, p.6).¹⁰ As such, the students were able to use these discussions to reflect on their own practice and to explicitly discuss the ethical implications of their translation strategies and overall approaches, which had otherwise become 'routine' and 'unproblematic' (Baker and Maier, 2011, p.3) over the course of the module. Notably, on both occasions our classroom discussions moved towards questions of who translates who, thereby reflecting the white framing found in English-language media discourse documenting the controversy. When this

¹⁰ Given that this class was taught halfway through the second semester of teaching, I had developed rapport with the students and established the classroom as a safe space for respectful disagreement through our previous, lower stakes discussions. However, the use of trigger/content warnings in module handbooks or explicitly stating ground rules before discussing challenging topics such as race may be useful in establishing an environment where such pedagogic practice is both possible and productive.

happened, I sought to re-orient the debate to highlight the white privilege at the heart of both the translation industry and our educational institution by encouraging critical reflection on whiteness in our department and on the students' course thus far, which in both instances that I taught the class was also mirrored in the students' broader educational experiences prior to commencing their MA studies, as well as my own.

Finally, whilst issues of race and white privilege may be prevalent across the Global North, discussion within a language-specific translation class allowed for a level of nuance that was incredibly relevant to the students' knowledge of their working languages and would not be possible in a generic class on a mixed-language module as such specificity would risk becoming exclusionary. Indeed, the complex and varied socio-political contexts of every language almost necessitates that race and white privilege are taught at this level of specificity alongside more open discussions between broader cohorts where difference can be highlighted, lest discussions remain too general and hypothetical for students to make clear links either to their practice or experiences.

4.4 How to handle the Dutch source materials?

As noted in section 3, when I originally saw this story in the news, I excitedly decided to use this as a discussion topic in one of my classes without fully engaging with the original Dutch-language source materials. At the time, the debates were ongoing and the discourse was shifting, so it seemed like a timely topic to include and one that we could come back to future weeks should further developments come. However, due to a lack of Dutch language skills, time and understanding, I relied on news articles such as Flood (2021), Holligan (2021) and Michallon (2021) to inform both myself and my students as pre-class reading. Consequently, I presented the controversy from a white perspective that failed to address the deeper problems at the core of this debate pertaining to racial inequality and systemic injustices across the literary, publishing and media fields. It was only when I read Kotze's excellent piece *Translation is the canary in the coalmine* (2021) and later in the year Kotze and Stowe's response to 'Representing experiential knowledge' (2021) that I realised not only the extent to which the debate had mutated into a white-centred discussion of who can translate who, but also how I had also been complicit in perpetuating that narrative with my pedagogy.

Interestingly, Kotze finds that my experience is not unusual, with much of the English-language debate on social-media platform Twitter drawing 'primarily on English-language media' and so English-language debate on the controversies proceeded 'almost exclusively through the sharing of already 'mediated' discourse' whilst direct references to Deul's original opinion piece were scarce (2024, p. 13). Given the relatively limited presence of Dutch in translation courses across UK higher education, as well as the fact that translation theory and ethics are often taught in non-language specific classes or modules, my anecdotal suspicion is that many UK-based colleagues may also have responded similarly: relying on English-language news media or perhaps even machine translation to present this issue in classes on translation ethics — at least in the immediate aftermath. However, now that there is nearly three-year's distance between us and the

controversies, we can no longer rest on our laurels and be complicit in perpetuating the problematic recentring of the controversy around whiteness found in English-language coverage. If we are actually interested in addressing the structural racism and white privilege that continue to dominate (literary) translation practices and policies, this then requires real engagement with the primary sources and criticisms from those such as Krieger and Deul, whilst also necessitating a discussion on how public debate on the topic reframed the issue around white victimhood. Kotze's published translation of Deul's original column is a useful resource in doing so, particularly as Kotze also provides additional comments and insights from Deul on edits made to the column by editors from the newspaper *De Volkskrant*, such as a change in the article's title and introduction (Deul, 2021).

However, other primary sources from the original debate, such as the tweets from Krieger and Meulenhoff's initial statement analysed earlier in this chapter, were also written and published in Dutch but there is no English translation available. Yet, in seeking to teach the racial injustice at the heart of these controversies, I am advocating for the critical evaluation of these primary sources in the British translation studies classroom — particularly in terms of demonstrating to students how the debate was recentred in the media to prioritise whiteness and even white victimhood. As such, students' ability to read and discuss these sources is crucial. The most obvious solution for staff without Dutch language skills (or a friendly Dutch-speaking colleague who can assist) is the use of machine translation (MT) services. Of course, the use of MT itself presents a myriad of other ethical issues that are out of scope for the present discussion (see for instance Kenny, 2011 and Moniz and Parra Escartín, 2023). Nevertheless, presenting (or asking students to generate) multiple versions from different MT engines not only provides an additional entry point into an ethical discussion of MT engines or even large language models more broadly, but also then gives students agency in going beyond accounts of the controversies as (re)written in the mainstream media. Whilst MT may not be a perfect solution, the important factor here is that students are able to trace the development of the controversies and understand the original Dutch-language debates on race and systemic injustice from which the discussions of who can or should translate who mutated.

5. Conclusions

This chapter aimed to demonstrate the need for academics who use the debates surrounding the Dutch translation of Amanda Gorman's *The Hill We Climb* as a case study of translation ethics to confront the white privilege at the heart of the controversies and the racial re-framing they were subject to in the mainstream media. Through a critical discussion of the original Dutch controversy and how this discourse was rewritten in the (English-language) media, I have demonstrated that there are multiple controversies that require pedagogic attention and reflected on how understanding this nuance has influenced my own pedagogical practice when teaching race and ethics in the practical translation classroom. As a lone, white scholar I cannot claim that this contribution serves as a comprehensive guide; nor do I seek to present a prescriptive methodology for teaching either the controversies, or race and ethics more broadly. Given my

own privileges, I am certainly in no position to attempt either. Rather, this chapter seeks to encourage critical reflection on pedagogic practice and more thorough coverage of racial injustice within translation studies programs, both in the UK and further afield. As just a few suggestions of how this may be achieved, I encourage colleagues to engage with more Black and anti-racist scholarship in theoretical modules, such as Corine Tachtiris' *Translation and Race* (2024) and John Keene's *Translating Poetry, Translating Blackness* (2016); to integrate Black "praxis of translation" into practical classes such as the work of Geri Augusto (2014) and Cibele de Guadalupe Sousa Araújo, Luciana de Mesquita Silva, and Dennys Silva-Reis (2019); or to include practical explorations into the biases, prejudices and intolerances found in machine translation engines or large language models when teaching translation technology. Doing so is going to take considerable work given the overall whiteness of our discipline, particularly within institutions in the Global North. Nevertheless, as a white member of the UK's translation and interpreting studies community, I am convinced that it is vital that both I and others of a similar profile undertake this work as urgently, thoroughly and sensitively as possible.

6. References

- AFP in Barcelona. 2021. 'Not suitable': Catalan translator for Amanda Gorman poem removed. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/10/not-suitable-catalan-translator-for-amanda-gorman-poem-removed>
- Alter, A. 2021. *Amanda Gorman Captures the Moment, in Verse*. [Online]. [Accessed 4 December 2023]. Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/books/amanda-gorman-inauguration-hill-we-climb.html>
- Araújo, C. G. S., de Mesquita Silva, L. and Silva-Reis, D. 2019. Translation Studies & Black Women in the Light of Feminism. Translated by John Milton. *Revista Ártemis*. 27(1), pp. 14–24.
- Augusto, G. 2014. Language Should Not Keep Us Apart! Reflections towards a Black Transnational Praxis of Translation. *Callaloo*. 37(2), pp. 632–647.
- Baker, M. and Maier, C. 2011. Ethics in Interpreter & Translator Training: Critical Perspectives. *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*. 5(1), pp. 1-14.
- BBC. 2021. *Amanda Gorman's Catalan translator dropped because of 'profile'*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-56340162>
- Bhopal, K. Critical Race Theory: Confronting, Challenging, and Rethinking White Privilege. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 48: 111–128. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-031021-123710>
- Brisco, E. 2021. *Amanda Gorman tells Oprah about her connection to Maya Angelou: 'It was an amazing discovery'*. [Online]. [Accessed 4 December 2023]. Available from: <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/celebrities/2021/03/26/amanda-gorman-oprah-interview-cites-angelou-morrison-inspiration/6998957002/>

- Carlson, J., Leek, C., Casey, E., Tolman, R. and Allen, C. What's in a Name? A Synthesis of 'Allyship' Elements from Academic and Activist Literature. *Journal of Family Violence*. **35**(8): 889–898.
- Deul, J. 2021. *English translation: Janice Deul's opinion piece about Gorman/Rijneveld*. Translated by Kotze, H. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://haidee-kotze.medium.com/english-translation-janice-deuls-opinion-piece-about-gorman-rijneveld-8165a8ef4767>
- Drugan, J. and Megone, C. 2011. Bringing Ethics into Translator Training: An Integrated, Inter-disciplinary Approach. *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*. 5, pp. 183-211.
- Feagin, J. R. 2013. *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- Flood, A. 'Shocked by the uproar': Amanda Gorman's white translator quits. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/01/amanda-gorman-white-translator-quits-marieke-lucas-rijneveld>
- Freeth, P. J. 2024. Introduction. In: Freeth, P. J. and Treviño, R. *Beyond the translator's invisibility: Critical reflections and new perspectives*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, pp. 7-28.
- Gorman, A. 2021. *Thank you! I would be nowhere without the women whose footsteps I dance in*. [Online]. [Accessed 4 December 2023]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/TheAmandaGorman/status/1351979460640317441>
- gov.uk. 2021. *Writing about ethnicity*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity>
- HESA. 2022. *Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2020/21*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/01-02-2022/sb261-higher-education-staff-statistics>
- Holligan, A. 2021. *Why a white poet did not translate Amanda Gorman*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-56334369>
- Johnson, J. R., Rich, M., and Cargile, A. C. 2008. 'Why Are You Shoving This Stuff Down Our Throats?' Preparing Intercultural Educators to Challenge Performances of White Racism. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*. **1**(2), pp. 113–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513050801891952>
- Keene, J. 2016. *Translating Poetry, Translating Blackness*. [Online]. [Accessed 29 February 2024] <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2016/04/translating-poetry-translating-blackness>
- Kenny, D. 2011. The ethics of machine translation. In: *Proceedings of the XI NZSTI National Conference, 4/5 June 2011, Auckland*. [Online]. [Accessed 18 December 2023]. Available from: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/11311284.pdf>
- Kotze, H. 2021. *Translation is the canary in the coalmine*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://haidee-kotze.medium.com/translation-is-the-canary-in-the-coalmine-c11c75a97660>

- Kotze, H. 2024. Concepts of translators and translation in online social media: construal and contestation. *Translation Studies*. [Online first]. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781700.2023.2282581>
- Kotze, H. and Strowe, A. 2021. Response by Kotze and Strowe to ‘Representing experiential knowledge’. *Translation Studies*, 14(3), pp. 250-363.
- Krieger, Z. 2021a. *Hoe salty op een level van 1 tot Dode Zee ga ik klinken als ik zeg dat tig vrouwelijke spoken word artiesten van kleur (Babs Gons, Lisette Maneza etc.) dit beter hadden kunnen doen?* [Online]. [Accessed 4 December 2023]. Available from: <https://x.com/ZaireKrieger/status/1364343287327444998?s=20>
- Krieger, Z. 2021b. *(Even het feit dat ik een van de weinige spoken word artiesten ben die in beide talen vloeiend schrijft ook even achterwege latend??? Why deze keuze?????)*. [Online]. [Accessed 4 December 2023]. Available from: <https://x.com/ZaireKrieger/status/1364344146161451011?s=20>
- Krieger, Z. 2021c. *Jullie weten toch toen ik bij Spijkers met Koppen én bij Correspondent zei dat er geen ruimte was voor spoken word artiesten van kleur? This is exactly what I meant. Lmao. Cant believe Im still surprised*. [Online]. [Accessed 4 December 2023]. Available from: <https://x.com/ZaireKrieger/status/1364344893527773184?s=20>
- Lambert, J. 2023. *Translation Ethics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Meulenhoff. 2021a. *Booker Prize-winnaar Marieke Lucas Rijneveld vertaalt Amanda Gormans poëzie* [Online]. [Accessed 4 December 2023]. Available from: <https://news.pressmailings.com/meulenhoff/persbericht-booker-prize-winnaar-marieke-lucas-rijneveld-vertaalt-amanda-gormans-poezie>
- Meulenhoff. 2021b. *Uitgeverij Meulenhoff over Marieke Lucas Rijneveld als vertaler van de poëzie van Amanda Gorman*. [Online]. [Accessed 4 December 2023]. Available from: <https://x.com/Meulenhoff/status/1364605334795517953?s=20>
- Michallon, C. 2021. *Dutch writer Marieke Lucas Rijneveld steps down from assignment to translate Amanda Gorman’s work*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/amanda-gorman-poem-translation-dutch-b1808315.html>
- Moniz, H. and Parra Escartín, C. eds. 2023. *Towards responsible machine translation: Ethical and legal considerations in machine translation*. Cham: Springer.
- PatrickGrayham. 2021. *Ze claimt dat Gorman zelf de keuze heeft gemaakt*. [Online]. [Accessed 4 December 2023]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/PatrickGrayham/status/1364486470925504514/photo/1>
- Rijneveld, L. 2022. *A few weeks ago I wrote a poem (Vrij van beren) about choosing to be addressed with male pronouns from now on*. [Online]. [Accessed 4 December 2023]. Available from: https://twitter.com/Lucas_Rijneveld/status/1488795220976312320
- Society of Authors. 2021. *#TranslatorsOnTheCover – sign the open letter*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://www2.societyofauthors.org/translators-on-the-cover/>

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in *Teaching Translation: Contexts, Modes and Technologies* due for publication on 29 October 2024, available online: <https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-Translation-Contexts-Modes-and-Technologies/Ward-Eugeni-Walker/p/book/9781032571850>

Sue, D. W., Lin, A. I., Torino, G. C., Capodilupo, C. M. and Rivera, D. P. 2009. Racial Microaggressions and Difficult Dialogues on Race in the Classroom. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*. **15**(2): 183–190.

Tachtiris, C. 2024. *Translation and Race*. London and New York: Routledge.

Tachtiris, C. and Layne, P. 2023. Special Focus Introduction: Centering Black Cultural Production in Translation. *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*. **47**(1): article no: 4 [no pagination]. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.2257>

Venuti, L. 1995 [2008/2018]. *The Translator's Invisibility*. London and New York: Routledge.

Whyte, C. 2022. *Online Movement Pushes That Translators Be Named in Game Credits*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 November 2023]. Available from: <https://slator.com/online-movement-pushes-that-translators-be-named-in-game-credits/>