

Of Metals and Men:

Kofman, Conversion and *The Merchant of Venice*

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My focus in this article is on one of Sarah Kofman's less often studied texts, her extended essay on Freud's reading of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, which was published in French in 1987 as a small book — *Conversions: 'Le Marchand de Venise' sous le signe de Saturne* (*Conversions: The Merchant of Venice under the Sign of Saturn*) — and in English translation (by Shaun Whiteside) three years later.¹ I will first examine *Conversions* as a response to a literary text, and consider the light it sheds on the relation between philosophy, psychoanalysis and literature in Kofman's work — for it is not just a reading of a literary text but a reading of a reading (by Freud), set off, as I shall argue, by a third interlocutor (Nietzsche). After setting out Freud's interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*, then, and Kofman's response to it, I want to concentrate on Kofman's methodology and the crucial role played in *Conversions* by the concept of ambivalence. I will read this text as consonant with Kofman's career-long concern for tropes and metaphors, for transformations and metamorphoses — at the most basic level, how one thing turns into another — and argue that her ultimately intense deconstructive interest in ambivalence acts as a riposte to the binary logic of conversion that she sees at work all too often in Freud.

Kofman's short book is actually a critique of the notion of conversion, then, but beyond these initial frames of reference, in the latter half of the article I want to bring out three other kinds of conversion in Shakespeare's play which seem to me to be neglected by Kofman herself, and (in true Kofmanian fashion) subject these absences and aporias to my own symptomatic readings. I will read *Conversions* as an aspect of Kofman's increasing interest in the 1980s in Judaism, and in coming to terms with her own Jewishness: one of the conversions

which Kofman thematizes is Shylock's forced conversion from Judaism to Christianity at the end of Act IV of Shakespeare's play, but I will be focussing on the other religious conversion in the play which Kofman neglects, namely the unforced conversion of Shylock's daughter Jessica. That will inevitably bring me on to examining some of the autobiographical elements which we can (and indeed are invited to) interpret *après coup* in the light of her late autobiographical text *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* (1994), specifically her own conversion to Christianity during the Second World War. I will also consider the theme of cross-dressing and gender fluidity in Shakespeare's text, which Kofman leaves surprisingly uncommented (given where the text comes in her oeuvre), and conclude by addressing one final supplementary sense of 'conversion', the question of translation.

'La relève de la philosophie'

Let me begin my analysis proper with a methodological reflection, by putting some linguistic pressure on the title of this collection: 'the relief of philosophy'. In (Derridean) French this formulation seems to me to describe rather well Kofman's attitude towards philosophy: 'la relève de la philosophie' or the sublation of philosophy. For Kofman philosophy is always destined to be sublated by literature and psychoanalysis: she holds the three in suspension, and they supplement each other. One could even go so far as to say 'ça relève de la philosophie' — it is in the nature of philosophy to be sublated. It is this approach that makes for the uncommon richness of Kofman's readings — advocating and demonstrating that the literary text has a truth of its own which is every bit as vital and urgent as the philosophical and psychoanalytic truths which it pre-empts. This, after all, is only what Freud himself maintained, in his letter to the great Viennese dramatist Arthur Schnitzler on the occasion of the latter's 60th birthday in 1922: 'I have formed the impression that you know through intuition — or rather from detailed self-observation — everything that I have discovered by laborious work on other people.'²

Kofman was writing on the intimate nexus between literature and philosophy right from her earliest publication (a 1963 article on Sartre).³ Throughout her career she chose to work on literary philosophers and on philosophical literary writers, always scrupulous *not* to maintain a strict separation between the two categories. In her early publications of the 1970s she follows Freud's literary tastes in reading Freud's literary readings — a series of four essays which would become *Quatre romans analytiques* (1974) — and *Conversions* is clearly a pendant to that project (even if, as it happens, it was published in English in 1990, a year before Sarah Wykes's translation of *Quatre romans analytiques* as *Freud and Fiction*).⁴ Kofman had not written on Shakespeare before this, and indeed she would not do so again: her interest is in Freud's reading, not so much in the Shakespeare itself, but in turn my interest will be in the interpretative gaps that inevitably result from such an approach.

Conversion and Ambivalence (Freud, Shakespeare, Nietzsche)

Kofman's essay is a reading of Freud's short piece 'Das Motiv der Kästchenwahl' (1913; literally 'The Motif of the Choice of Caskets', translated in the *Standard Edition* as 'The Theme of the Three Caskets').⁵ Here Freud opens with a discussion of *The Merchant of Venice* and rapidly establishes a parallel with a second Shakespeare play, *King Lear*: one of the important sub-plots of *The Merchant of Venice* has Portia's suitors choosing between three caskets, and (once the caskets have been 'translated' by Freud into three women, by a process of 'symbolic substitution' [*symbolische Ersetzung*] [TT, 236 / MK, 184]) this episode is paralleled with Lear choosing between his three daughters. In each case the least showy and apparently least valuable of the options is actually of the greatest value: in *The Merchant* it is the lead casket that contains the portrait of Portia, indicating a successful choice and her hand in marriage; in *King Lear* it is Cordelia whose mute love for Lear appears least but in fact is most fiercely sustained. Freud marshals a number of further examples from myth and fairy tales where a

male character chooses between three women (for example the Judgement of Paris, or ‘Cinderella’), and isolates a common characteristic of muteness. He argues that the muteness of the chosen one indicates (by impeccable dream logic) that it (she) in fact symbolizes death, and the fact that the process is represented as an act of choice rather than an ineluctable necessity indicates for Freud a wish-fulfilment (as in a dream): such scenarios figure the desire to control one’s own destiny, and the ultimate three women are indeed the Fates, who are depicted on the cover of the French edition of Kofman’s text.

As Kofman points out (CE, 145 / CF, 23), Freud reads these literary works as if they were dreams, in other words his interpretation uses the binary logic of substitution and inversion (*Ersetzung* and *Umkehrung* are the key operative terms in the text).⁶ Freudian dream logic is a logic of transformations, whereby one thing turns into another (its opposite), one thing can be translated into another in an interpretation which unfolds according to a principle of strict one-to-one equivalence. Thus in Shakespeare’s text (on Freud’s reading, according to Kofman) the first substitution is the claim that the three caskets stand for three women (hence the parallel with *Lear*), but Freud in fact makes a chain of substitutions, of which this is only the first: the lead casket signifies the pale, mute woman, who in turn signifies death; as in medieval alchemy, lead is but the point of departure for a series of transformations (CF, 44 / CE, 152).

But Kofman highlights an important and under-recognized feature of Freud’s analysis: there is a point in Freud’s narrative where the binary dream logic of inversion and substitution gives way to the recognition of ‘an ancient ambivalence’ of meaning (TT, 244 / MK, 191), between love and death (as two sides of the same coin). It is not that one turns into the other, he argues, but that both are available at the same time, and he points out the historic identity between different guises of Aphrodite: the goddess of love is *also* the bringer of death. So in this case the process of conversion is incomplete because the one has not been transformed into

the other wholly and without residue. Instead of a straight ‘replacement by the opposite’ (*Ersetzung durch das Gegenteil*) (TT, 244 / MK, 190), the ‘opposite’ origin remains, at least in trace form, and gives itself away to the trained hermeneut who knows where to look: ‘On closer inspection we observe, to be sure, that the original myth is not so thoroughly distorted that traces of it (*Resterscheinungen*) do not show through and betray its presence’ (TT, 245 / MK, 191).

Although Kofman doesn’t establish the parallel, this is actually (also) a Nietzschean gesture. Just as Freud is interested in the alchemical process of dream/myth interpretation and of literary symbolism, whereby something stands for and needs to be interpreted as its opposite, so Nietzsche is also drawn to the alchemical, to the conversion of base metal into gold, in the context of values. He opens his 1878 text *Human, All Too Human* with a ‘chemistry of concepts and sensations’, arguing:

Historical philosophy, by contrast (...), has ascertained (...) that there are no opposites (...): according to its explanation, there are, strictly speaking, neither any unegoistical actions nor any completely disinterested contemplation; both are only sublimations (*Sublimierungen*), in which the fundamental element appears to have almost evaporated (*fast verflüchtigt erscheint*) and reveals its presence only to the keenest observation.⁷

Kofman explicitly criticizes Freud for a failure to see the importance of this kind of ambivalence in Shakespeare’s text: ‘Freud’s error’, she writes (CE, 151 / CF, 41), is that he is led astray by the dream logic of inversion to focus exclusively on the lead casket (which he wants to ally with the goddess of death) and to ignore the lesson of the ambivalence of *all* the metals:

Thus, gold, silver and lead are all ambivalent, with an ambivalence that is concealed by their being split into three different, even opposite metals, which disguises their profound kinship, their common derivation from the metal which is supposed to be the most base: lead or Saturn; a split which masks the fact that each of them, and not lead alone, secretes (*porte inscrit en lui*) time, the risk of transformation, of deterioration, of transmutation in one direction or the other, and conceals, beneath gilded and silvered surfaces, genesis, development (*le devenir*) and death. (CE, 153 / CF, 46).

Shaun Whiteside's English translation of 'le devenir' in the final sentence as 'development' rather than 'becoming' conceals the Nietzschean co-ordinates of Kofman's analysis; elsewhere, for example, she refers explicitly to Shylock's 'will to power' (CE, 161 / CF, 66). In *Conversions* Kofman applies a Nietzsche-derived corrective to Freud — and appropriately enough her English translator Whiteside would go on to translate Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* for Penguin Classics three years later.⁸

For Kofman's hermeneutics, then, the concept of ambivalence is crucial and supersedes (dare one say, sublates) the various conversions on which Freud concentrates.⁹ Conversion is usually associated with a Damascene moment of *anagnorisis* (recognition) and *peripeteia* (sudden reversal of fortune — of the kind that befalls Shakespeare's merchant of Venice, Antonio, no less than twice in the course of the play), where scales fall from eyes and one thing flips or converts into another. Conversion is often accompanied by a violence: a developing situation reaches a tipping point, then switches in a catastrophic event — and indeed on the back cover of the French edition of *Conversions* Kofman glosses 'conversion' as 'catastrophic reversal'¹⁰ (cf. CE, 152 / CF, 43). In the process of conversion, one thing wholly becomes another, stands for the other and takes its place, entirely occluding it. But the message of ambivalence is that no successful, complete, perfective conversion is possible. The two obey

differing logics: on the one hand Freud's binary logic of either/or; on the other Kofman's deconstructive post-binary logic of both/and. In turn, Kofman herself proceeds to generalize the category of ambivalence and apply it to the rest of the play's themes in a chapter, 'Towards a General Ambivalence', that takes up over half of her text (CF, 31-70). Such a generalized theory of ambivalence is characterized by situations where two mutually antagonistic meanings exist simultaneously, one always poised to turn into the other on the stroke of an interpretation, like a semiotic Schrödinger's cat (conversion is an activity, ambivalence is a state awaiting an interpretation).¹¹

Kofman's argument reaches its culmination in her characterization of 'the structural ambivalence of time' itself: 'With and through time, which is fundamentally ambivalent, all conversions remain possible' (CE, 156 / CF, 54). This is what Kofman calls the 'true "theme" of this baroque drama' (back cover; cf. CF, 68 / CE, 161). It is not the first time that Kofman has made the notion of ambivalence work this hard: it is crucial to her reading of Freud's texts on E.T.A. Hoffmann too, for example,¹² and — incarnated in the recurring figure of the Janus face — it is an important feature of her analysis of Freud's book on jokes, of Nietzsche's autobiography *Ecce homo*, and so forth.¹³ In the conclusion to *Conversions* her claim is that the generalization of ambivalence (dis)qualifies Freud's overly simplistic readings of literature based on dream interpretations which in turn hinge on one-for-one decipherings. Kofman is presenting an alternative hermeneutics: she is correcting 'Freud's error' not only in his reading of this play but his reading of fiction more generally. One might say that Kofman converts conversion into ambivalence (and she argues that Freud missed a trick by not doing so himself), or that conversion is sublated by ambivalence.

Jessica and Sarah

At this point, though, one is entitled to feel slightly puzzled by the title of Kofman's work. Specifically: if ambivalence sublates (*relève*) conversion as an interpretative category, why does the book highlight the term to such an extent? After all, *The Merchant of Venice* is described by Kofman as 'a drama of conversion in all its forms' (CE, 162 / CF, 68f.). Now we need to bear in mind that 'Conversions' is Kofman's word, not Freud's, and she has chosen a particularly polysemous word to summarize all the different kinds of transformation that she is interested in, in Shakespeare's play and Freud's reading of it. The German translation of her text is titled *Konversionen* (1989),¹⁴ but that is not a term that Freud himself uses in his essay — as mentioned above, Freud predominantly uses the terms *Ersetzung* and *Umkehrung*, meaning respectively substitution and *inversion*. The dictionary offers many other possible German terms for 'conversion', most of which are formed with the prefix 'Um' — *Umrechnung*, *Umsetzung*, *Umbau*, *Umstellung*, *Umwandlung*, *Umformung*, *Umwechslung*, *Umdeutung* — but Freud doesn't use any of these in his essay. Nor indeed does Freud use the more standard word for religious conversion in German, *Bekehrung*, which is used by August Wilhelm von Schlegel in the standard German translated edition of the play, at the only point in Shakespeare's text when religious 'conversion' is explicitly mentioned, by Shylock's daughter Jessica in III.5:

Nay, you need not fear us, Lorenzo. Launcelot and I are out. He tells me flatly there's no mercy for me in heaven because I am a Jew's daughter, and he says you are no good member of the commonwealth, for in converting Jews to Christians, you raise the price of pork. (Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, III.5.25-29)¹⁵

Ihr habt nichts zu befürchten, Lorenzo; Lanzelot und ich, wir sind ganz entzweit. Er sagt mir grade heraus, im Himmel sei keine Gnade für mich, weil ich eines Juden

Tochter bin; und er behauptet, daß Ihr kein gutes Mitglied des gemeinen Wesens seid, weil Ihr Juden zum Christentum bekehrt und dadurch den Preis des Schweinefleisches steigert.¹⁶

By highlighting ‘conversion’ in her title, and using a word, ‘*Conversions*’, which allows (more easily than in German) a parallel to be established between religious conversion and other kinds, Kofman draws greater attention than otherwise to, precisely, the religious connotation of conversion (and she certainly makes more of the theme than does Freud, who ignores the religious dimension of Shakespeare’s play entirely in his 1913 treatment and makes no mention of either Shylock or Jessica). This in turn marks a new direction in Kofman’s writings of the 1980s and 1990s, a reflection on Judaism and the Holocaust (the other main text which she published in 1987 was her first significant text on a Jewish theme, *Smothered Words* [*Paroles suffoquées*]).¹⁷ Now Kofman supplements Freud’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s text by pointing out that, as she puts it on the back cover: ‘This book shows (...) that the conversion of the Jew is merely a specific case of a general, reciprocal convertibility (of the characters Antonio, Bassanio, Shylock and the metals they represent, lead, gold, silver).’ Kofman’s book generalizes conversion, then, and extrapolates it from the religious variety, but I want to bring Kofman back to the religious theme, and focus in particular not on the forced conversion of Shylock but on the conversion of Shylock’s daughter Jessica in the play.

In *Conversions*, Kofman focuses exclusively on Shylock’s conversion (CF, 67 / CE, 161) and fails to thematize his daughter Jessica, who also converts. There are important differences between the fates of the two characters: in IV.1 Shylock is obliged by Antonio to agree to be forcibly converted as punishment for insisting on his bond — a ‘conversion stipulation’ (in the words of Joan Ozark Holmer) that is peculiar to Shakespeare’s version of the story and is not present in his source material.¹⁸ Jessica, on the other hand, willingly agrees

to convert (and abjure her Judaism) through marriage to the Christian Lorenzo. Jessica is converted through marriage, and as Holmer points out, Shakespeare presumably invents the name Jessica in the first place, with its allusion to the Biblical figure of Jesse, precisely in order to (silently) invoke a Biblical figure who is a willing convert to Christianity.¹⁹ Jessica elopes with Lorenzo, taking with her a large cache of her father's jewels: she 'steal[s] from the wealthy Jew' (V.1.15) in all senses, and in this respect the play is a tale of multiple faithlessness.

The only point in Kofman's text where Jessica is mentioned is in the context of her theft of the jewels (CF, 61 / CE, 159). I want to argue that Kofman's omission of Jessica otherwise is a blind spot that betrays an anxiety stemming from an uneasy identification with Shakespeare's character. After all, the play has a very real personal connection for her if we bear in mind that Freud cites it according to its standard German title of *Der Kaufmann von Venedig*.²⁰ Kofman's significant personal investment in her analysis of Freud's reading of the play becomes apparent if we read it in the context of the culmination of that autobiographical strain in her writing which is *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* (1994). This is the text that reveals that for Kofman there is a very personal relation to 'conversion' in the religious sense because during the War she converted to Christianity herself. At the opening of *Rue Ordener* she invites us to read her earlier works in the light of it, so that is what I will briefly now do: 'Maybe all my books have been the detours required to bring me to write about "that"'.²¹

Her father Bereck Kofman acts as a kind of patron for *Rue Ordener* since he is invoked right at the outset in the form of his old fountain pen which, we are told, constrains her to write. We have seen that Kofman has no compunction about criticizing her mentor and 'setting Freud straight' in her analysis of his reading of Shakespeare, but the memory of her actual father (murdered in Auschwitz) is steadfastly and faithfully cultivated. Things are very different with her mother, though, and the main narrative in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* concerns how she turned against her birth mother in favour of her adoptive mother Mémé in wartime Paris. She relates

how she begins to eat pork and forgets her Yiddish; she is baptised and passes as Mémé's daughter, willingly taking on the name Suzanne. She internalizes Mémé's antisemitism and begins to hate her own Jewishness. In her repudiation of Judaism Sarah/Suzanne resembles Shakespeare's Jessica, the willing convert. Yet her attitude to her two mothers is agonal, ambivalent, and defies Jessica's binary logic. Paradoxically, Mémé makes her more conscious than ever of her Judaism — by, for example, introducing her to Jewish thinkers such as Spinoza, Bergson, Einstein and Marx — then after the War Sarah reclaims her Jewish inheritance, vindicating the fears of Shakespeare's contemporary audience that the Jewish daughter's conversion to Christianity might not last.²² I agree here with Joanne Faulkner, who argues 'that Kofman's abjection of Judaism is crucial to the construction of her Jewish identity in the context of the Nazi occupation — that at the heart of all identification is ambivalence.'²³

'Turning to Men'

Such neglect of the character of Jessica is also one aspect of how very little Kofman remarks on the women in Shakespeare's text, despite the fact that *Conversions* postdates her main groundbreaking work in feminist criticism — from 'Baubô' (1975) through *The Enigma of Woman* (1980) to *Le respect des femmes (The Respect of Women)* (1982).²⁴ The final aspect of the 'conversion' theme I want to explore here is another that Kofman herself neglects, namely the various ways in which Shakespeare's female characters are converted into men. The theme of the Saturnalia interested Kofman as early as *Nietzsche and Metaphor*,²⁵ and not surprisingly it is also discussed in *Conversions: The Merchant of Venice under the Sign of Saturn* (CF, 65-7 / CE, 160f.), but one important aspect of this feature of Elizabethan life as depicted in Shakespeare is the saturnalia of gender. Of course female characters were played by male actors in the first place, but this was compounded by further cross-dressing.²⁶

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica's first conversion is actually in II.6, when she is 'transformèd to a boy' (II.6.40) in order to escape from her father's supervision and elope. When it comes to transforming and converting herself, then, Jessica is like Homer's Odysseus, 'much-turned' (πολύτροπον). Jessica's travesty in II.6 then establishes the precedent for the rather better known cross-dressing episode in IV.1, when Nerissa and Portia 'turn to men' (III.4.78) to become the lawyers for the trial scene. But there is a chiasmic structure here because just as Jessica prefigures Portia's transformation, Portia returns the compliment with a dress rehearsal for Jessica's conversion-by-marriage in III.1. Portia is indeed the first character to be converted in the play, for after Bassanio correctly chooses the lead casket, Portia tells him: 'Myself and what is mine, to you and yours / Is now converted' (III.2.166-7). Portia seals this conversion by giving Bassanio the ring which he will subsequently give to 'Balthazar' in IV.2, only for the latter to return the ring in V.1 having converted back to Portia. In the world of Elizabethan comedy the conversion of cross-dressing is bound to be temporary and undone before the close, but as Holmer points out, these transformations can never be entirely undone since 'Jessica, Portia, and Nerissa all have names that are feminine conversions of masculine names so that all three women "turn to men" (III.4.78) in names as well as cross-gendered disguise'.²⁷ Such conversions are revealed to be but impermanent, reversible oscillations, which suggests the model of ambivalence rather than conversion once again.

Conclusion: 'This Conversion that is Called Translation'

Kofman's critical reading of Freud's interpretation of Shakespeare sublates multiple instances of conversion, converting them into so many kinds of ambivalence, and I have supplemented Kofman's account by extending the reach of her model of ambivalence to cover a number of other kinds of conversion in *The Merchant of Venice* which Kofman and Freud both neglect. In conclusion, though, I want to ask what might be the implications of the general theory of

ambivalence that Kofman sets out for what Derrida refers to as ‘this conversion that is called translation’.²⁸

Kofman’s biographer Karoline Feyertag argues that ‘Without doubt the concept of translation is central to her thinking.’²⁹ Christie McDonald figures Kofman’s wartime conversion as a ‘self-translation’,³⁰ and Kofman figures herself as a translator (of Kafka) in the dream which she reports and analyses in the short 1976 text ‘Tomb for a Proper Name’.³¹ She took a keen interest in translations of her work and was very supportive of her translators, while in the works themselves, although she always gives original-language quotations where necessary for the purposes of her argument, she also cites an array of translations. In *Conversions* the first point that Kofman makes is about a translation: in her first footnote she criticizes translator Marie Bonaparte’s French title for Freud’s text (‘Le Thème des trois coffrets’ rather than ‘Le Motif du choix des coffrets’ — CF, 11n. 1 / CE, 162n. 1).³² But that initial comment is the only explicit reference to translation in Kofman’s text, which refuses to describe as a translation any of the conversions, inversions, replacements, exchanges, metaphorical substitutions, transformations or transmutations which it otherwise identifies in Shakespeare’s play. A decade after Kofman, Derrida will have no such qualms, claiming in his 1998 lecture ‘What is a “Relevant” Translation?’ that ‘everything in the play can be retranslated into the code of translation and as a problem of translation’ (QTR, 30 / WRT, 372). He proceeds to read the play as a *locus classicus* of translation motifs, going so far as to claim (without reference to Kofman’s study) that ‘all translation is a conversion’ (QTR, 31 / WRT, 373),³³ and his English translator Lawrence Venuti then ensures that the lecture (and its reading of *The Merchant of Venice*) becomes a classic of translation studies by including his own translation in his best-selling *Translation Studies Reader*.

Unlike Derrida, Kofman did not write extensively on translation, and even *Conversions*, with its concern for all kinds of transformation, only points towards what a Kofmanian theory

of translation would look like, but she is at least more explicit elsewhere. One of the most substantial comments that Kofman makes on translation comes in *Comment s'en sortir* ([‘Beyond Aporia?’]) (1983), when she is writing of the ambiguities of the word ‘poros’ in relation to translating it:

To translate, to open up a path through a language by using its resources, to decide upon *one* meaning, is to escape the agonizing, aporetic impasses of any translation, to make the philosophical gesture *par excellence*: the gesture of betrayal (*un geste de trahison*). To recognize the untranslatability of *poros* and *aporia* is to indicate that there is something about the terms, which Plato borrows from a whole tradition, which breaks with a philosophical conception of translation, and with the logic of identity that it implies.³⁴

Following Walter Benjamin, Kofman is critical of the standard model of translation as conversion between equivalents, just as she is critical of Freudian dream theory for the same reason: ‘traditional’ translation for Kofman is a betrayal.³⁵ The translator is faced with an array of choices and usually needs to plump for one or the other. In the case of highly polysemous terms like *poros* and *aporia* it is obvious that limiting the range of signification promotes loss and amounts to a betrayal, but in fact this is the case to a greater or lesser extent in all acts of translation. The alternative is to embrace at least a degree of untranslatability in every translation, to hold open ambiguity and prize ambivalence (the logic of the both/and). Most publishers would not look kindly on a translator who submitted final copy offering a wealth of unresolved alternatives, but it ought at least to be possible to treat the untranslatable as a kind of regulative idea. This is the position — of studied ambivalence — adopted by Barbara Cassin for her monumental project the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, which defines its subject, and

its approach, with the watchword: ‘the untranslatable is rather what one keeps on (not) translating’.³⁶ In adopting a theory of translation based not on equivalence but on ambivalence in this way, Cassin seems to me to be Kofman’s worthy successor.

¹ Sarah Kofman, *Conversions: ‘Le Marchand de Venise’ sous le signe de Saturne* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), hereafter CF; ‘Conversions: *The Merchant of Venice* under the Sign of Saturn’, translated by Shaun Whiteside, in *Literary Theory Today*, edited by Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 142–66, hereafter CE.

² Sigmund Freud, *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, translated by Tania and James Stern, edited by Ernst L. Freud (New York: Basic Books, 1960), 339f.; Freud, *Briefe 1873–1939*, edited by Ernst L. Freud (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1960), 249f.

³ Kofman, ‘Le problème moral dans une philosophie de l’absurde’, *Revue de l’enseignement philosophique* 14:1 (October–November 1963), 1–7; reprinted in Kofman, *Séductions: De Sartre à Héraclite* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 167–81.

⁴ Kofman, *Quatre romans analytiques* (Paris: Galilée, 1974); translated by Sarah Wykes as *Freud and Fiction* (Boston: Northeastern University Press; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

⁵ Freud, ‘Das Motiv der Kästchenwahl’, in *Studienausgabe*, edited by Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards and James Strachey (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2000), X, 181–93, hereafter MK; ‘The Theme of the Three Caskets’, translated by C. J. M. Hubback, in *Art and Literature* (Penguin Freud Library, volume 14), edited by Albert Dickson (London: Penguin, 1990), 233–47, hereafter TT.

⁶ Graham Frankland suggests an important qualification: ‘Rather than reducing literature to the status of a dream, Freud seems, rightly or wrongly, to *elevate* the dream to the status of literary text’ (*Freud’s Literary Culture* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 133).

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human, I*, translated by Gary Handwerk, in *Complete Works*, edited by Bernd Magnus (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 3, 15; Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches, I, 1*, in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari, 15 vols., 2nd edition (Munich: dtv, 1988), 2, 23f. Kofman cites §162 of the same text in a footnote elsewhere (CF, 42n. 5).

⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, translated by Shaun Whiteside, edited by Michael Tanner (London and New York: Penguin, 1993).

⁹ Harold Bloom, likewise, stresses the importance of ambivalence in the play. Cf. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 189f.

¹⁰ Where not otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

¹¹ Also of relevance here is the notion of ‘convertibility’ that Jean Emily Tan derives from her reading of Kofman’s contemporaneous text *Paroles suffoquées (Smothered Words)*. See Jean Emily Tan, ‘Sarah Kofman as Philosopher of the Uncanny Double: Sarah Kofman’s Appropriation of Nietzsche and Freud’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, Loyola University Chicago, 2009), 226–9.

¹² See Duncan Large, ‘Kofman’s Hoffmann’, in *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman*, edited by Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 67–83 and 242–45.

¹³ See Kofman, *Pourquoi rit-on? Freud et le mot d’esprit* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), 74–82 (‘Un Janus double face’); *Explosion I: De l’‘Ecce Homo’ de Nietzsche* (Paris: Galilée, 1992), 157.

¹⁴ Kofman, *Konversionen: Der Kaufmann von Venedig unter dem Zeichen des Saturn*, edited by Peter Engelmann, translated by Monika Buchgeister (Vienna: Passagen, 1989).

¹⁵ *The Merchant of Venice* is cited in the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition by M. M. Mahood, 3rd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

¹⁶ Shakespeare, *Sämtliche Werke*, edited by Erich Loewenthal, 4 volumes, 5th edition (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1987), *I: Komödien*, 613.

¹⁷ Kofman, *Paroles suffoquées* (Paris: Galilée, 1987); translated by Madeleine Dobie as *Smothered Words* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Joan Ozark Holmer, *The Merchant of Venice: Choice, Hazard and Consequence* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1995), 221. See also Kenneth Gross, *Shylock is Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 107, and Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 191.

¹⁹ See Holmer, *The Merchant of Venice*, 86.

²⁰ Shakespeare's Kaufmann/Kofman is of course Antonio, not Shylock, although Portia's Doctor Balthazar, at least, cannot initially tell them apart (IV.1.170: 'Which is the merchant here and which the Jew?'). On their confusing similarities, see for example Graham Holderness, *The Merchant of Venice* (London: Penguin, 1993), 24–8. On the etymology of Kofman's surname, see Kofman, 'Trois textes autobiographiques', *La part de l'oeil*, 9 (1993), 83–5, 84; translated by Frances Bartkowski and Georgia Albert as 'Tomb for a Proper Name' in *Selected Writings: Sarah Kofman*, edited by Thomas Albrecht, with Georgia Albert and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 248–9.

²¹ Kofman, *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 9; *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, translated by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 3.

²² Kofman, *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, 57; *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, 47. On fears that Jessica's 'blood' would win out, see: James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 2nd edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 158f.; Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in 'The Merchant of Venice'* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), Chapter 3 (66–98); Brett D. Hirsch, 'Counterfeit Professions: Jewish Daughters and the Drama of Failed Conversion in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of*

Venice’, *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Special Issue 19 (2009), 4.1–37 (<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-19/hirscoun.html>).

²³ Joanne Faulkner, “‘Keeping It in the Family’: Sarah Kofman Reading Nietzsche as a Jewish Woman’, *Hypatia*, 23:1 (January – March 2008), 41–64, 42. See also Karoline Feyertag, *Sarah Kofman: Eine Biographie* (Vienna and Berlin: Turia + Kant, 2014), 269–80.

²⁴ See Kofman, ‘Baubô: Theological Perversion and Fetishism’, translated by Tracy B. Strong in *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Kelly Oliver (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 21–49; Sarah Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud’s Writings*, translated by Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); *Le respect des femmes (Kant et Rousseau)* (Paris: Galilée, 1982).

²⁵ See Kofman, *Nietzsche et la métaphore*, 2nd edition (Paris: Galilée, 1983), 106–17 (‘Les Saturnales’); *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, translated by Duncan Large (London: Athlone Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 74–80 (‘Saturnalia’).

²⁶ For a detailed discussion of this theme in the play, see Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 97–113.

²⁷ Holmer, *The Merchant of Venice*, 88.

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une traduction “relevante”?’ in *Actes des quinzièmes assises de la traduction littéraire (Arles 1998)* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1999), 21–48 (31), hereafter QTR; ‘What is a “Relevant” Translation?’, translated by Lawrence Venuti, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Venuti, 3rd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 365–88 (373), hereafter WRT.

²⁹ Feyertag, *Sarah Kofman*, 260.

³⁰ Christie McDonald, ‘Sarah Kofman: Effecting Self Translation’, *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, 11:2 (1998), 185–97.

³¹ Kofman, ‘Trois textes autobiographiques’, 84; ‘Tomb for a Proper Name’, 248.

³² It should be noted that Kofman has by this stage (the second line of her text) already mis-cited the German title of Freud’s essay (as ‘Das Motiv der Kästenwahl’ rather than ‘Kästchenwahl’, CF, 11); later, perhaps under pressure from the Bonaparte translation, she also mis-cites the title in French as ‘[Le] Motif du choix des trois coffrets’ (CF, 26). Freud himself grumbles in one of his footnotes that the Schlegel translation of *King Lear* misses Cordelia’s muteness (‘The Theme of the Three Caskets’, 239n. 1; ‘Das Motiv der Kästchenwahl’, 186n. 2).

³³ On the relation between Jewish–Christian conversion and translation, see especially Naomi Seidman, ‘False Friends: Conversion and Translation from Jerome to Luther’, in *Faithful Renderings: Jewish–Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 115–52.

³⁴ Kofman, *Comment s’en sortir?* (Paris: Galilée, 1983), 17f.; Kofman, ‘Beyond Aporia?’, translated by David Macey, in *Post-structuralist Classics*, edited by Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 7–44, 9f.

³⁵ See also Kofman, *Pourquoi rit-on?*, Chapter 2, ‘Traduttore, tradittore’ (59–92), especially 72–74. On psychoanalysis as a form of translation, see Alan Bass, ‘On the History of a Mistranslation and the Psychoanalytic Movement’, in *Difference in Translation*, edited by Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 102–41 (especially 102–04).

³⁶ Barbara Cassin, ‘Introduction’, in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, edited by Cassin, translated by Steven Rendall *et al.* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), xvii.