



Translating Berlin #11

Dorian Gray

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- 1. Starter activity: What do you know about Berlin?**
 - a) Name five facts about Berlin.
 - b) Name one cultural connection between Germany and the UK.
 - c) Name three English writers in the 1920s.
 - 2. Read the English text below about the Dorian Gray.**
 - a) Where was the Dorian Gray located?
 - b) Which role did the Dorian Gray play in the 1920s in Berlin?
 - c) Who used to meet there, and why?
 - 3. Present the Dorian Gray to your neighbour or group. Your presentation should contain the answers to 2a), b), and c).**
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Named after the protagonist of Oscar Wilde's novel, the Dorian Gray was one of the many homosexual bars that dotted the area around Bülowstraße in the 1920s and early 1930s. In his *Führer durch das lasterhafte Berlin* (1931), Curt Moreck listed it in the section dedicated to lesbian Lokale as one of Berlin's most established bars. According to Moreck, the Dorian Gray operated separate gentlemen and ladies' nights, the latter featuring a 'Bunter Abend', perhaps best translated as 'gaudy night'. He went on to describe the special atmosphere of these occasions, when the lights were softened behind Chinese parasols and the dance floor was overhung with colourful ribbons.

The German writer Ruth Margarete Roellig also described the comfortable, tasteful feel of the Dorian Gray in detail in her *Berlins lesbische Frauen* (1928), confirming its role as both a cultural and social hub for the lesbian community. The Dorian Gray awoke the curiosity of Alix Strachey, who made reference to it in her letters to her husband.

Oscar Wilde's legacy would have had a special resonance for queer English writers. Isherwood followed the hint when he drew his imaginary landscape of the city's queer nightlife in *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939): Sally Bowles performs in a cabaret called 'The Lady Windermere', and the 'Salome' is a glitzy, commercialised place where tourists and customers from out of town come to see 'stage lesbians and some young men with plucked eyebrows'. Like other LGBTQ+ venues, the Dorian Gray was forced to close down when the Nazis came to power in 1933. Stefano Evangelista.



Wyndham Lewis

4. Who was Wyndham Lewis? Scan the QR code to find out.

Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957), avantgarde artist and writer, travelled to Berlin in 1930, fell for Hitler and National Socialism, and was repelled by Berlin's sexual liberalism, as documented in his controversial book *Hitler* (1931). He later retracted his advocacy of fascism. Gesa Stedman.



Wyndham Lewis. Photograph by George Charles Beresford, half-plate glass negative, 1913. NPG x6535
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Translation Theory

5. Answer the following questions in pairs or in your group:

- a) Can you think of a German or English word or phrase that you cannot translate verbatim (exactly word for word) into the other language? What strategy would you use to translate it?
- b) Would you like to become a professional translator? Why or why not? What do you think would be the most interesting aspects of being a translator?

6. Read and discuss the text on translation theory.

- a) What is the difference between micro- and macro-level translation?
 - b) What is the difference between domestication and foreignisation?
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Translation theory often distinguishes between micro- and macro-level translation. The micro level refers mainly to the accurate translation of single words, terms, or shorter segments of a text from the source language into the target language. In this context, the emphasis is placed on linguistic accuracy. For the sake of precision, decisions on the micro level are often made independently.

The macro level, on the other hand, rather looks at a text in its entirety and takes into account not only linguistic accuracy, but also social and cultural aspects. For the sake of consistency, decisions on a macro level are often made for the entire text. How can local dialects be translated from one language into another? Should personal names be translated in such a way that their meaning can be understood in the target language? And how should certain cultural references be approached, especially those that foreign readers may not understand? All of these questions belong to macro-level translation.

Translation decisions, whether on the micro or macro level, can always be located between the poles of domestication and foreignisation. Domestication means not only translating a text, but also adapting its content to the culture of the target language. Foreignisation, on the other hand, means keeping a translation as close to the original as possible, both in terms of content and style.

Lesbische Begegnungen

7. Read the German text 'Lesbische Begegnungen'.

- a) What evidence is there that homosexual relationships were happening in Berlin in the 1920s?
- b) What was the status of homosexuality then?

8. Translate the text into English. Choose:

- a) Translate the text directly.
 - b) Rewrite the text in simpler German. Next, translate your simpler version into English.
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Glossary

anbelangen	to concern
Balzverhalten (n.)	courtship behaviour
necken	to tease
Strafe (f.)	punishment, penalty
nichtsdestotrotz	notwithstanding
undenkbar	unthinkable

Was die Sexualpolitik anbelangt, finden sich Berichte über Berliner Möglichkeiten für lesbische Begegnungen in den Briefen von Vita Sackville-West an Virginia Woolf und bei Alix Strachey, die ihren Ehemann mit Berichten über das lesbische Balzverhalten und ihren geplanten Besuch im Dorian Gray neckt. Es darf nicht vergessen werden, dass in Deutschland, wie auch in Großbritannien, Homosexualität zu dieser Zeit noch unter Strafe stand. Nichtsdestotrotz wurde weibliche und männliche Homosexualität in Berlin offen thematisiert und in einer Weise toleriert, die in Großbritannien [...] undenkbar gewesen wäre. Stefano Evangelista, Gesa Stedman.

Hitler

9. Read the excerpt from Lewis's book *Hitler* (1931) and highlight all the words you know how to translate already.

10. Translate the text into German. Choose:

- a) Translate the text directly.
- b) Rewrite the text in simpler English.

Next, translate your simpler version into German.

Of establishments upon these lines, Berlin can boast one hundred and sixty, I believe. Some are the stern strongholds solely of the *lesbische Frau*. There is nothing sunny or pagan about *those*. All is feverish, solemnly tense—with a furious rictus in place of the bland male smile. But every variety of Perversion is properly and adequately represented. Each has its home-away-from-home, its bar, its club, its bazaar, its place of nightly Reklame and rendezvous.

Wyndham Lewis, 'Hitler', p. 26.

Glossary

establishment	here: Einrichtung (f.)
boast	here: aufweisen
rictus	steifes Grinsen (n.)
bland	nichtssagend, ausdruckslos
home away from home	zweite Heimat (f.), zweites Zuhause (n.)

Plenary

11. Talk about your translation process.

- a) Did any difficulties or problems arise?
- b) Which translation strategies did you use ...
 - I. ... to translate from German into English?
 - II. ... to translate from English into German?