

EACH AND EVERY CHILD by Tal Nitzan

A Proposal for a Thesis in Literary Translation

submitted towards an MA in English

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את כל הילדים בעולם מאת טל ניצן

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Aims and General Description

I intend to translate from Hebrew into English part of the novel *Each and Every Child* (את כל הילדים בעולם) by Tal Nitzan, published by the Achuzat Bayit publishing house in 2015. The thesis will consist of 120 pages of translated material – roughly one-half of the novel – as well as an introductory essay. Nitzan is both a novelist and a poet, and I expect the translation to be quite challenging, due to the poetic language she frequently uses and the abundance of local features which will have to be transmitted into the target language. In addition there are, of course, the "usual" issues of translation in general, and Hebrew-English translation in specific – both grammatical (syntax, tenses etc.) and substantial (vocabulary, atmosphere and culture).

The introductory essay will include some background facts about the author and the book and discuss major obstacles encountered in the course of translation. The essay will also offer scholarly background for this project drawn from feminist criticism and scholarship on gender and translation.

Conceptual background

About the author

Tal Nitzan is an award-winning Israeli poet, writer, editor and translator. She was born in Jaffa and raised in Israel, Argentina and Columbia. She has a B.A. in Art History and in Spanish and Latin American studies, and an M.A. in Literature, both from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She has published five books of her own poetry and translated into Hebrew dozens of literary works, many of them volumes of poetry, mainly from Spanish.

About the book

Each and Every Child is Nitzan's debut novel. Published in April 2015, it is a story about contemporary Israeli urban existence and islands of tenderness striving to survive in a sea of coarse conduct and harsh indifference.

Eli, the main character, is a young single mother who has just moved into a rented flat in a suburban neighborhood bordering on Tel Aviv. She is struggling to protect her vulnerable child from the violent world lurking outside their doorstep, while also looking to find a place for herself in a heartless scene of romantic encounters and in a demanding career environment – both of which are unappreciative of her qualities and unable to meet her personal needs and gratify her innermost wishes.

The male protagonist is her next-door neighbor, a gawky high-school teacher and an amateur guitar player, with whom she and her son gradually develop a delicate relationship. A parallel plotline describes the suffering of a detached, rejected

teenager, a girl whose social and familial ties are broken and unable to give her the support she needs at a time of great emotional hardship.

Conceptual issues

I have chosen to translate this novel for two main reasons, the first being my longtime fascination with Tal Nitzan's poetic work – which I find to be very poignant, accurate, original and rich. Most of the "action" in her early poetry takes place in the domestic sphere, where she (the poems are very personal, even when written in the third person) constantly struggles with parenthood, romantic relationships, and mundane home routines. Even when the poems comment on the world "outside", on politics and career and social issues – and they do – the main reference point is usually the private, "feminine" world within. This feminine voice of a poet looking at the world through the eyes of a woman – a mother, a mediator, a pacifist – pays close attention to detail while showing no tolerance for power games or "macroeconomics" and is present in her later poetry as well, where the focus shifts to larger, cultural and political issues.

The novel, too, takes place in a kind of domestic scene, a bit expanded to include the suburban neighborhood where most of the events occur. Politics, large-scale economy, power and fame are seemingly left out of the frame, but a closer look uncovers their implicit presence in almost every aspect of the characters' lives.

I expect my familiarity with Nitzan's poems (which I also translated for another project) to be of great assistance to me in translating her fiction, since they all share the same figurative language, sensitive observation and expressive imagery.

The second reason I chose to translate this novel has to do with Nitzan's unique feminine voice. I actually began my search for a source text with the vague yet

strong notion that I would prefer it to be a contemporary literary creation written by a woman who belongs, at least roughly, to my generation and speaks my "voice." Naturally, therefore, I was very excited to learn about Nitzan's recently published novel. But even while reading it (with great joy) and all the more so when I contemplated the book afterwards, I began asking myself questions about the way the author chose to handle certain issues of gender in her novel.

It seems to me that while I expected the novel to represent a strong, liberated and thus "feminist" point of view, I found that in some ways the book is more conservative and obedient to gender conventions than I might have thought, or at least "acts" the part in a rather intricate game of contradictions.

This aspect of the novel raises several questions about women's writing that I would like to study more deeply while working on the translation. One such question concerns the physical appearance of the main female protagonist. Eli rejects the traditional "feminine" appearance from the very beginning of the story and is described as boyish; she is also portrayed as a strong, decisive woman, well aware of her needs and capable of leading an independent life. However, although the author seems to break away from traditional feminine expectations of beauty, she makes it clear that Eli's androgynous appearance is undoubtedly *attractive*. The fact that Nitzan is only *seemingly* indifferent to her heroine's sex appeal but, in fact, insists on it aroused my interest in learning more about the way women writers, as well as audiences, relate to the physical characterization of female protagonists: through whose eyes are these women actually seen? Whose expectations are they required to answer?

I am also interested in Nitzan's portrayal of the romantic relationship between the two main characters. What, or rather who, is the driving force behind the slowly

developing love story? What are the choices Eli really makes, rather than the choices she is dragged into making by other people or circumstances? Could it be that despite her assertiveness, self-awareness and relative independence, her life is still so unbearably fragile till the big man rushes in to the rescue? Is this a feminist story, in this sense, or a popular romance in disguise? A third question deals with women who have careers: How are they presented throughout the novel? Where do their career possibilities lie? How is their success measured? Who sits at the top of the feminine pyramid? Can women only rise to power by consciously using and mocking the inferior "feminine" interests of their "sisters"? As I translate I will be reading critical materials and feminist scholarship that provide insight into these questions, and this research will be reflected in my introductory essay.

Shape of the project

The project will consist of two parts. The first will be an introductory essay, which will include the author's biography, a discussion of the major translation issues I had to deal with during my work, and a section offering scholarly background to this project by discussing the question of how contemporary women writers engage with gender norms in their writing.

The introduction will also consider how the gender-related issues mentioned above affect the translator's task. To what extent are the choices made by a translator influenced by gender norms? How do my own beliefs and values with regard to gender interact with those of the author? These issues will be discussed while drawing on feminist criticism, scholarship devoted to the idea of a "feminine" writing tradition, and theoretical discussions of gender, feminism and translation.

The second part of the project will be the translation itself: the first 120 pages (in English) of the novel, which is comprised of short, unnumbered chapters – or, rather, fragments – one to four pages long each. I believe these 120 pages will account for about half of the novel – a substantial body of translation, hopefully enough to constitute a meaningful reading experience and to offer a profound insight into Tal Nitzan's literary achievement.

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