

RENATE EIGENBROD¹

Transplanting Indigenous Literature: A Trajectory of Understanding²

Zusammenfassung

Thema dieses Aufsatzes ist die deutsche Übersetzung der Kurzgeschichtensammlung *Angel Wing Splash Pattern* des indigenen kanadischen Autors Richard Van Camp aus dem Stamm der Tlicho (Northwest Territories). Der Übersetzer Ulrich Plenzdorf, der durch seine Adaption von Goethes „*Werther*“ bekannt geworden ist und bereits mit Erfolg Van Camps Roman *The Lesser Blessed* (dt. *Die ohne Segen sind*) übersetzt hat, legt mit seiner Bearbeitung von Van Camps Kurzgeschichten allerdings eher eine „transcultural adaptation“ (Linda Hutcheon) denn eine Übersetzung vor. Plenzdorfs Umgang mit Van Camps Text ist – letztlich wohl auch aufgrund der Jahrhunderte langen rassistisch beeinflussten Fehlinterpretation indigener Literatur – problematisch, zumal das Ausmaß seiner Bearbeitung in den Buch- und Filmveröffentlichungen nicht wirklich deutlich wird. Statt Van Camps zweites Buch als Einheit zu respektieren, wählt Plenzdorf Geschichten und Themen so aus, dass sie in seine Vorstellung von einem Fortsetzungsroman zu *Die ohne Segen sind* hineinpassten. Van Camp hat Plenzdorfs Arbeit trotz der Umdeutung seiner Erzählungen nicht verurteilt; in diesem Aufsatz werden daher nicht nur die Adaption als solche, sondern auch die Hintergründe und verschiedenen Bewertungsmöglichkeiten diskutiert.

Résumé

Cet article examine la traduction allemande d'un recueil de nouvelles autochtones, *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, écrites par Richard Van Camp, l'écrivain Canadien d'origine Tlicho des Territoires du Nord-Ouest. Le traducteur allemand, Ulrich Plenzdorf, qui est reconnu pour son adaptation du „*Werther*“ de Goethe, avait déjà traduit avec succès le roman de Van Camp, intitulé *The Lesser Blessed* (*Die ohne Segen sind*). Cependant, sa traduction de *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, qu'il a transformé en roman (*Dreckige Engel*, 2004) doit être considérée comme une „adaptation transculturelle“ (d'après Linda

1 The paper was revised in collaboration with Richard Van Camp.

2 A pre-version of this paper was presented at the Canadian Comparative Literature Association (CCLA) conference on June 1, 2008 at the Congress of Social Sciences and Humanities in Vancouver under the title: „Transplanting Indigenous Literature: a Postcolonial Reading of a German Adaptation.“

Hutcheon) plutôt qu'une traduction. Vu la longue histoire coloniale qui a mal interprété et approprié la littérature autochtone, l'adaptation de Plenzdorf est problématique, d'autant plus que ses changements ne sont pas discutés profondément et que son choix de nouvelles et thèmes de l'oeuvre de Van Camp représente plutôt la vision de Plenzdorf que celle de Van Camp. Malgré tout, l'auteur autochtone a choisi d'évaluer le travail de Plenzdorf d'une façon conciliante. Donc, on examine dans cet article non seulement l'adaptation, mais on explore aussi les raisons pour les changements de Plenzdorf et les évaluations différentes que ses changements ont engendrées.

In his article in the June 2004 issue of *The Walrus*, titled "Gained in Translation," Canadian writer Wayne Johnston comments on the German translation of the first of his books, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, in the following words: "I am glad to have been translated, but whenever I think of the word 'translation,' it is attended by the sobering thought that you should be careful what you wish for" (Johnston 2004). I assumed that Canadian Indigenous author Richard Van Camp from the Tli-cho (Dogrib) First Nation would have similar thoughts when he found out about the details of a German translation and adaptation of his collection of short stories *Angel Wing Splash Pattern* (2002); however, it turned out that I was only partly right. Instead of condemning his translator (who is no longer alive) for misconstruing his stories, he appreciated the German author's interest in his work, regardless. This essay, therefore, does not only discuss the flaws of a cross-cultural adaptation process but also divergent views on it. At the outset of my work on this project, a stringent postcolonial analysis seemed to be the only legitimate approach to an apparently very clear case of imperialist transgression taking advantage of a people whose literature is new (by European standards), in need to be heard, but whose authors are without easy access to influential media. However, the person most affected by this, the author Richard Van Camp, includes his fellow author Ulrich Plenzdorf, in spite of his transgressions, into his "all my relations" philosophy that transcends an adversarial appropriation paradigm and understands his work, like other collaborative creations, as "a dance of trust" with unpredictable results. His comments on Plenzdorf, which conclude this paper, also reflect an Indigenous philosophy of respecting a person's sovereignty: "If that is how he saw the story, who am I to judge this?" As he eschewed an interpretation framed by an us/them binary of the European colonizing, once again, the Indigenous person, but instead took a conciliatory and broader approach, he created a new trajectory of understanding also for me. Since my communication with Van Camp about this particular reception and re-writing of his work, I have come to understand that the context for this scenario is no longer the appropriation debate of the early 1990s with an emphasis on

(neo)colonialism and a continuous power imbalance³ but technology-driven cultural globalization which, not for Aboriginal communities generally, but for (established) writers and artists potentially equalizes access to media and audiences. And yet, as will be argued in this paper, process and end result of this particular translation/adaptation cannot be left uncriticized.

In Wayne Johnston's case it became clear to the author during the process of the translation of his work that the German translators' understanding of the English language was quite limited; in Van Camp's case, he would have never known if that had been the case as there was very little communication between him and the translator of his stories. German author Ulrich Plenzdorf did not translate his second book *Angel Wing Splash Pattern* with the idea of attempting a faithful representation of Van Camp's work but transformed the collection into a product that he envisioned as a successful sale that would benefit both him and Van Camp. He "picked" and "chose" what he transplanted to his own soil in the sense in which Linda Hutcheon describes transcultural adaptation: "Adapters of traveling stories," she argues, "exert power over what they adapt" (Hutcheon 2006, 150). Emphasizing the importance of agency of the adapter, Hutcheon refers to this process as "indigenization" (150). This is a rather ironic term in the context of the discussion of a European re-writing of a work by an Indigenous author and yet it reflects Hutcheon's understanding of what she terms "transcultural adaptation" or "transcultured adaptation" (Hutcheon 2006, 145) (in which she includes, for example, the adaptation of Tomson Highway's plays to the Japanese stage). She sees a legitimate role for adapters who "[i]n the name of relevance [...] seek the 'right' resetting or recontextualizing" (Hutcheon 2006, 146) in taking the stories home to their own soil, so to speak. Although arguing from a different philosophical point of view than Tlich author Van Camp, her conclusions are similar to his in so far as the objective of her book is to challenge the negative view on adaptation, "a late addition to Western culture's long and happy history of borrowing and stealing or, more accurately, sharing stories" (Hutcheon 2006, 4). Van Camp himself borrows from ancient Greek mythology in his story "Mermaids" and works with connotations evoked by the name for the famous author Charles Bukowski in another story in *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, "The Night Charles Bukowski Died."

The main players in this process of translation and adaptation discussed here are Ulrich Plenzdorf and Richard Van Camp. Ulrich Plenzdorf died in 2007 after a successful writing career. He was one of the best known authors from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in particular due to his adaptation of the German classic *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774) by Johann Wolfgang Goethe to *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (1973). He translated into German the first novel by Indigenous author Richard Van Camp, *The Lesser Blessed* (1996), because this novel's male teen character reminded him of his own youth character, the re-imagined Werther, as he

3 See Lutz 1995.

explained in the preface to the German version of the novel titled *Die ohne Segen sind*: "Ein Roman, bei dem mich von jeder Seite mein alter Freund Holden Caulfield ansah, den ich einst als Edgar Wibeau in Berlin über den Jordan geschickt hatte" (Van Camp/Plenzdorf 2002, n.p.). Van Camp's translated novel won the prestigious "Jugendbuchliteraturpreis" in Germany in 2001. Inspired by this success, Plenzdorf translated five stories from Van Camp's collection of short stories *Angel Wing Splash Pattern* (2002) in a way that the book would read like a sequel to *Die ohne Segen sind* (as he explained in a brief email to Van Camp). Defining adaptation, Linda Hutcheon embraces a "continuum model" starting at one end with literary translations, "which are, in fact, inevitably refractions of the aesthetic and even ideological expectations of their new audience," as she claims by quoting Lefevre (Hutcheon 2006, 171), and ending with "the realm of adaptation proper" (Hutcheon 2006, 171), i.e. "(re-)interpretations and (re-)creations" (Hutcheon 2006, 172). Plenzdorf's adaptations of Richard Van Camp's two books started out with a literary translation but then moved on to re-creation. However, his role in the second process is left ambiguous in the publishing information about the book. While both writers are named on the cover giving the appearance of co-authorship, the title page in the book attributes the "Roman" *Dreckige Engel* to Richard Van Camp alone with the subtitle: "Aus dem kanadischen Englisch übersetzt und bearbeitet von Ulrich Plenzdorf." If one flips the page, *Angel Wing Splash Pattern* is identified as "die Originalausgabe." Marketed in this way, the term "bearbeitet" in no way suggests the extent of the total transformation of Van Camp's work as there is no mentioning here of the fact that Van Camp's book is a collection of short stories from which only some were selected by Plenzdorf as the basis for the writing of a novel part of which was his own creation. The blurb on the back of the book links the brief summary of the plot and even the dramatically changed title solely to Richard Van Camp: "Anrührend und hilflos zugleich ringen seine 'dreckigen Engel' um Anstand, Liebe und Freundschaft."

It is true that Van Camp was informed about the planned changes to his book in Plenzdorf's "translation" by a brief email the German author had sent him⁴ informing him that he had picked out certain stories which he had "arranged and changed slightly" so that they "can be read as a novel, sort of as part two of 'The Lesser Blessed'" and that the Aufbau-Verlag in Berlin was very interested in that version of his book. Although he only informed Van Camp after he had done the work and had already contacted a publisher without Van Camp's knowledge, the Tlicho author could have still intervened at that point. He did not because he trusted this renowned German writer, who had translated his first novel so successfully. He did not object although *Angel Wing Splash Pattern* had not been intended as a "part two" to *The Lesser Blessed* but as a new work of fiction for which he and his publisher had carefully selected the stories that should go into this book in order to ensure that

4 With the permission of Richard Van Camp I added the email exchange as an appendix to this paper; unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, Ulrich Plenzdorf died in 2007.

they “worked together in theme, pacing and originality” (Mavor 2004). This relationship among the stories was ignored in Plenzdorf’s reworking as he created three large novel chapters by inserting five (out of nine) selected stories, or parts of them, wherever they fitted into the plot mixing them with episodes of his own creation. One might argue that he gave the narratives another life; however, as explained above, he did not acknowledge the extent of his changes and therefore used Richard Van Camp’s name inappropriately.

It is striking that throughout his constructed novel Plenzdorf highlights a pair of male friends, Larry and Clarence – instead of just one protagonist- who are labeled as “Blutsbrüder” in the blurb on the back of the book, reminiscent of the blood brothers Winnetou and Old Shatterhand in the influential fake Indian novels by the 19th-century German author Karl May. It is also revealing (and disturbing) that he linked his character of a white teen, whom he added to Van Camp’s script in this novel set in the Northwest Territories, to the sexual desire of his two Tlicho protagonists for a white woman, the teen’s mother. Given the changes made by Plenzdorf, it is not surprising that the novel is described in the various marketing contexts as about young people’s preoccupation with drugs and sex. However, although “the immediate, visceral representation of youth culture, its languages, losses, and loves” that, according to Haladay (2007, 74), characterizes Van Camp’s first novel *The Lesser Blessed*, also shapes his collection of short stories, the narratives in his second book are stylistically diverse and convey a layered approach to a variety of themes. In *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, the young people’s erotic adventures, for example, are juxtaposed with the erotic yet also mythical and spiritual story “Why Ravens Smile to Little Old Ladies as They Walk By” and with the moving confession about a love relationship gone wrong in “My Fifth Step.” Both of these texts are left out in Plenzdorf’s adapted version. In the original work, stories of violence, about bullying, for example, and revenge, are counterbalanced with the narration about a peaceful death in “Sky Burial,” another story that has been deleted in the adaptation. If, as is stated in one review of the English version, by inserting “counterweights to the tough tales,” Van Camp “works well in both screams and whispers” (Firth), his adapted work mostly speaks in screams. Further, Van Camp’s language carries a poetic allusiveness that does not typecast the characters or reduce a story to one simplified theme. For example, his poetic arrangement of lines at the end of the story “The Night Charles Bukowski Died” is enhanced by alliteration and sentences structured by rhythm rather than punctuation marks:

And Mikey holds himself and cries You beat Scott up You hurt
him I want to go home

I want to
go home I
want to go

home

I hold him this skinned caribou crying like a cat this little kid
 who never stopped screaming As he cries into my chest Jason looks
 down his bamboo flute broken I

throw
 back
 my
 head
 and
 roar (*Angel Wing Splash Pattern* 36)

In Plenzdorf's translation:

"Hermann heulte nur in seine Hände: 'Ihr habt ihn getreten! Ihr habt ihn
 schwer verletzt! Ich will nach Hause! Ich will nach Hause. Ich will nach
 Hause!'
 Er fiel mir an die Brust. Ich hielt ihn, dieses arme Karibu-Junge, das wie
 eine Katze schrie und nicht aufhoeren konnte. Ich legte meinen Kopf zu-
 rüch und heulte wie ein Wolf." (*Dreckige Engel* 60)

The poetic rhythm of Van Camp's lines is changed into a prose text which also leaves out a proper translation of images evoking the vulnerability of these tough young people ("The Broken Bamboo Pipe," "The Skinned Caribou") nor does it adequately reflect their rage fueled by feeling so powerless: "I throw back my head and *roar*" (emphasis added) – the rage of a lion rather than the howling of a wolf as translated by Plenzdorf.

In Van Camp's book, his acclaimed story "Mermaids" opens the collection; in the German version it comes right before the third chapter that Plenzdorf wrote on his own, but it is reworked so that it could be used for the plot of the last chapter of his novel. He changed this narrative not "slightly," as promised in his email, but significantly, in particular the ending. Van Camp's story is about two brothers. One is drawn to the power of fire (a pyromaniac) and, although a youth at risk and potentially dangerous, befriends a little girl who was deserted by her parents; the other contracts AIDS and eventually commits suicide. Van Camp's version of the story ends with a promise to the little girl to take her to the teen's grandfather; in Plenzdorf's adaptation, she is left behind. The surviving youth in Van Camp's story learns from the consequences of not observing his grandfather's rules for making money through gambling; Plenzdorf's protagonist recovers from those consequences and, together with his "Blutsbruder," becomes rich through more gambling. The remainder of the plot of Plenzdorf's novel totally deviates from Van Camp's

work creating a story about their life of drug dealings, various business ventures and fights with the Vietnamese Mafia. On another level of difference between the two texts it should be noted that in Plenzdorf's adaptation AIDS is not mentioned as God's response to the all-consuming love of mermaids thereby leaving out a whole plethora of debates within Aboriginal communities and of associations with disease, abuse, and trauma effected by colonialism. Plenzdorf's emphasis on drug addiction makes heroin the root cause sent by God as a punishment: "deswegen schickt er uns Gift, Heroin" (*Dreckige Engel* 71) is his translation of Van Camp's "that's why he brought Aids" (*Angel Wing Splash Pattern* 5).

With Linda Hutcheon I would claim that an adapter's "deeply personal as well as culturally and historically conditioned reasons for selecting a certain work to adapt and the particular way to do so should be considered seriously by adaptation theory, even if this means rethinking the role of intentionality in our critical thinking about art in general" (Hutcheon 2006, 95). Ulrich Plenzdorf was born in 1934 as son of parents who were members of the Communist Party and therefore persecuted by the German Fascists. After the war, they moved to East Berlin where Plenzdorf studied Marxism and Leninism but later on switched to Film Studies. In 1972, his play *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* was premiered and also published as a prose text; it became "a cult book" about "teen angst" and, translated into thirty languages, "reached a global audience" as was stated in the *Times* obituary ("Ulrich Plenzdorf," *Times Online*). This work started his successful career as a writer, mostly as screen writer for DEFA, the GDR film institute, writing theatre, film and TV scripts. Noteworthy in the context of this article is that most of his scripts evolved out of adaptations of various authors (for example, the Russian author Tschingis Aitmatow) as is revealed in the *Zeittafel* appendix to the 2004 edition of *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (103-109). Towards the end of his career, Plenzdorf was no longer very successful with film and television projects although he initially had started out well in the new political situation of unified Germany. The obituary in the *Berliner Zeitung* stated that in the last years of his life he became a bitter man feeling misunderstood (Sylvester 2007) It was then that he turned towards translations of English texts. Considering Edward Said's elaborations on "late style," which does not always play out as "harmony and resolution" but often as "intransigence, difficulty and unresolved contradiction" (Said 2006, 7), one might conjecture that the aging and disillusioned Plenzdorf tried to revive, through his translations of Van Camp, an era in the GDR where he thrived as a young artist [although "some of his work was banned by the censors" ("Ulrich Plenzdorf," *Times Online*)]. As stated before, he saw in Richard Van Camp's main protagonist Larry in his novel *The Lesser Blessed* his own character Edgar Wiebau, the adapted Werther of the classic novel by Goethe, who brought him international fame. After a successful translation of his first work, his impetus for translating the second one may have come from building on the readers' "inter-textual knowledge" of previous works (Hutcheon 2006, 126), both, his own and Van Camp's, hoping for another successful twinning of transplanted characters and

plots, but this time in form of a “‘transcultured’ adaptation” (Hutcheon 2006, 145). His change of genre from a collection of short stories to a novel seemed not only to be influenced by the success of *The Lesser Blessed* but also by “the perceived hierarchy of the arts,” as Hutcheon explains the many adaptations of literature into film (Hutcheon 2006, 91): a novel is often considered more important and easier to sell than short stories (so that the latter are less likely to be published as Plenzdorf mentioned in his email to Van Camp).

Besides biographical circumstances that may have influenced Plenzdorf’s move toward the translation and adaptation of an Indigenous author, there is also a socio-political context for his choice. The German fascination with Native culture is a well-known and much publicized fact; what is less well-known is the promotion of Indigenous literatures in Germany which made Plenzdorf acquainted with Van Camp’s texts in the first place. Further, before the destruction of the Wall in 1989, there was a difference between the East and the West German reception of Native culture and writing (Lutz 2002a, 103). Although the GDR had its “Indian movies” between 1966 and 1983, these were not tied to the fantasies of the German 19th-century author Karl May, but were set in specific social and economic circumstances and came “inevitably, with an unmistakable political message” (Buscombe 2006, 209) about the victimization of the good (they were always good) Native people by the evils of an “aggressively expansionist American capitalism” (Buscombe 2006, 209). Also, Karl May, the in/famous 19th-century author who created an “imaginary Indian” in the minds of many generations of Germans, was banned by the Communist party of Germany until the mid-1980s as he was seen as “Hitler’s ‘Lieblingsschriftsteller’” (Augstein 1995, 134). In his “transcultured” version of Van Camp’s book, Plenzdorf’s depiction of the Tlicho environment, although written much later, echoes socialist sentiments of “the Indians” as the oppressed as he paints a very depressing – if at times humorous – picture of the Tlicho people’s lives. It seems that Plenzdorf “indigenized” the text in Hutcheon’s sense of the word, transplanted it to his own soil, by transferring the “drab,” depressing milieu of the GDR (as was pointed out about his work in the obituaries) onto the environment of “the oppressed” Natives, thereby, ironically, de-culturating the stories (Hutcheon 2006, 160) as there is more to “Indians” than being victimized. A comparison of both title and title page of both works also speaks to this interpretation. Van Camp’s mysterious allusion to angels and the uplifting cover image of a bird differs greatly from Plenzdorf’s title *Dreckige Engel* and the prosaic image of a car, the icon of consumer culture, in front of a nondescript building.

Plenzdorf does not fit the category of German “Indianertümelei” or “Indianthusiasm,” a term coined by Hartmut Lutz, which “tends to historicize Indians as figures of the past” (Lutz 2002b, 169); on the contrary, he wrote and re-wrote a contemporary text but fails to see that in Van Camp’s contemporary stories so-called traditional culture still plays a very important part. As Van Camp states: “What Aboriginal authors bring to world literature is our ability to braid our oral traditions with the writ-

ten word" (Van Camp 2005, 2). The reviews of the German translation *Dreckige Engel* all highlight the depressive tone of the stories, the god-forsaken places ("Kaff") and the dreary streets ("triste Straßen"), while reviews of Van Camp's book emphasize that he "engenders an irrepressible sense of hope where the prognosis might otherwise be bleak" (Bashford 2002, 113). All in all, one might say about Plenzdorf's adaptation of Van Camp's second book what has been stated about East Germany's "Indian" films, which, of course, influenced Plenzdorf's perception of Native people (and which returned on German TV in recent years), that they firmly appropriate "the 'other,' that is, North American Native peoples, as an 'us'" (Gemünden 2002, 248).

Plenzdorf's re-/mis-interpretation of Van Camp's text may easily happen to traveling stories as Said elaborates on in his "Travelling Theory." It is not surprising that Plenzdorf was interested in Van Camp's stories. Both authors had in common their interest in youth characters who, in each case, form the second generation of survivors from oppression. Plenzdorf's version of Werther, whom he tried to resurrect through Van Camp's Larry, represents a second generation of GDR citizens who, as Brandes and Fehn explain, rebelled against the stifling reality of socialist realism in the drab East German milieu, and a dogmatic ideology they, unlike their parents' generation, did not create as an alternative to Fascism so that it was without much meaning to them (Brandes/Fehn 1983). Van Camp belongs to the second generation of Indigenous authors in Canada writing in English for and about a second generation of survivors from traumas inflicted by colonization (among others, residential schools), young people rebelling against their dispossession and dysfunctional behaviour of parents they often do not understand because they do not know enough about their past. Both authors show the generation gap from the perspective of the young; they write in youth vernacular and depict a youth culture of sex and addiction and fascination with music, but they also show youth suffering in and from society to the point of committing suicide. If Plenzdorf's emphasis on sexuality echoes, at least according to one critic, "the somewhat belated arrival of Western sexual liberation to the East" (Asmus 2006), Van Camp's engagement with this theme may be understood as part of his generation of Aboriginal peoples' decolonization reclaiming their body, and their sexuality in particular, as it had been repressed, shamed and abused in the colonial residential schools.⁵ However, in spite of this commonality, Plenzdorf's writing about the theme of sexuality without adhering closely to Van Camp's text is problematic. If an outsider creates a story about Aboriginal characters with repeated graphic depiction of sexual scenes, often enmeshed with violence, his or her imaginings remind too much of earlier racist and dehumanizing literature and films about Aboriginal people in which sex and violence were the "standard commodities," to borrow a phrase from Edward Said (Said

5 Two anthologies by Aboriginal authors in Canada are noteworthy here: Akiwenzie-Damm 2003; and Taylor 2008.

1978, 190) used in Terry Goldie's book about images of the Indigene, *Fear and Temptation* (15).

The problematic implications of Plenzdorf's adaptation are clearly played out in a further adaptation of Van Camp's collection of short stories. *Dreckige Engel* has been out of print since October 2006, but it did live on as a "Krimi" aired on the German radio station WDR on February 21, 2008: "*Dreckige Engel* von Richard Van Camp." "Mit Musik, Drogen und Sex versuchen sie, gegen die Ödnis der Provinz anzukämpfen. Und mit ein paar krummen Touren, die ihnen das nötige Kleingeld verschaffen (*Dreckige Engel*, <www.einslive.de/sendungen>). Similar to the adapted novel, for the unknowing listener who does not pay attention to the marketing details ("Übersetzung aus dem Englischen und Bearbeitung: Ulrich Plenzdorf") this is primarily Van Camp's work. However, as Hutcheon points out, an adaptation can only be appreciated as *adaptation* (Hutcheon 2006, 172) by the "knowing" reader, ideally a reader who knows both texts in order to understand "the enriching, palimpsestic doubleness" (120). In the two reviews of Plenzdorf's adaptation on the internet, one came from a reader who knew that Plenzdorf had deviated from Van Camp's text significantly, including the change of genre, and opined that, "[O]ffenbar traut Van Camps deutscher Verlag den Geschichten des Dogrib-Indianers nur [...] wenn ein weisser Mann sie gründlich überarbeitet" (Mensing 2004). The other, much longer, review reveals total ignorance of Plenzdorf's role in the creation of the German text but instead regrets the fact that Van Camp's second book, "das hochdepressive Werk," is not at all as strong as his first as it lacks a plot ("Die ohne Handlung sind," <www.ciao.de>). This comment not only shows that this reader was unaware that a novelistic plot had never been intended by Van Camp in his collection of short stories but also that Plenzdorf's novelistic adaptation is not very convincing.

I would like to agree with Hutcheon that "multiple versions [of a text] exist laterally, not vertically" (Hutcheon 2006, xiii), that we may appreciate the "original" version only *after* we read or viewed the adapted one – and this is what Richard Van Camp hopes for as well – but the chances of easy access in Germany to a book by an Aboriginal author from Canada published by a very small Aboriginal press are slim. An author like Richard Van Camp, still a young person himself, who tries to engage Aboriginal youth by telling their stories in a way that appeals to their generation but at the same time goes beyond the depiction of a globalized youth culture and instead inscribes a Tlicho/Dogrib context – not at all noticed by reviewers of the adapted version – should be heard on his own terms, albeit in translation. Far from idealizing a homogenous traditional society, Van Camp, as an active participant in his culture, alludes to the "internal debates," the "conflicts of interpretation" and the "rival perspectives" (Scott 1999, 217) in his realistic yet also visionary tales of a continuously changing society still reeling from the legacy of colonialism. A continued perpetuation of simplified and stereotypical images *about* Aboriginal cultures through a translation/adaptation that assumes an Aboriginal voice undermines the

empowerment through Aboriginal literature which Jeannette Armstrong so clearly positions as resistance to colonial disempowerment (cf. Armstrong 2005).

Although the above paragraph sounds like the conclusion to this paper, it is not, or it is not the only conclusion. Not only will I leave the final word to the person affected most by Plenzdorf's work, the author Richard Van Camp, but I also want to acknowledge my own learning curve. My evaluation of the translation/adaptation of Van Camp's stories comes from the perspective of a non-Aboriginal scholar trying to be an ally in decolonization processes. As a scholar of Aboriginal literature who saw (and still sees today) her main responsibility in facilitating Aboriginal voices, I am particularly concerned about the lack of respect for Indigenous ownership of stories. Since for the longest time Europeans did not acknowledge copy right protocols regarding oral stories, they were just taken, translated into English and "adapted" from a Eurocentric point of view.⁶ With that history of appropriation in mind and Aboriginal writers' resistance to it (cf. Lutz 1995) I initially reacted very critically to Plenzdorf's work. Richard van Camp's conciliatory interpretation, however, a story I want to honour as well, reminded me of my first graduate student Daniel Rice, a Mohawk, who passed on many years ago. He responded to my harsh condemnation of the appropriative fabrications of what became known as the speech by Chief Seattle⁷ by explaining that I should think of the larger picture and remember that that text, although not "the real" one, will make a contribution of its own, and had already done so, and not all negative either. Further, in these times "beyond postcolonial theory" and "after postcoloniality," to borrow phrases of book titles from Epifanio San Juan and David Scott respectively, Van Camp's total silencing of the colonial legacy in his response to Plenzdorf also reminds me of the affirmative scholarship by a new generation of Indigenous writers, particularly in the United States (Weaver/Womack/Warrior). They resist the impacts of colonization by drawing on Aboriginal intellectual traditions having evolved in spite of, together with, beyond and outside of the "epistemic violence" (Spivak 2006, 31) imposed on Aboriginal peoples for centuries without letting this violence define them. Van Camp wants to share his funny yet sad, realistic yet magical stories widely as his own contribution to peace and social justice – even at the risk of being misinterpreted. Looking at this issue holistically, there are more implications and consequences from one event than any single person can ever know. So I want to conclude my part of this paper by borrowing from Van Camp's comments cited below: "If that is how he saw the story, who am I to judge this"?

6 I want to refer here to my article from 2006, "Who wants these stories? Reflections on ethical implications of the re-publication of a missionary work", *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 4, 221-243.

7 This is well documented by Kaiser 1987, 497-536.

Epilogue: Richard Van Camp's Comments on the Transformation of *Angel Wing Splash Pattern* into *Dreckige Engel*

Whether it is working with a great editor or an internationally renowned artist like George Littlechild for our children's books, writing and publishing for me has always been a dance of trust.

To hear that German literary icon, Ulrich Plenzdorf, wanted to translate *The Lesser Blessed* was beyond incredible. His passion for the project was contagious. He was so in love with this story! When my agent for this project, Carolyn Swayze, and I learned later that Ulrich had approached his own publisher in Berlin in 2004 and had begun translating five of the stories from *Angel Wing Splash Pattern* by himself and had sold the manuscript for us to Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, well, we were overjoyed.

Who was this Soldier of Passion who believed in my work so beautifully?

The term "dance of trust" here really applies because I do not speak or read German. I knew Ulrich had done a magnificent job on the translation of *The Lesser Blessed* (*Die Ohne Segen sind* won the *Jugendliteraturpreis* in 2001 at the Frankfurt Book Fair in the juvenile category), but I sensed that something was different with the translation of *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*. Not only is the cover unlike anything in my experience or the experience of my characters, I did have the sense that this translation was also an adaptation by Ulrich into a vision he springboarded from after reading both *The Lesser Blessed* and *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*.

Since then, there has been a radio play also adapted from Ulrich's translation of *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, and I understand that it is very different from what made it into print. It was broadcast on Germany's largest radio station, the WDR. Again, I have heard that this is an adaptation of an adaptation of what was written in both *The Lesser Blessed* and *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*.

Confused? Well, sometimes we just have to surrender to the muse, and I surrendered my trust to Ulrich. And now, after I have learned of his great passing, here is where I stand in all of this: it is with great sadness that Ulrich had passed away before I had a chance to meet him. He was a great writer, a fine translator and celebrated internationally as the voice of a generation in German literature. It was my loss not to have met him this time around, but I am very proud to have worked with him. I trusted him with the translation of *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, and I do not regret it at all. If that is how he saw the story, who am I to judge this?

I know there are many fans of my writing who questioned the translations of *Angel Wing Splash Pattern* and the radio play, but, ultimately, if they wish to read my work, they will have to in English. This is the trump card any author can play when questioned about translations.

The Lesser Blessed will soon be a movie with First Generation Films. The director, Anita Doran, loves the novel more than anyone I have ever met. She is writing the screenplay. It is an adaptation. I have noticed that I have, once again, let go of the

story. Where Anita takes it is up to her. Ultimately, it is her name as the director and screenwriter. Nobody wants to make a bad movie. Regardless of how this dance of trust works out, ultimately, people who wish to read the original can read the story as Larry, the main character, told it to me so many lifetimes ago.

Life is a dance of trust. Mahsi cho.

Richard Van Camp
Yellowknife, NT.
July, 2008

References

- Akiwenzie-Damm, Kateri (ed.), 2003, *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica*, Cape Croker Reserve: Kegedonce Press.
- Armstrong, Jeannette, 2005, "The Disempowerment of First North American Native Peoples and Empowerment Through Their Writing", in: Daniel David Moses/Terry Goldie (eds.), *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*, Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 242-245.
- Asmus, Kareen, 2006, "Goodbye Lenin, hello GDR that never was." High Beam Encyclopedia (<<http://www.encyclopedia.com/printable>>), 12.05.2008.
- Augstein, Rudolf, 1995, "Weiter Weg Zu Winnetou", *Der Spiegel*, 18, 130-144.
- Bashford, Lucy, 2002, Rev. of Richard Van Camp. *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*. *Malahat Review*, 141, 112-113.
- Brandes, Ute/Ann Clark Fehn, 1983, "Werther's Children: The Experience of the Second Generation in Ulrich Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* and Volker Braun's "Unvollendete Geschichte", *The German Quarterly*, 56.4, 608-623.
- Buscombe, Edward, 2006, *'injuns!' native americans in the movies*, Bodmin, Cornwall: Reaction Books.
- "Die ohne Handlung sind," 12 September 2004. Review of *Dreckige Engel*. (<http://www.ciao.de/Dreckige_Engel_van_Camp_Richard_Plenzdorf_Ulrich_Test_2857>), 12.05.2008.
- Dreckige Engel*, 21.02.2008 (<http://www.einslive.de/sendungen/plan_bkrimi/2008/02>), 12.05.2008.
- Eigenbrod, Renate, 2006, "Who wants these stories? Reflections on ethical implications of the republication of a missionary work", *Journal of Academic Ethics* 4, 221-243.
- Firth, Matthew, n.d., Rev. of *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*. *TDR The Danforth Review*. (<<http://www.danforthreview.com/reviews/fiction/vancamp.htm>>), 13.05.2008.
- Gemünden, Gerd, 2002, "Between Karl May and Karl Marx: The DEFA *Indianerfilme*", in: Colin G. Calloway/Gerd Gemünden/Susanne Zantop (eds.), *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 243-258.
- Goldie, Terry, 1989, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Haladay, Jane, 2007, "'I Liked It So Much I E-mailed Him and Told Him': Teaching *The Lesser Blessed* at the University of California", *SAIL*, 19.1, 66-88.
- Hutcheon, Linda, 2006, *A Theory of Adaptation*, New York: Routledge.
- Johnston, Wayne, 2004, "Gained in Translation." *The Walrus*. (<<http://www.walrusmagazine.ca/articles/2004.06>>), 12.05. 2008.

- Kaiser, Rudolf, 1987, "Chief Seattle's Speech(es): American Origins and European Reception", in: Brian Swann/Arnold Krupat (eds.), *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 497-536.
- Lutz, Hartmut, 1995, "Confronting Cultural Imperialism: First Nations People are Combating Continuing Cultural Theft", in: Hans Braun/ Wolfgang Klooss (eds.), *Multiculturalism in North America and Europe: Social Practices – Literary Visions*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 132-151.
- , 2002a, *Approaches: Essays in Native North American Studies and Literatures*, Augsburg: Wissner.
- , 2002b, "German Indianthiasm: A Socially Constructed German National(ist) Myth", in: Colin G. Calloway/Gerd Gemünden/ Susanne Zantop (eds.), *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 167-184.
- Mavor, Liz, 2004, Interview with Richard Van Camp.
(http://www.kegedonce.com/authors_richard.php), 11.05.2008.
- Mensing, Kolja, 18.05.2004, Rezensionennotiz zu *Die Tageszeitung*.
(<http://www.perlentaucher.de/buch/17588.html>), 12.05.2008.
- Plenzdorf, Ulrich, 2004, *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Said, Edward, 1978, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge & Kevin Paul.
- , 1983, "Traveling Theory", in: Edward Said, *The World, The Text and the Critic*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 226-247.
- , 2006, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*, New York: Vintage Books.
- San Juan, Epifanio, 1998, *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*, New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Scott, David, 1999, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 2006, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in: Bill Ashcroft/Gareth Griffiths/Helen Tiffin (eds.), 2006, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., London/New York: Routledge, 28-37.
- Sylvester, Regine, 10.08.2007, "Er brachte es zur Sprache", *Berliner Zeitung*.
(<http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv>), 09.05.2008.
- Taylor, Drew Hayden (ed.), 2008, *Me Sexy: An Exploration of Native Sex and Sexuality*, Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre.
- "Ulrich Plenzdorf", 30.08.2007. *Times Online*.
(<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article2351303>), 11.05.2008.
- Van Camp, Richard, 1996, *The Lesser Blessed*, Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre.
- , 2000, *The Lesser Blessed*. Deutsch von Ulrich Plenzdorf. *Die ohne Segen sind*. Ravensburg: Ravensburger Buchverlag.
- , 2002a, *The Lesser Blessed*. Deutsch von Ulrich Plenzdorf. *Die ohne Segen sind*. Ravensburg: Ravensburger Taschenbuch.
- , 2002b, *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, Cape Croker Reserve: Kegedonce Press.
- , 2004, und Ulrich Plenzdorf. *Dreckige Engel*. Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag.
- , 2005, "Miracles", *Spirit: The Literature Issue*, 2.3, 2-4.
- Weaver, Jace/Craig Womack/Robert Warrior (eds.), 2006, *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Appendix: Email Exchange between the Two Authors

Dear Richard,
thanks for your reply. I am happy to see that you like the idea being published at Aufbau. I will proceed with the translation and the line editing. The

editor Gunnar Cynybulk will get in contact with you and sort the aspects of the contract etc. out with you. Hope you are well,
Your old Ulrich

> Ulrich!
> Great hearing from you!!!!
> I think this is wonderful. Yes, let us proceed with this. Please send the
> contract to:
> My address
121 Robson Drive
> Kamloops, BC
> V2E 2K6
> Canada
> ph: 250-828-1891
>
> ----- Original Message -----
> From: "Ulrich Homunkulus" <ulrich.plenzdorf@gmx.de>
> To: <michrich@shaw.ca>
> Sent: Thursday, March 06, 2003 4:13 AM
> Subject: Angel Wing Splash Pattern

Dear Richard,

I think you already know - or must have sensed - that Ravensburger will not publish "Angel Wing Splash Pattern". I don't really know why. (I guess it's still too much of an adult book.) So I decided - having worked so hard translating your impressive stories - to approach other German publishers.

Among others, I talked to people at the well-respected Aufbau-Verlag in Berlin. They have published Mailer, Hemingway, Faulkner, Twain in the past and would like to bring out AWSP - that is, they liked very much the version I presented them. I translated and picked out five stories ("How I Saved Christmas, Luke, The Night Charles Bukowski Died, Mermaids, Skins), which I arranged and changed slightly so that they can be read as a novel, sort of as part two of "The Lesser Blessed". (Aufbau and other do not or very rarely publish story collections.) Due to the Jugendliteraturpreis the readers want to know more about Larry Sole, his friends, his girls, his fate. I hope you don't mind my step and consider giving the rights to Aufbau. They would like to publish AWSP soon, so let me know ASAP what you think.

Hope you are alive and kicking,

Yours,

Ulrich Plenzdorf