

The Red Countess

Online Appendix III

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Zur Mühlen as Translator of Upton Sinclair

Lionel Gossman

Zur Mühlen's work as Upton Sinclair's translator, along with the correspondence to which it gave rise and on which the following account is based, is of interest for three reasons. First, it documents Zur Mühlen's esthetics, i.e. her determined rejection of literary estheticism and her insistence, in the socio-political conditions of her time, on the pragmatic function of writing and on the moral and political responsibilities of writers, even though, as some explicit comments in *The End and the Beginning* and, more tellingly and poignantly, several scenes in her novels testify, this commitment did not destroy her esthetic sensibility and was not untinged with longing for a condition in which the creation of beautiful works could be a legitimate goal of the artist. Second, it documents Zur Mühlen's principles as a translator. In the Introduction to his *West-östlicher Divan*, Goethe distinguished three types of translation: literal translation, as close to word for word as possible; translation that adapts the source language to the target language and the source text to the target audience (the French are particularly adept at this type of translation, Goethe notes, with a hint of malice); and a type of expansive translation, which strives to alter and expand the target language in order to accommodate the source language and to open the target audience's mind to unfamiliar concepts and experiences (the type preferred by Goethe himself). It is clear from Zur Mühlen's correspondence that she is chiefly a practitioner of the second type of translation. As the function of writing is pragmatic, to affect people's minds and attitudes, she was always prepared – in translating her own work, as well as in translating the work of others – to adapt it to

the intended audience. Finally, because she presents herself, in her letters to Sinclair and the “Maliks” (Wieland Herzfelde and his associates at the head of the Malik Verlag¹), as a participant in a business and professional relationship, and not as the heroine of an autobiographical memoir or a fiction, the correspondence reveals aspects of her character and personality – her touchiness and her aristocratic pride, for instance – that she may not have chosen to exhibit as part of her public image or would at least have covered over with irony.

Zur Mühlen had already tried her hand at writing before she came to Davos. In her early twenties, before her marriage, she had written two – by her own account – “atrociously bad novels and several equally atrocious short stories” and had submitted them to a local newspaper in Merano (still at the time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). Almost everything was rejected, but “the friendly fair-haired editor” did accept two feuilletons, which appeared “under a fine pseudonym” (countesses did not publish stories), in the winter of 1906-1907.²

In Davos, isolated from both her own family and her husband’s, she undertook her first major translation project, a war story entitled *Igo Voyyny* [*The Burden of War*] by the then much admired Russian writer Leonid Andreyev. Though she may have been commissioned to do this translation, she is also likely to have been motivated by the book’s criticism of German militarism and by Andreyev’s reputation, based on his earlier writings – notably *The Red Laugh* (1905), about the horrors of the Russo-Japanese War – as a pacifist and humanitarian. First published in installments in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* under the title *Unter dem Joch des Krieges* Zur Mühlen’s translation was acquired in 1918 by the well-regarded Alsatian poet and novelist René Schickele, an ardent anti-militarist (later also anti-Nazi) and advocate of Franco-German reconciliation, for a series entitled “Europäische Bibliothek” that he was editing for a Zurich publisher.³ An extract from it

1 “People sometimes ask how the Malik Verlag came by its name. ‘Der Malik’ is the title and the hero of a novel by Else Lasker-Schüler [a poet long admired by Herzfelde], which first appeared in installments in the magazines *Der Brenner* and *Die Aktion* and finally, as of July 1916, in *Neue Jugend* [a monthly founded by Herzfelde in that year]. The word corresponds to the Hebrew *melech*. It means king, duke, leader.” (Wieland Herzfelde, in *Der Malik-Verlag 1916-1947: Ausstellung Dezember 1966 – Januar 1967* [Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Künste, 1966], p. 21)

2 *The End and the Beginning*, p. 97.

3 Unlike Zur Mühlen, who welcomed the Russian Revolution, Schickele had serious reservations about it, fearing that achieving socialism through violence would simply

was also sold, under the title *Hinter der Front*, in an inexpensive series put out by the same publisher.

In that same year, 1918, the Zurich Internationaler Verlag published Zur Mühlen's translation of Upton Sinclair's *King Coal* [*König Kohle*], only one year after its appearance in the United States, with an introduction by the eminent Danish critic Georg Brandes. Thus was inaugurated the long series of Zur Mühlen translations of Sinclair and an intense transatlantic literary collaboration that occupied a good many of the years Zur Mühlen and Klein spent in Frankfurt. The first extant letter from Zur Mühlen to Sinclair (written in English, like all her letters to him) dates from the summer of 1919. Contact between the two had apparently been established some time before, even though the forms of address are still quite conventional and do not yet have the more comradely tone of later letters. Zur Mühlen expresses her enthusiasm for Sinclair's *Jimmie Higgins* (1919), reports that she has completed her translation of it, discusses options for publishing the book in Germany, informs Sinclair that she has found a translator for one of his non-fiction works, and inquires about various other novels of his that she might translate. It is clear from this letter that Zur Mühlen was not simply Sinclair's translator but was in fact acting as his literary agent – seeking out publishers, finding translators for books she could not or did not wish to translate herself, looking out for magazines interested in purchasing the rights to publication in installments, and generally promoting his work in every way possible.

Dear Mr. Sinclair,

I have been wanting to write to you for such a [long] time and to tell you what a wonderful book *Jimmie Higgins* is, I really think you never wrote anything better. J.H. is translated and I shall send him off to a publisher in a few days time. Please tell me, now that peace is signed, have you still any objection to being published by a German publisher? Of course a decent one, one who did not publish patriotic books during the war, I know of one who is greatly interested in the book. Switzerland is shaking in its shoes, in its well made bourgeois shoes, and the word Bolshevism is enough to make any book taboo.⁴

substitute one tyranny for another. Likewise, though he welcomed the November revolution in Germany enthusiastically, he opposed what he saw as an appropriation of it by groups committed to a strict and exclusive ideology. Ultimately Zur Mühlen came around to a somewhat similar position. See Eric Robertson, *Writing between the Lines, René Schickele 'citoyen français, deutscher Dichter' (1883-1940)* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 91-94. It is worth noting that the translator of the Andreyev text is still given as "Hermynia von zur Mühlen." Within a year the "von" had been dropped and the "zur" had acquired a capital "Z."

⁴ Like Andreyev's *Igo Voyny*, Sinclair's *Jimmie Higgins* is an ambivalent anti-war book. Its Socialist hero develops from an anti-war pacifist into a supporter of the war as he becomes convinced that the defeat of Prussian militarism must precede the overthrow of the class system. That was also Sinclair's view; hence Zur Mühlen's question about his willingness

I have been asked by a Hungarian review, if you would undertake to let it have an article every month or so [...] and what your conditions would be. [...]

What about the *Journal of Arthur Stirling*, don't you think it would be suitable for translating?⁵ As Mr. Curtis Brown [an American literary agent—L. G.] will have told you, I have found a translator for *The Profits of Religion* for the German language. I thought it an awfully good book, but I myself would rather stick to fiction.[...] A chapter of *Jimmie Higgins* (German) will probably appear next month in a magazine, [I] shall sent it to you at once. Could you let me have some dates [i.e. data – L. G.] about yourself, as I have been asked to write about you and your last [i.e. latest – L. G.] books?

I do hope you will see your way to writing for the Hungarian review, it's going to be an awfully decent review, and it wants to bring articles by the best socialist writers of all countries.

Hoping to hear from you soon,

Very sincerely yours, Hermynia Zur Mühlen.⁶

Other letters confirm that if Zur Mühlen benefited from having become Sinclair's "authorized" translator (as she was to be described subsequently in the translations put out by the celebrated Malik Verlag) and thus ensuring for herself a much needed, relatively steady source of income,⁷ she was at least as strongly motivated – by her own account, primarily motivated – by her conviction that his work was capable of making a significant contribution to the cause she had now embraced wholeheartedly – that of international socialism. She does not disguise that she needs the money her work as a translator brings in. In fact, she makes it clear that she is dependent on it for her livelihood,⁸ but she insists that financial considerations were not what

to be published by a German publisher who had not been an extreme nationalist and her warning about the difficulty of publishing socialist books in Switzerland.

5 Published in 1903, this autobiographically based novel was in fact never translated into German.

6 Letter dated "Davos, 9 July 1919" in Upton Sinclair, Wieland Herzfelde, Hermynia Zur Mühlen, *Werter Genosse, die Maliks haben beschlossen... Briefe 1919-1950*. Upton Sinclair, Wieland Herzfelde, Hermynia Zur Mühlen, ed. Walter Grünzweig and Susanne Schulz (Bonn: Weidle Verlag, 2001), p. 14.

7 "I'm really doing my best, and of course it's also in my own interest to place the two new books and *Jim Porter* [a play by Sinclair] as soon as possible," she replied on one occasion to a complaint from Sinclair about delay in getting his work published, "as I am in very bad financial straights [*sic*] myself." (Letter of 28 June 1926, *ibid.*, p. 28). Like the author and the publisher, the translator received not a flat fee but a percentage, albeit a fairly small one, of the income from sales. This may explain Zur Mühlen's preference for translating works of fiction, since, by her own account, these sold better than non-fiction works and were thus more profitable to everybody, including the translator. Nevertheless, Zur Mühlen's political commitment often overrode her financial interest and she was by no means consistent in passing non-fiction works along to other translators.

8 In a letter to Sinclair of 16 December 1927, Zur Mühlen complained that while the Malik Verlag, which had become his main publisher in Germany, was reluctant to accept her translations of works by him that it thought would not find a ready market, it also tried to prevent her from placing those works with other publishers. "I am quite ready," she wrote, "to translate all the books you send me, also theoretical ones at the risk of not finding a publisher, but as I have to work for my living that way I simply cannot afford to let a book lie about for

drew her to Sinclair in the first place. "I firmly believe that [your work] has an enormous propaganda value," she tells Sinclair,⁹ and she asks him for the names of other American writers "who have written socialist fiction," since she is "anxious to translate that kind of book."¹⁰ It could even be said that Zur Mühlen regarded Sinclair primarily as a valuable propagandist for socialism. That was certainly the aspect of his work that she constantly emphasized in her dealings both with him and with the Malik Press.

In general, Zur Mühlen's attitude to literature, including her own writing, was functionalist rather than esthetic. She believed that writers have an obligation to enlighten their readers. "Man muß es ihnen sagen" [We've got to tell them] is the title of one of her many feuilleton sketches and that theme is repeated throughout her work. Her entire literary career demonstrates that of the two kinds of writer distinguished by Peter de Mendelssohn, the exiled German novelist, historian, and future biographer of Thomas Mann, in a lecture to the International P.E.N. Congress in London in September 1941 – the writer, to whom what matters most is language and who, forced into exile, has to choose between not writing at all and writing for an absent public that may never discover his work, and the writer to whom it is the content and effect of writing that matters most and who will therefore use any medium, including the language of the country of exile, in order to reach the public – Zur Mühlen belongs in the second category. She wrote in multiple genres to get her social and moral message across: the short story, the fable, the children's fairy tale, the novel, the detective story, the autobiographical memoir. She made her translations in the same spirit and with the same intent. Characteristically, when she had to seek refuge in England in 1939, she accepted that she had to write in the language of her country of exile – or at least to translate her work into that language and adapt it to a new reading public.¹¹ It should also be recalled

which I could find a publisher, only to please the Maliks' vanity." (Ibid., pp. 71-72)

9 Ibid. Cf. letter of 23 November 1927 in which she repeats a frequent complaint that the "bottom line" has displaced politics as the top priority of the Malik Verlag, so that the firm is dragging its feet over Sinclair's more directly political, non-fiction writings: "I really do my best, and nobody can be more sorry if a book of yours does not come out here than I, because I believe they are the best propaganda we can have." (Ibid., p. 67)

10 Letter of 9 July, 1919, *ibid.*, p. 14. As Zur Mühlen went on to translate Nathan Asch, Max Eastman (during his long socialist phase), and Edna Ferber, her commitment to "progressive" voices in American literature would seem to be totally sincere.

11 On De Mendelssohn's lecture and on German writers exiled in Great Britain who chose to write in English, see Waltraud Strickhausen, "Schreiben in der Sprache des Anderen: Eine Vorstudie zu den Publikationsmöglichkeiten und der Wirkung englischsprachiger Exilwerke in Großbritannien," in Dieter Sevin, ed., *Die Resonanz des Exils. Gelungene und mißlungene deutschsprachiger Exilautoren* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992), *Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literature*, 99, pp. 369-96.

that repudiation of “art” was by no means uncommon among left-leaning artists in Germany in the years following the war. Harry Graf Kessler tells in his diaries of visiting George Grosz, who, as it happens, illustrated some of Zur Mühlen’s translations of Sinclair, in his studio in Wilmersdorf: “He wants to become the German Hogarth, deliberately realistic and didactic; to preach, improve and reform. Art for art’s sake does not interest him at all,” Kessler noted. In fact, “Grosz argued that art as such is unnatural, a disease...Mankind can do without art.”¹²

After *König Kohle*, Zur Mühlen placed two of her earliest translations of Sinclair – *Jimmie Higgins* (1919) and *Der Liebe Pilgerfahrt* [Love’s Pilgrimage] (1922) – with the respected firm of Kiepenheuer in Potsdam.¹³ She was also offered a contract on generous terms by the up and coming publishing house of Kurt Wolff in Leipzig,¹⁴ which had asked her to recommend books by American authors. However, she chose instead, out of political solidarity, and on financial conditions less favorable to her (or so she claimed some years later), to link her fortunes and those of her American author to the Herzfelde brothers’ young, avant-garde, and left-wing Malik Verlag. By working with and for the Malik Verlag, and by adding Sinclair to its stable of authors, Zur Mühlen apparently felt she would not simply be earning a modest living for herself and her partner Stefan Klein but advancing the cause of socialism in Germany. Collaboration with Malik, she apparently believed, would focus public attention on the socialist message of Sinclair’s work, while at the same time strengthening the reputation of the firm and virtually guaranteeing that everything Sinclair wrote (and that she translated) would be published in Germany. Accordingly, she reached an agreement with Malik, by which it was given the first option on all her “authorized” translations of Sinclair’s works, while in return, as she understood it at least, Malik undertook to give her the first option on translating any work of Sinclair’s that it was interested in publishing. Thus she could seek other publishers only for works that Malik declined to publish,¹⁵ while on its side, Malik could seek the services of another

12 *Berlin in Lights: The Diaries of Count Harry Kessler (1918-1937)*, trans. and ed. by Charles Kessler (New York: Grove Press, 1999), p. 64 (5 February 1919).

13 Founded in 1909. After the Second World War, the firm of Kiepenheuer & Wirtsch was re-founded in Jena and became an imprint of the powerful East German Aufbau Verlag.

14 Obligated to flee Germany when Hitler came to power, Wolff subsequently founded the prestigious house of Pantheon Books in New York.

15 This was the case with her translation of *The Spokesman’s Secretary* (1926), published by Universum Bücherei, Berlin, in 1927 as *Präsident der U.S.A. Roman aus dem Weißen Haus* and presumably also with her translation of *Manassas* (1904), which appeared as *Sklaverei* with the Renaissance Verlag in Vienna in 1923 – unless the second of these had been contracted for

translator only for works by Sinclair that she had declined to translate.

In the next five or six years a close collaboration of Zur Mühlen with Wieland Herzfelde resulted in the translation by Zur Mühlen and the publication by the Malik Verlag of a slew of Sinclair works:

In 1921, the novel *100% Roman eines Patrioten* [100%. *The Story of a Patriot*, 1920] and the plays *Die Maschine* [The Machine, 1911] and *Prinz Hagen* [Prince Hagen, 1903] in the firm's "Collection of Revolutionary Stage Works."

In 1922, the novels *Der Liebe Pilgerfahrt* [Love's Pilgrimage, 1911] and *Man nennt mich Zimmermann* [They Call me Carpenter, 1922] along with *Das Buch des Lebens* [The Book of Life: Mind and Body, 1921, *The Book of Life: Love and Society*, 1922].

In 1923, *Der Sumpf* [The Jungle, 1906], Sinclair's first great success, reworked (and, as it turned out, considerably cut) by Zur Mühlen from Eduard Eugen Ritter's 1906 translation for the Hanover publisher Sponholtz.

In 1924, the novels *Jimmie Higgins* [1919], taken over from the publisher Kiepenheuer, *Samuel der Suchende* [Samuel the Seeker, 1910], reworked from a 1911 translation published by Sponholtz in Hanover, and the 250-page tract *Parademarsch. Eine Studie über amerikanische Erziehung* [The Goose-Step. *A Study of American Education*, 1923].

In 1925, the novels *Der Industriebaron* [A Captain of Industry, 1906], *Die Metropole* [Metropolis, 1908], *Nach der Sintflut* [The Millennium, 1924], and *Die Wechsler* [The Money Changers, 1908], the play *Die Hölle* [Hell: a verse drama and photo-play, 1923], and a second tract on education, *Der Rekrut* [The Goslings: A Study of the American Schools, 1924].

This astonishing productivity culminated in 1927 in the publication, in the same year as it appeared in America, of the greatest of Sinclair and Zur Mühlen's successes in Germany, the novel *Petroleum* [Oil!, 1927], along with the play *Singende Galgenvögel* [Singing Jailbirds, 1924], which was performed almost simultaneously with its publication, first in Breslau and then in a production by the celebrated director Erwin Piscator in Berlin, and of *Die goldene Kette oder die Sage von der Freiheit der Kunst* [Mammonart, 1925], a long 400-page tract on the subservience of art to power and money.

After 1927 there was nothing more. The Malik Verlag brought out a few

prior to the arrangement with Malik. In addition, her translation of a short play, *The Second Storey Man*, the original of which was first performed in San Francisco in 1909, was published in 1924 as *Der Fassadenkletterer* by Verlag Die Wölfe in Leipzig, which also published in that same year Zur Mühlen's own collection of adult fables entitled *Der Rote Heiland* [The Red Redeemer].

more books by Sinclair to round out their 13-volume edition of his works, but these were not translated by Zur Mühlen.¹⁶ Zur Mühlen, on her side, published her translation of Sinclair's 1926 satire *The Spokesman's Secretary: Being the Letters from Mame to Mom* [*Präsident der USA: Roman aus dem Weißen Haus*], which Malik had declined, with the Berlin publishers Universum Verlag in 1927 and Robinson Verlag in 1928. The events and conflicts that put an end to an unusually productive collaboration of author, translator, and publisher throw light on Zur Mühlen's situation in those years as a writer earning her living by translations, as well as on the changing literary situation in Germany in the 1920s and on the problems confronted by translators in general.

The turning point appears to have been 1925, when Malik, which was in constant financial difficulty, became a public company with Felix Weil, the son of a millionaire German businessman, as one of the largest shareholders. The new management was strongly sympathetic to the Left and Wieland Herzfelde was kept on as editor. (Felix Weil had financed the first "Marxist Workweek" at Ilmenau in Thuringia, in 1923, which was attended by Geörgy Lukács, Karl Korsch and Karl Wittfogel, and he had also provided the funds to set up, in the following year, the celebrated *Institut für Sozialforschung* in Frankfurt, with which notable Marxist scholars like Adorno, Borkenau, and Horkheimer were associated.) Nevertheless, Zur Mühlen alleged that financial considerations began to loom larger in the operations of the firm to the detriment of its political mission.¹⁷ Until then, author, translator, and publisher had indeed worked harmoniously and in friendship, as a team, supporting each other in every way possible. In 1922, for instance, as he was nearing completion of *The Goose-Step: A Study of American Education* – a denunciation of American higher education as a system designed to produce conformist defenders of capitalism – Sinclair asked "Mrs. Zur Mühlen" to find "quotations on the subject of the Goose Step from German military authorities" for him. As he expected to finish this book "in about six weeks," she should do this "as promptly as you can." He was sure, he wrote, that "there must be a great many manuals and discussions of military affairs in which the moral and spiritual effect of

16 Most of the new translations were by Paul Baudisch, an experienced translator of Dos Passos, Bret Harte, and Zane Gray, but not a writer in his own right. One translation was by Elias Canetti.

17 The growing conflict between Zur Mühlen and the management of the Malik Verlag may not be unrelated to tensions and disputes within the fractious German Communist Party in the 1920s. Unfortunately, in the absence of documentary evidence, this possibility could not be investigated.

the Goose Step is favorably commented on by writers of authority in that field." In addition, he asked her to make a selection of appropriate texts – "I don't want any long passages, just a few sentences" – and to "translate for me" what she finds, bearing in mind that he is "not familiar with military phraseology."¹⁸ Zur Mühlen was apparently happy to play the role of assistant to Sinclair as well as that of agent and translator.

On her side, as late as 1927, Zur Mühlen wrote Sinclair on behalf of the Malik Verlag about a possible film based on *King Coal*.

The Maliks...want to know right away whether they can have the picture rights for *King Coal*. The Prometheus people are the same who produced *Potemkin* and Eisenstein would stage [i.e. direct – L. G.] *King Coal*, so that it would be sure to be fine...The Maliks want to know if you agree to the conditions...; you getting 66⅔ % of the royalties, the Maliks who have to do all the agent's work 25%, and I 8⅓ %... The Maliks want to insert in the agreement, that in case *King Coal* [is] produced, the propaganda must remain the same as in your novel.

As his agent, she urges him to accept a deal that she clearly finds fair and believes would promote the sale of his books. "It would mean a lot for all your books if the film were produced over here."¹⁹ In a similar spirit of friendly co-operation, she praises John Heartfield's cover design for the forthcoming *Mammonart* [*Die goldene Kette*],²⁰ gives strong support to Wieland Herzfelde's plan to write a biography of Sinclair, and urges the latter to assist Herzfelde in every way possible.

The Maliks have decided not to take Floyd Dell's book about you.²¹ I am sorry on account of Floyd Dell, but I believe they are right; the book is too American, written for the American public and the people over here have another idea about you, you are for them much more the Comrade and the agitator, than the writer. Comrade Herzfelde wants to write the biography himself; I believe he could do it well, he's a good writer and could bring out just the points we want over here. Do please send him all the dates [i.e. data – L. G.] he wants.

She then urges Sinclair to send photographs of himself, his parents, and his son, adding that "Comrade Herzfelde is here and we are going through *Oil!* once more; we want to make it *the* book of the season."²²

18 Letter of 9 September 1922, in Upton Sinclair, Wieland Herzfelde, Hermynia Zur Mühlen, *Werter Genosse, die Maliks haben beschlossen... Briefe 1919-1950*, p.17.

19 Letter of 19 March 1927, *ibid.*, p. 35.

20 Letter of 7 May 1927, *ibid.*, p. 41.

21 Floyd Dell, *Upton Sinclair: a Study in Social Protest* (New York: George H. Doran; London: Werner Laurie, 1927).

22 Letter of 18 May 1927, *ibid.*, p. 44. The comments on Dell's book throw an interesting light on Zur Mühlen's own translation practices. She was clearly acutely aware of the specific character of different reading publics: the German public was not the same as the American

The first sign of something's having gone wrong in the relation of author, translator, and publisher was a "confidential" letter from Sinclair to Wieland Herzfelde in October 1927, asking about "the literary quality of the German translations by Mrs. Zur Mühlen that you have been publishing." He had been informed, he wrote, by "several persons" that "they are not of good literary quality." One of his other translators into German had even claimed that his books had been "seriously mishandled" and cited one work that was "so badly mutilated, it was unrecognizable." Sinclair professed to feel bad about having raised this question: "Mrs. Zur Mühlen has worked so hard and been so enthusiastic over my books that you will understand I feel deeply grateful to her, and am extremely reluctant to do anything that would hurt her feelings." His primary concern, however, had to be "for the usefulness of my books in Germany."²³

Herzfelde answered "confidentially" – though he too claimed to write with a heavy heart, for "Frau Zur Mühlen is a Comrade, is in very poor health, lives a hard life with great uprightness, and has broken with her husband and her wealthy family on account of her convictions" – that "we are *not* satisfied with the translations." Their deficiencies may be partly due, he suggested, again softening his criticism with professions of sympathy, "to Zur Mühlen's illness," which, along with some other things, puts her in need of considerable sums of money, so that "Comrade Zur Mühlen cannot devote as much care to her work as she might do in more favorable circumstances." The Press had, in fact, been so unhappy with her translations that it had got her to agree to their being reviewed and where necessary revised. This is costly, however, and also holds up publication. Had Sinclair not broached the matter first, therefore, the Press would have had to ask him to consider "a new arrangement" for the translation of his works, especially in view of the fact that business is expanding and that he, Herzfelde, can no longer devote "weeks and months to reviewing and correcting Comrade Zur Mühlen's translations." As, in addition, "Comrade Zur Mühlen has declared that she will no longer accept having her work reviewed and corrected by me, since this delays publication of the books... we request that you concede to us the right to appoint authorized translators."²⁴

one. Books – and presumably translations also – must therefore be oriented toward a particular public if they are to have any chance of success and therefore also of achieving the political effectiveness that mattered so much to Zur Mühlen.

23 Letter of 9 October 1927, *ibid.*, p. 54.

24 Letter of 9 November, *ibid.*, pp. 60-61. The request is confirmed in a letter of 12 November 1927, *ibid.*, p. 63.

In the meantime Zur Mühlen is charging more and more angrily in her letters to Sinclair that “the bottom line” has replaced political commitment as the priority of the Malik Verlag since its take-over in 1925. “Am once again having a battle royal with the Maliks on account of your new book,” she complains in October 1927. “They do not want it, as they believe it would not ‘sell as well as your other books.’ Since they have got more money they are frightfully commercial and have lost all love for propaganda. Besides they are very mad with me for having placed the *Speaker* [*The Spokesman’s Secretary*]; their idea is that none of your books, which they won’t publish for financial reasons, ought to be published at all, however good the propaganda might be.”²⁵ A few months later she declares that the old spirit has gone out of the firm completely: “The Malik-Verlag has been a purely capitalist firm for the last three years.”²⁶ Though he has been kept on as editor, Wieland Herzfelde is now no longer a free agent and does not have the backbone to stand up to the new owners.²⁷ The result is that “the Maliks” are now dragging their feet, asking her to shorten some of her translations – which “only means with the Maliks of today, cutting out the propaganda”²⁸ – and postponing or even turning down publication of Sinclair’s non-fictional writing, which they fear will sell poorly. “I had to fight like a lion for each propaganda word in *Oil!* And the same with *Mammonart*,” she reports.²⁹ In the case of the latter, they keep putting off publication. In addition, they have been encouraging her to decline to translate works they think will not sell well.³⁰ At the same time, they do their utmost to prevent her from offering anything by Sinclair to other publishers, and they were angry when she succeeded in finding a publisher for *The Spokesman’s Secretary*, which they had declined.³¹ “Please stick up

25 Letter of 29 October, 1927, *ibid.*, p. 58.

26 Letter of 10 April 1928, *ibid.*, p. 115.

27 “I must tell you that Comrade Herzfelde cannot help himself, because he dares not make a stand against those people of the firm who have the money.” (Letter of 29 October 1927, *ibid.*, p. 58).

28 Letters of 29 October and 16 December 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 58, 71.

29 Letter of 29 October 1927, *ibid.*, p. 58.

30 “Whenever they do not want to take a book, they come and tell me ‘Don’t translate it. It’s not a good book.’ It was the same with *Judd* [*Letters to Judd*]. But I know a good book when I see it and have told them that I shall translate all the books you entrust to me and find other publishers.” (Letter of 16 December, 1927, *ibid.*, p. 71) It would be much easier to do this if she could also promise those other publishers “one of your next novels, but we are, alas, bound to the Maliks, who take the novels but do not take the other books.” (Letter of 23 November, 1927, *ibid.*, p. 67)

31 Letter of 23 November 1927, *ibid.*, p. 67. Again in letter of 16 December 1927: “You must remember one thing: they want to prevent any of your books being published by other publishers. They told me I ought not to try and find a publisher for *The Speaker* as it was a

for me," she pleads. "I know they want to get the authorization for your books away from me." She will gladly give up translating his books "if it is better for them," but she "has done for them whatever I could and shall go on doing it."³²

In the late fall of 1927 Zur Mühlen told Sinclair that "the Maliks" had begun to find fault with her translations. "The proofs of *Mammonart* come trickling in at last," she tells Sinclair, "but I have made myself enemies of Herzfelde and the rest. All of a sudden they pretend that the book is so badly translated that they must correct everything."³³ A few weeks later, however, she heard from Sinclair himself about letters "various persons" had sent him, "mentioning that the German translations of my books were not adequate and that the influence of the books was being diminished thereby." He has "attributed this to the fact that [she] was ill and unable to give the amount of time necessary to the work." As he does "not know how to decide such a problem, because [he] would not be unfair to [her] for anything in the world, [he has] submitted [it] to a German friend here in California, who is a competent man of letters and whose opinions of the translations will be useful to [him]." (68-69) He then shifts to the topic of his latest novel *Boston* (about the Sacco and Vanzetti case). The people at Malik, he tells her, "thought they might be able to make arrangements for serialization" of this work "in Germany, if I would send them a copy of the manuscript. But I do not know," he adds somewhat disingenuously, "whether the magazine or paper would want to use your translation, or whether they would insist upon having a translator of their own." If he were on the spot, he would be able to "work these matters out." As this is not the case, however, "I shall have to leave it in Malik's hands because they are in Berlin, where they can do the negotiating and get a prompt decision, which of course will be essential in the case." Sinclair is well aware of the effect his letter will have on Zur Mühlen for he closes, weakly, on an apologetic note: "I hope you will understand this and not be too much disappointed with me. I have for you a very deep appreciation and sincere esteem, and I want you to understand this and not feel that I am failing in loyalty to you."³⁴

Zur Mühlen *was* offended, however, and quite angry. To answer "your weak book and would hurt your reputation over here. They wanted me to write and tell you that." (Ibid., p. 71).

32 Letter of 16 December 1927, *ibid.*, p. 72.

33 Letter of 23 November 1927, *ibid.*, p. 66.

34 Letter of 9 December, 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

accusation of my having translated your books badly," she writes,

I must do something that sounds like bragging, which I loathe. First of all I am sorry you do not tell me who the friends are, who have attacked me. You know that ever since translating your books begins to mean good business and not a labour of love, many people wanted to get the authorization, some writing to you, some to me. Perhaps some of the 'friends' would have liked to translate you or have their wives, sisters or friends translate you. If you still have the old reviews I sent you, you will also see that the translations have been praised by good papers. Besides, please forgive if that sounds like bragging, I can't help it, I have placed translations of mine in the best German publishing firms like Kurt Wolff, Kiepenheuer (don't forget he was the first to bring you [out], not the Maliks), the Drei Masken Verlag, and a good many more. My own books have not only been published over here but translated into French, Hungarian, Czech, Japanese, Russian, English and Serbian. I have just placed a novel I translated with the Frankfurter Zeitung and your German friend in California will be able to tell you that the Frankfurter Zeitung...does not take bad stuff. The same paper has also asked me to write my Memoires for it this year. I have always given my best work to your books. At Oil! I worked correcting and recorrecting five months.³⁵... The whole complication reminds me of what happened with Bernard Shaw and his translator Trebitsch. As soon as Shaw meant good business over here, Trebitsch was attacked all round and a big German review published all his mistakes. But...old B.S. stood up for his translator, saying he translated me before I was famous in Germany, and even if he did make some mistakes,...I'll stick to him. One more thing in my defense. The Malik-Verlag did a lot for your books, I'm the first to acknowledge it, but it was easier for a firm than for me, and I can tell you honestly that I often put off well paid work so as to translate your books and let the Maliks have them at conditions that were bad for me.

Now, as to *Boston*, you know that I cannot, according to my agreement with the Maliks, translate for another publisher or sell any of your books which they have not refused. But the same holds for me; they can only bring [out] a translation of your books by another translator if I have refused to translate the book. It was therefore most incorrect of the Maliks to ask for your Ms. without telling me about it and [I] shall let them know it.

The letter concludes on a note of reproach and disappointment.

As you have been so honest with me I shall be honest too and tell you that your letter was one of the greatest disappointments I ever had, because I felt so sure that you would first hear my side of the whole affair.³⁶

Matters deteriorated further when, as Zur Mühlen wrote to Sinclair, "I told the Maliks how uncorrect they had been in the case of *Boston*, whereupon they told me that *you* had been the first to wire and propose another

³⁵ She admits that one book – *The Captain of Industry* – was not well translated. At the time, she explains, she did not have access to a library and could not check the appropriate technical language. Though she asked Comrade Gumperz of the Malik Verlag to go over it and correct it for her, "people told me afterwards that many expressions were wrong."

³⁶ Letter of 27 December 1927, *ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

translator." She repeats that Malik wants to get rid of her because she insists that "not a single revolutionary phrase of your books...be left out." She now sees and presents herself as the exploited writer up against the capitalist publisher. "I must defend myself as I stand alone against a publishing firm which is, compared to me, the capitalist, so that in holding out against them I fight not only for myself but for all other writers who have anything to do with the firm." For that reason she plans to take the dispute to the Writers League Union [*Schutzverband Deutscher Schriftsteller*]. Perhaps out of genuine concern for Zur Mühlen, perhaps also in order to avoid an unpleasant scandal, even a lawsuit,³⁷ the Malik Verlag had invited Zur Mühlen to review and correct, for a fee, whatever translation was made of *Boston*. She rejected this olive branch with scorn, however. "If I translate so badly, and can neither write German nor understand English, what's the good of my correcting a Ms.?"³⁸ Again and again she insists on her commitment to Sinclair's work and to the cause to which he, she, and Malik were all once dedicated. She took up the task of translating him in the first instance as a labour of love, she protests, long before publishing (and translating) him brought in much money. To the contrary, she turned down better paying contracts in order to devote herself to his books. And for similar disinterested reasons she offered his work to Malik on better terms for them and worse terms for her than she had been offered by other publishers.³⁹

In Zur Mühlen's eyes, the management of Malik was without any doubt behind an elaborate scheme to discredit her in order to acquire for the press itself the translation rights that she felt were hers not only by contract but in

37 See HZM's letter to Sinclair of 10 April 1928 (p. 115) on the possibility of her bringing a lawsuit against the Maliks.

38 Letter of 9 January 1928, *ibid.*, pp. 82-83. Zur Mühlen apparently did not know that on that same day, 9 January 1928, profiting from the advice that she, as his agent, had given him about the publication of his books in Germany, but bypassing her completely, Sinclair had proposed to Herzfelde that "you agree to publish all my books... Manifestly all of them will not be equally salable, and if I let you have all the salable ones I might find it impossible to get publishers for the others. On the whole I think it would be better for you to have a complete list of my books rather than to have other publishers getting the advantage of the advertising of my books." (*Ibid.*, p. 81)

39 There may well be truth in this claim. In the late 1920's Zur Mühlen translated several novels of Nathan Asch for the Frankfurt publisher Rütten und Loening and was apparently also acting as Asch's literary agent on the European continent. Many years later, in a letter of February 3, 1949, written from England, she asked Asch if he had any new works for her to translate, citing their "usual terms 50/50." (Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University) Presumably this meant that royalties were shared equally by author and translator – terms much more favorable to the translator than those on which she had made her translations of Sinclair.

light of her longstanding efforts on Sinclair's behalf and her demonstrated success in putting him on the map in Germany and turning him into a bestselling author. However, a letter in which she listed her grievances against the press elicited a harsh reply from Sinclair in which he sided with the press and rejected her arguments point by point.⁴⁰ The last straw for Zur Mühlen, the former countess and committed socialist, was Sinclair's insinuation that translating his work had been "a profitable matter" for her and that commercial considerations lay behind her work as his translator. "Till *Oil!*," she retorted in a letter dated 6 February 1928, "it was anything but profitable, you can ask Albert Rhys Williams [an American socialist journalist, author of a book on Lenin and the Russian Revolution that Zur Mühlen had translated – L.G.] about...the struggle I had to pay my way." When she first offered Sinclair's work to it, "the Malik Verlag offered me 2% and I accepted it." Though this was a low fee for a translator, she has no regrets, "as I really believe that *Oil!* which has made you known all over Germany would not have had the success [it had] if the other books had not paved the way." "It really was a labour of love translating the books," she insists, adding, not without some malice, that it was all the more a labour of love as "my literary friends told me again and again that I was spoiling all my chances with other publishers by translating books which were in the eyes of 'literary' Germany pure propaganda and not literature."⁴¹

All the participants in the quarrel tried to occupy the moral high ground. Zur Mühlen, for her part, concluded her letter by thanking Sinclair "for the possibility you have given me of letting the German working people know and love your books. They – and also several well known German critics and authors could tell you that my translation has not hurt your work." That said, however, their relationship had no future. "That one phrase of yours [the assertion that translating him had been "a profitable matter"] has made everything impossible for me. I shall not bother you again with my letters and take up your time with them. Yours sincerely, Hermynia Zur Mühlen."⁴² Zur Mühlen did not know at this point – or perhaps ever – that Malik, again perhaps out of a genuine desire to help a comrade in difficulty, perhaps to avoid a lawsuit, had drawn up a contract according to which she would always receive 2% of the royalties from books by Sinclair, and that the evidently quite hard-headed Sinclair had refused to sign it.

40 Letter of 25 January 1928, *ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

41 Letter of 6 February 1928, *ibid.*, pp. 103-04.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

There is something in these contracts that I would not sign, and that is the agreement to pay Mrs. Zur Mühlen two percent of my royalties, which appears to be a continual promise and without time limit. I may wish to pay her this, and I may not, but certainly there is no reason why I should agree to do so, or feel under obligation to do so. In the case of *Boston*, I will do it gladly, if it will help to restore peace. But what if the arrangement for *Boston* should not work out satisfactorily? Then certainly I do not want to be bound to Mrs. Zur Mühlen for the future. It seems to me that your contract would even give her heirs a claim upon my royalties on books not yet written. I hereby give you the authorization to make the two percent payment to Mrs. Zur Mühlen for *Boston*, and I think you should cut out from this contract the sentence referring to her, and instead specify that the royalties paid to me are to be increased by two percent, in case I should terminate the arrangement of paying two percent to Mrs. Zur Mühlen.⁴³

The correspondence of Sinclair and Zur Mühlen did not cease entirely with the latter's letter of 6 February 1928. The translator wrote the author three more politely worded letters on business matters, but their collaboration had indeed come to an end. Ironically, a few months later, at the very same time that Herzfelde wrote to Sinclair to inform him of his discovery that Zur Mühlen's reworked translation of *The Jungle* [*Sumpff*] and her own translation of *Love's Pilgrimage* [*Der Liebe Pilgerfahrt*] had been drastically cut in relation to the originals (by over 100 pages, allegedly, in the case of the former and by 350 pages, equivalent to half the book, in the case of the latter!), and that he had persuaded Zur Mühlen to go back over both translations and restore the missing sections,⁴⁴ he also sent a telegram to Sinclair telling him that, in

43 Sinclair to Wieland Herzfelde, 20 February 1928, *ibid.*, p. 108. On Sinclair's preoccupation with royalty issues and with the commercial aspect of the publication of his works in Germany, see Deborah Vietor-Engländer's 2001 review of *Werter Genosse, die Maliks haben beschlossen* in <http://www.literaturhaus.at/buch/fachbuch/rez/zurmuehlen/?COLOR=NO>. Vietor-Engländer also points to a discrepancy between the tone of the German translations of Sinclair's letters in this volume and that of the English originals: "Die deutschen Briefe klingen durchweg sehr viel herzlicher, freundlicher und glatter; in den Originalen wird Sinclairs Kälte wesentlich deutlicher, es geht dem Sozialisten vor allem um Rechte, Prozente und um seine eigenen Interessen." [In German the letters sound altogether warmer, friendlier, and smoother. Sinclair's coldness is significantly more evident in the originals. This Socialist is chiefly concerned with rights, percentages, and looking after his own interests.]

44 Wieland Herzfelde to Sinclair, 10 September 1928, *ibid.*, pp. 125-26. I have not been able to check Zur Mühlen's translations of those two works. I did examine her translations of *Hundred Percent*, *King Coal*, and *Oil!*, however, and found them mostly faithful to the originals. She does make short cuts here and there (e.g. the seduction of Bunny by Eunice in *Oil!*, VIII, 1) and her translations do not communicate the colloquial speech of Sinclair's working class characters. (Not, probably, an unconsidered decision; using a German equivalent might have made these characters seem more German than American). On the other hand, the rhyming verses in *King Coal* (Bk. 1, ch. 1), based on the nursery rhyme "Old King Coal", are quite effectively translated into rhyming German verses, and an allusion that the German reader might not understand is conscientiously explained in a footnote. Thus, "Go on wid ye! 'Tis the blarney-stone ye been kissin'" (Bk. 1, ch. 7) is translated "Hören Sie doch auf. Sie haben den Blarneystein geküßt." A note explains the term "Blarneystein": "Ein Stein in der Mauer des Schlosses Blarney in der irischen Grafschaft Cork, der den, der ihn küßt, zum gewandten Schmeichler macht" [a stone in the wall of Blarney Castle in the Irish county of Cork that turns

order to ensure sales, *Boston* would have to undergo major cuts.

Albeit not unrelated to financial considerations, the core of Zur Mühlen's increasingly contentious relation both to the Malik Verlag and to Sinclair himself may well have been, as she always claimed, her emphasis on the "propaganda value" of Sinclair's work. This could well have led her to pay less attention at times to its textual integrity than the author himself could accept, despite the fact that he shared her unconcealed contempt for the notion of "Art for Art's sake."⁴⁵ Given her often expressed conviction of the moral and political responsibility of the artist, it seems not unlikely that Zur Mühlen was willing and in fact felt it was her duty to adapt Sinclair's work to the German reading public, and in particular to that less well off and less educated segment of it that, for moral and political reasons, she particularly wanted to reach. Her own life experience, which had brought her into contact with many different social, cultural, and linguistic groups must have made her keenly aware of the specificity of different reading publics and – consistently with her emphasis on "propaganda value" and on getting a message across – of the importance of adapting texts to their target public. That she did have this awareness is clear not only from her sharing the Malik Verlag's view that Floyd Dell's biography of Sinclair, good as it was, was not right for the German public and that Herzfelde should write one specifically for that public, or from her ready adoption of a particular style for the socialist children's fairy tales she was writing in those same years, but from her translations, many years later, of her own German works into English. If she made significant cuts in translating *Jungle* and *Love's Pilgrimage*, as "the Maliks" alleged, she also made major cuts in her own novel *Ewiges Schattenspiel* as she translated it for publication in Britain in 1943 under the title *We Poor Shadows*.⁴⁶ The changes she made or permitted to be made to the original 1933 German text of her comic novel *Nora hat eine famose Idee* for the 1947 English translation, *Guests in the House*, were even more drastic. However contrary to our strict contemporary ideas about translation, Zur Mühlen's understanding of it was by no means

whoever kisses it into an expert flatterer].

45 Zur Mühlen to Sinclair, 18 November 1927, *ibid.*, p. 64: "Unfortunately the whole Malik-Verlag believes in Art for Art's sake just now and of course that makes them dislike your book [*Mammonart*]."

46 As no translator of this text is named and as Zur Mühlen had always known English reasonably well and had by 1943 been living in England for four years, it has been wrongly assumed that she wrote this text in English. This turns out to be not the case. The work was originally written in German. It does seem most likely, however, that even if she used some help from native speakers, Zur Mühlen was herself deeply involved in the translation and adaptation of *Ewiges Schattenspiel*.

uncommon. Nor is it indefensible. It corresponds in fact, as noted, to the second of the three types of translation outlined by Goethe, albeit not to the type Goethe himself preferred. Besides, Zur Mühlen herself objected to certain kinds of cuts. "The Maliks," she complained to Sinclair, "did not want to take *Mammonart* because it was too fat, and have shortened it about a quarter."⁴⁷

It is also true, however, that, having cut herself off, through her politics and her relationship with Klein, from her former husband and her own aristocratic family, Zur Mühlen no longer received any income from those two sources and needed money badly. In the face of continued ill health and medical expenses and of Stefan Klein's inability to bring in money, she was working like a dog, turning out fairy tales, detective novels, translations, and feuilletons at a dizzying pace. How could she not have cut corners here and there, as her critics alleged? Likewise, when she complains of foot-dragging on the part of "the Maliks" and of their lack of interest in the less obviously profitable works of Sinclair, it is not unreasonable to assume that she did so at least partly because she herself needed her work to appear quickly, so that she could start collecting her translator's share of the royalties as soon as possible. As the Countess-Comrade put it herself, she was not in a position to work for nothing.

⁴⁷ Zur Mühlen to Sinclair, 16 December, 1927, *Werter Genosse, die Maliks haben beschlossen... Briefe 1919-1950*, p. 71.