

## R.F. Kuang'ın *Babil* Romanında Çevirmenin Görünürlük Kazanmak İçin Nihai Olarak Şiddete Başvurması \*

Çiğdem TAŞKIN GEÇMEN<sup>1</sup>

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### Öz

Bu makale, R.F. Kuang'ın *Babel: Or the Necessity of Violence* adlı romanını, Lawrence Venuti'nin çevirmenin görünürlüğünü, yerlileştirme ve yabancılama çeviri stratejileri açısından incelemektedir. Makalenin ana iddiası *Babel*'in yalnızca çevirmenleri ana kahraman olduğu bir roman olmaktan ziyade, Venuti'nin Anglo-Amerikan çeviri pratiklerine yönelik yaptığı analizin güçlü bir kurgu haline getirilmesi ve radikelleştirilmesinin örneği olduğunu göstermektedir. Makale, romanın "etnomerkezi şiddet" kavramını, Britanya İmparatorluğu'nun sömürgeci ilerlemesini sahnelemek için kullanılan gümüş işçilerinin, yani çevirmenlerin, elinde gerçek ve büyülü bir enerjiye dönüştüğünü göstermektedir. Çevirmenlerin nasıl yöntemsel olarak "görünmez" kılındığı ve yerlileştirici bir sistemin nesneleri olarak nasıl sömürüldükleri açıklanmaktadır. Nihayetinde, çevirmenlerin devrim niteliğindeki yıkım hareketi metinsel bir direniş stratejisinden, görünürlük elde etmeyi amaçlayan şiddetli, politik bir isyana doğru bir geçiş olarak incelenir. Makale, pasif çevirmenler üzerinden kurulan edebi metaforun, yine çevirmenler tarafından altüst edilerek onların merkezi ve devrimci bir aktör olarak yeniden konumlandığı *Babel*'in, çevirinin doğası gereği politik ve şiddet içeren yapısını inkâr edilemez hale getirdiğini savunur. Böylece, Venuti'nin çalışmasının temel amaçlarıyla uyumlu bir kültürel müdahale gerçekleştirdiği sonucuna varır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Görünmezlik, Yerlileştirme, Yabancılaşırma, L. Venuti, *Babil*, Kurgusal Çevirmen

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## The Translator's Ultimate Turn to Violence to Gain Visibility in R. F. Kuang's *Babel* \*

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### Abstract

This article examines R.F. Kuang's novel *Babel: Or the Necessity of Violence* for its use of Lawrence Venuti's translation strategies on translator in/visibility, domestication, and foreignization. It claims that *Babel* is not simply a novel where translators are protagonist but a significant fictionalization and radicalization of Venuti's analysis of Anglo-American translation practices. The article shows how the novel makes "ethnocentric violence" as a concept into actual and magical energy in the hands of silver-workers (translators) used to stage colonial expansion for the British Empire. It examines how the translators are methodically made "invisible" and exploited as objects of a domesticating machinery. Their revolutionary turn is taken, then, to represent a radicalization of Venuti's "foreignization," from resistance as textual strategy to violent political insurgency in the pursuit of visibility. The article argues that the literary metaphor established through passive translators, which is then overturned by translators themselves, repositioning them as central and revolutionary actors in *Babel*, makes the inherently political and violent nature of translation undeniable. It thus concludes that *Babel* achieves a cultural intervention that is consistent with the fundamental aims Venuti's theory.

### Keywords:

Invisibility, Domestication, Foreignization, L. Venuti, *Babel*, Fictional Translator

\* Ethical Statement: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited. This article has not been presented at any academic conference.

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## **The Translator's Ultimate Turn to Violence to Gain Visibility in R. F. Kuang's *Babel***

### **1. Introduction**

Since the 1990s, translation studies has developed into a dynamic and influential field of study with its own vast theoretical literature that explores the relationship between language, politics and power. One of the major figureheads of this so-called "cultural turn" is Lawrence Venuti. In his seminal text, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995), he explores the dominant translation strategies in the Anglo-American context and offers a powerful criticism on these translation norms. Venuti's main argument is that translation is never a neutral or transparent act of transference but is always a "locus of difference" and a site of ideological contestation (1995, 42). Venuti examines how certain types of translation are given too much importance for the way they help keep the cultural and political dominance of the target language rather than their inherent superiority. His particular criticism is accumulated for the cases where the target language is English. R. F. Kuang's *Babel: or the Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators' Revolution* is one such metaphor that can help bring to life the rendering which Venuti makes about visibility as it talks about translators' fight for visibility and the violence that comes with it. The book creates a universe in which ethnocentric appropriation, the suppression of diversity, and the exploitation of the translator are not simply theoretical discussions but the actual, magical forces driving an empire. In order to demonstrate the metaphorical relationship, the theoretical framework Venuti provides will be established and it will be demonstrated that his concepts of invisibility, domestication, and foreignization do not only describe stylistic choices but also establish a political philosophy of translation that reveals the power dynamics inherent in every act of cross-cultural communication. Then, the said political philosophy will be applied to the examples from the *Babel*. In doing so, how *Babel* becomes the embodiment of Venuti's theory will be shown.

### **2. Defining the Translator's Invisibility**

The main argument of Venuti's study revolves around the idea of the translator's "invisibility" in modern Anglo-American society. This state of invisibility is not an inherent condition but rather a conscious cultural construction, an "illusion of transparency" that is carefully created and maintained by the joint influence of institutional power and market demands. Venuti argues that a translated text is deemed successful by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it "reads fluently," when "the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text" (1995, 1). In other words, the highest praise for a

translation is that it does not read like a translation at all. The expectation that the translator be "fluent" contributes to an environment where the work and intermediary role of the translator is consistently overlooked. The goal is to produce a text that gives the reader an "illusion of immediate access to the source text," as if no intermediary were present (1995, 5). This preference is so firmly established that any departure from it, any hint of "translationese" or linguistic oddity that may bring to mind the text's foreign roots, is usually criticized (as cited in Venuti 1995, 66). Venuti historically maps this inclination and highlights that a smooth, fluent style has been dominant since the seventeenth century, influencing the canon of foreign literature accessible in English.

This cultural norm is not simply an aesthetic preference. On the contrary, it is an ideological one. Venuti argues that the translator's invisibility is a product of specific "legal and cultural constraints" that define "faithful rendition" in a way that serves the interests of the receiving culture (1995, 8-9). It is very important to realize that this particular cultural norm is not only something aesthetic, it also embodies ideology. Venuti observes that the invisibility of the translator results from certain "legal and cultural factors" which specify "faithful rendition" in such a way as to favour the receiving culture's needs (1995, 8-9). Therefore, these incentives make it important for the translators to employ such techniques that will help them make their translation commercially feasible as well as critically acceptable. In most cases, this also means following the major standard of fluent "invisible" writing style. In such a situation, translators frequently find themselves complicit in their own invisibility. This intentional erasure of the translator's role obscures the manipulations and cultural negotiations that are inherently involved in any translation process. It maintains and fosters a false sense of direct contact with a foreign "other," while simultaneously concealing the conditions under which the said contact occurs.

## **2.1. Domestication as Ethnocentric Violence**

The primary strategy through which the translator's invisibility is enforced is what Venuti terms "domestication". He defines this as "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring[ing] the author back home" (1995, 20). Based on this explanation, domestication can be defined as the practice of translating in a transparent, fluent style specifically to minimize the foreignness of the source text for the target-language reader. Domestication thus involves scrubbing the text of foreign elements, strange syntax, culture-specific terms, and any other ambiguities that might challenge or confuse the reader, leaving only that which is familiar and easily assimilated.

For Venuti, this is far from a benign act of cultural accommodation. He charges the practice with being a form of "ethnocentric violence" (1995, 20). The term "violence" here is theoretical but potent, referring to the act of "violently" erasing the cultural values and linguistic specificities of the foreign text to make it conform to the norms of the dominant, receiving culture (1995, 19). This process of assimilation conceals the very differences that make the foreign text foreign, thereby reinforcing the cultural narcissism of the target audience (1995, 20). It is an act of "ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text" on the part of the receiving culture (1995, 81), which, instead of venturing out to meet the foreign, demands that the foreign come to it, stripped of its alterity and remade in a familiar image.

This theoretical violence has profound political implications. Venuti argues that the dominance of domesticating translation in the Anglo-American world is "symptomatic of a complacency in Anglo-American relations with cultural others, a complacency that can be described—without too much exaggeration—as imperialistic abroad and xenophobic at home" (17). In this view, translation becomes a tool of empire. The selection of which texts to translate is often governed by what can be easily assimilated into domestic canons and stereotypes, and the method of translation ensures that these texts reinforce, rather than challenge, the dominant cultural and political values (cf. 1995, 308). The history of translation, Venuti shows, is also a history of manipulation, where rewritings of foreign texts have been used to serve power, repress innovation, and contain cultural difference (1995, vii). Domestication, therefore, is not a neutral stylistic choice but a political practice that perpetuates cultural hegemony by masking the very act of appropriation under a pretense of fluent, transparent prose.

## **2.2. Foreignization as Ethical Resistance**

In direct opposition to the hegemonic practice of domestication, Venuti champions an alternative strategy he calls "foreignization," also referred to as "resistancy" or "resistant translation" (1995, 24). Drawing on the ideas of earlier theorists like Friedrich Schleiermacher, Venuti defines foreignization as "an ethnoreactive pressure on [target-language cultural] values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (1995, 20). This strategy is purposely opposed to the appeal of fluency and transparency. Rather it constitutes an effort to produce a target text which quite deliberately violates the conventions of the target language in order to preserve and signify the exotic of the source language.

A foreignizing translation is marked by a "non-fluent, estranging or heterogeneous translation style" (Munday, 2016, 226). This might involve retaining foreign syntax and/or incorporating regional dialects and other nonstandard linguistic elements to disrupt the smooth surface of the

text. The goal of this disruption is twofold: first, to make the translator's mediating presence "visible" to the reader, and second, to "highlight the foreign identity of the ST [source text]" (Munday, 2016, 226). By doing so, foreignization acts as a "strategic cultural intervention" (Venuti, 1995, 20) that forces the receiving culture to confront the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, rather than comfortably assimilating it.

Venuti frames foreignization as an explicitly ethical and political choice (1995, 38). It is a method to "counter the unequal and 'violently' domesticating cultural values of the English-language world" (Munday, 2016, 226). By resisting the pressures of the market and the dominant literary establishment, the translator can use their work to challenge existing canons, introduce new literary forms, and foster a greater awareness of cultural difference, which makes it an act of defiance against the ethnocentric and imperialist tendencies embedded in domesticating practices (cf. Venuti, 1995, 308).

However, a closer examination reveals that foreignization involves more than simply replicating the "authentic" foreignness. The "foreign" in a foreignizing translation is not an entirely direct representation and/or embodiment of the source text. Rather, it is a "strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current situation in the receiving culture" (Venuti, 1995, 20). The foreignness becomes visible precisely because it departs from the dominant values of the target culture (Munday, 2016, 228). The translator accomplishes this through the use of "heterogenous discourse" which involves incorporating marginal, minority, or archaic forms within the target language to convey the otherness of the source text (2016, 299). This highlights an important paradox: the foreign is expressed and brought into view through a deliberate alteration of the domestic. Consequently, the translator serves as a significant intermediary for conveying a foreign reality as well as actively shaping the perception of the foreign for the target audience. This idea of foreignization as a deliberate creation is crucial for grasping the essence of resistance in works like *Babel*, where the oppressed must utilize their differences from within the core of the empire that seeks to obliterate them.

### **3. *Babel* as the Manifestation of Theory**

#### **3.1. Translation as Domestication and Violence in *Babel*'s Imperial Machine**

R.F. Kuang's novel *Babel: Or the Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators' Revolution* (2022) can be interpreted as a vivid and expansive fictional representation of the domesticating translation paradigm that Lawrence Venuti criticizes. Kuang creates a world in which these theoretical concepts of ethnocentric appropriation, the

erasure of difference and the instrumentalization of the translator are not material for academic debate but the actual magic that fuels an empire. Babel's Royal Institute of Translation, thus, becomes the manifestation of a domesticating machine. It serves as an extraction system that violently appropriates linguistic resources that translators provide for a colonial metropole. Through its world-building, characterization, and central magical system, *Babel* enacts the deep political and psychological violence that is a translation practice at imperial power's service.

The Royal Institute of Translation at Oxford University embodies the institutional essence of British imperial authority, serving as a metaphor for Venuti's domesticating system. Instead of being a place for mutual cultural sharing, Babel operates as a mechanism for the "colonial extraction of people and resources" (Kuang, 2022, 184), where language and the translators are the primary assets. The institute's existence depends on the sole reason to exploit the world's languages and use the resource to support British industrial and military power. This goal leads to its inextricable association as "tied to the business of colonialism" as Shinjini Dey observes in her review (2023).

This process is clearly undirectional, which is a major feature of the unequal power dynamic that Venuti pinpoints in Anglo-American translation culture. This is comprised by the character Griffin, who is a member of the resistance: "Ask yourself why the Literature Department only translates works into English and not back out again" (Kuang, 2022, 109). This question reveals the essential purpose of Babel: it is a system for appropriation, not communication. All information, all language diversity, everything goes one way toward England where it can then be processed as a weapon by the British Empire, and used in any manner that would help them without any worth returned to the originating cultures. This validates the "ethnocentric reduction" that Venuti examines, wherein the other is seen valuable only as long as they may be altered, assimilated and exploited by the dominant authority (1995, 310).

The institute's stated mission, as articulated by the well-meaning but ultimately complicit Professor Playfair, is to "collect all the world's languages under one roof" and, through the "arts of translation", achieve the unity humanity lost (Kuang, 2022, 116). However, he concludes this sentence by revealing the true political reality: "Such is the project of empire—and why, therefore, we translate at the pleasure of the Crown" (ibid., 117). This sinister addition confirms the true role of the institute: its universalist rhetoric about bringing humanity together through language is nothing but an ideological cover for a project of imperial control. Babel's program is not about building understanding; on the contrary, it is about accumulating power. It

exemplifies domestication on a large scale in that not only the individual texts, but whole linguistic and cultural traditions are converted into fuel for the imperial machine.

Lawrence Venuti's key concepts on domestication and foreignization are easily applicable to *Babel*. The invisibility of the translator is their disappearance behind fluent, transparent translations that tend to represent translators as neutral conduits. In *Babel*, this is manifested in the treatment of the Babblers, the translation students, as "translation machines" (2022, 207), "vessels for the languages they spoke" (2022, 201) and "valuable imports" (2022, 164). Their individuals and cultures are systematically suppressed in the effort to "optimize" them for Imperial use.

Domestication, as used by Venuti, is an ethnocentric technique of adapting anything foreign to the values within the receiving culture. Kuang's book enacts this process through the one-way flow of translation at Babel, where all other languages are stripped-mine for the enrichment and further growth of British imperial power. Robin Swift, on a personal level, is literally domesticated: re-named; anglicized and not allowed to speak Cantonese, his original self is wiped out so that what remains can better serve as an imperial instrument.

This assimilated way is a process that is not neutral, but ethnocentrically violent as Venuti argues. This violence is not subtle; rather, it is persistent in consistently erasing any trace of cultural distinctiveness. In *Babel*, this violence is brought to a literalized extreme in the act of silver-working, which is a magic system that gains its power from "the loss in translation" between languages. The core of cultural and linguistic difference is captured and used as a weapon to further Britain's colonial conquests, particularly the Opium War against China.

Finally, Venuti contrasts domestication with foreignization, a resistant strategy that preserves foreignness in order to challenge the target culture and to make the translator visible.

In Kuang's novel, this opposition is materialized by the Hermes Society, who are undermining Babel's system by circulating silver to fund anti-colonial movements. The novel ends with the protagonists' decision to cause the destruction of Babel, which constitutes an unprecedented gesture of visibility and a flat denial to the domesticatory system that has oppressed them.

### **3.2. The Commodification of Language and the Dehumanization of the Translator**

In *Babel* this dark economic logic of the domesticating paradigm is masterfully dramatized. Inside the walls of the institute, language has stopped being a repository of culture and instead turned into a natural "resource to be extracted and exploited" (Kuang, 2022, 184). The colonized students with mother tongues such as Chinese or Hindi or Haitian Creole are not

actually students in training. They function as conduits for the Imperial machine. As Kari Stein observes, the translators in the novel are "colonized bodies Britain captures and manipulates into working for their translation institution" (2023, 10). They have a "linguistic heritage" that can be traded as "a commercial value", and they are foreign talents to be kept, or hoarded like any item of trade on which British Empire is currently feeding.

This commodification, in turn, is a direct path to the dehumanization of the translators. They are not valued for themselves, but only as a means to an end. They are valued only as "vessels for the languages they spoke" (Kuang, 2022, 208). This contradiction renders their nature in Oxford deeply paradoxical: they have been given admittance to an elite world barred from peers at home, but they are still only, in essence, oppressed colonial subjects whose presence is barely tolerated in so far as it is useful. This burying is, on one level, a fictive version of Venuti's real-time criticism of the marginalized social and economic status of the translator in the Anglo-American culture, whose foundational work tends to be undervalued and made invisible (1995, 17).

The cost in mental well-being of this instrumentalization is devastating. The protagonist, Robin Swift, is trained as a "translation machine" (Kuang, 2022, 213). All this work begins in his youth, when he is taken away from Canton and forced to shed his Chinese name and language. This renaming and re-education into English-inspired literature is an act of personal domestication. Thus, it positions Robin as, in Marie-Luise Kohlke's words, a "trauma victim of implicit cultural genocide" (2022, 265). He is told that everything about his own identity he must suppress and weaponize his mother tongue to serve the interests of those who are pulling his strings. This internalizes empire's logic, making him an agent in the expropriation of his own heritage, a conflict that constitutes the novel's central psychological drama.

### **3.3. Traduttore, Traditore: The Psychological Violence of Betrayal**

It might well be that the "an act of translation is always an act of betrayal" in the novel's tagline is something that tracks on several registers at once, from aggregation as a philosophical generalisation to political brutality. On a purely linguistic level, in scenes where university seminars are held, the characters argue over how it is inherently impossible to have perfect translation and that something is always inevitably lost. The difficulty of translation, even translating something as simple as a greeting, is explained by Professor Playfair, who explains that "translators do not so much deliver a message as they rewrite the original" (Kuang, 2022, 114). Such positions resonate with the theoretical discussions in translation studies, from Walter

Benjamin's call to maintain the feeling of a text, to Vladimir Nabokov's insistence on complete literality (Stein, 2023, 1).

However, Kuang's great narrative accomplishment is the literalization of Venuti's assertion that translation has a "violence" about it. In Venuti's terms, the violence at hand is in essence theoretical and ethical; it is about the violence committed when cultural differences are blanketed or smothered, foreign voices are muffled under the cover of familiarization through domestication (1995, 19-20). Kuang has taken this abstract notion and translated it into her world's physical and magical motor. At the heart of the sorcery of silver-working fits its capacity to actually capture that very semantic "gap" (Kuang, 2022, 164) that is lost in translation between a bilingual word-pair. This "loss" (the violent act of erasure) is then captured and transferred into silver bars that help to make British naval ships sail faster, their guns shoot harder and their infrastructure in the colonies more durable (*ibid.*, 386).

This function establishes a direct link between the translation act and that of physical violence. The theoretical "violence" of domestication in a foreign word is thereby translated into material violence and fuelled by it. When Robin translates a word from his native Cantonese into English for a silver bar, he is not just doing some linguistic exercise; he is also adding to the strength of the cannon that will help conquer China, his hometown, in the coming Opium War. This changes *Traduttore, traditore*, the Italian aphorism about how translation betrays, an inspired abstract pun into a specific and damning political condemnation. For Robin and the other translators from the colonies, translation is an act of betrayal that cannot be refused. They are given a choice to either betray their countries by working with Babel or the organization that has provided everything for them by refusing. This narrative decision renders visible the ethical stakes of translation, which Venuti suggests are usually kept hidden. The translator now is not a shadowy, neutral figure but a central, morally compromised actor at the heart of the imperial project.

### **3.4. Foreignization as Resistance and the Fight for Visibility**

If Babel is the ultimate institution, then the revolutionary vector of the novel can serve as a radical narrative embodiment of Venuti's foreignizing principle. The resistance led by the Hermes Society, which is also embraced by the protagonists themselves, takes resistance from being a textual inclination to a full fledged political and physical revolt. This is an urgent and violent effort to make visible both themselves, and the injustices of an imperial system which seeks to erase them, subverting the very foundations of a domesticating power structure. In *Babel*, foreignization becomes the necessity of revolution.

The most notable example of foreignization in the novel is The Hermes Society. If anything, it can be understood as a foreignizing force in the Venutian sense as it is an underground resistance group lurking in the shadows. Its aim is not to join or redeem the domesticating labor of Babel but disrupt it at its core from within. The society, led by Robin's half-brother, Griffin, steals silver and manuscripts and engraving materials from the institute. Their aim is not personal gain but the redistribution of the power of translation. They are attempting to turn silver-working magic away from the Empire and towards those that it oppresses, helping in slave revolts and anti-colonial actions worldwide (Kuang, 2022, 104).

It is this agenda that strikes at the "ethnocentric" and unidirectional structure of power and knowledge of which the Babel Institution is an exemplar. By filching from the tools of empire and using them against it, Hermes actively seeks to "send power abroad" in a manner consistent with Venuti's advocacy for translation as counter-practice to dominant cultural values. They are designed to reintroduce "difference" and "alterity" into the imperial equation. Their purpose is not for aesthetic admiring but for a revolutionary stirring. They are trying to render the exploitative system in plain sight by disrupting its operations and giving power back to its victims. Whereas Venuti's foreignization leads to a non-fluent text for reader-resistance opposition, HS's foreignization is how an empire ends material practice. They are not merely producing a "heterogeneous discourse"; they are equipping a heterogeneous resistance. Their work is the political praxis of Venuti's theory because it proves that an authentic resistant translation practice would have to aim from its very inception to change the material conditions of power.

### **3.5. The Necessity of Violence in Obtaining Visibility**

The necessity of violence, the subtitle of the novel, indicates the final tactic used by the protagonists to become visible. Invisible in the imperial machine, dehumanized as "translation machines" or "vessels" for language, their only form of agency is an act of destruction so extreme that it cannot be overlooked or co-opted. Their turn to violence is the final, desperate rejection of their enforced invisibility.

The physical violence of the revolution is framed as a direct and necessary response to the insidious, "invisible" violence of the domesticating system they have been forced to serve. The novel posits that the colonial system is itself inherently violent; its "system of extraction is inherently violent" (Kuang, 2022, 395). In this context, Griffin's argument that "violence was the only thing that brought the colonizer to the table" (2022, 490) and that it is "the only language they understand" (2022, 395) can be read as a radical extension of Venuti's call for

"ethnodeviant pressure" (1995, 81). If the dominant culture refuses to acknowledge the difference and humanity of the "foreign" other, then that other must force itself into view through a shocking act of resistance. The protagonists' revolutionary violence is the ultimate non-fluent "estranging" (Venuti, 1995, 305) style. It is a discourse of bombs and rebellion designed not to be read, but to be felt. This inevitable violence creates a shock to the system which is intended to shatter the illusion of imperial peace and expose the violent foundations. Their violence is their final translation, rendering their pain and rage into a language the empire is forced to comprehend.

The novel's climax where the protagonists decide to destroy the Babel tower itself serves as the most potent metaphor for a foreignizing resistance and aim for visibility taken to its absolute limit. The tower is not only a building; it is the embodiment of the domesticating organization. It is the archive, the library, the laboratory and the canon. That is to say, even the whole machinery of linguistic productivity that keeps the power of Empire intact and increasingly violent. Were Robin and Victoire to decide not just to shoot it down, they would be not simply making an act of war – but also an extraordinary act of demolition. They are taking down the very production line that oppressed them, refusing to work in a system so fundamentally corrupt that it cannot be reformed from within. By choosing to destroy it, Robin and Victoire does not simply start a war. They actually give rise to a radical act of destruction. They dismantle the very tools of production that enabled their oppression, with an understanding of the system that is too inherently corrupt to change from within.

This is the literal and violent enactment of Venuti's "challenging canons" and "disrupting the literary canon" (1995, 39). Where Venuti recommends that we select counter-canonical texts and use resistant textual strategies, Kuang's characters decide to burn down the entire library. What they do, of course, is slamming the door to working in the master's house with the master's tools. The tower is falling down, collapsing the entire structure of imperial knowledge production so that we can imagine a new world, freed from oppressive orders. It's the very last statement of witness, a final refusal to be absorbed or wiped out.

But the novel does not depict this act of destruction as a plain, heroic victory. The conclusion is one marked by tragedy and ambiguity, complicating Venuti's overall more positive theoretical stance. The destruction of the tower cripples the British Empire but does not terminate colonialism, nor ensure a better life to come. In the end, their act of violence destroys a font of knowledge, and a reservoir of magical healing that might have benefited any number of sick or colonized people in the world the ones Robin and his friends attempted to liberate. It

is not a message of straight victory, but of deep and tragic deadlock. Ultimately, the revolution destroys a world of injustice, but what it leaves behind is the unthinkable loss.

This is a grim conclusion that further complicates Venuti's strategies. If foreignizing resistance may be an ethical necessity in the context of violent domestication, *Babel* implies that it is neither a simple nor a utopian solution. In a framework of violence carried out on such a grand totalizing scale, the only response might be an equally driving counter-violence. The battle for visibility does not result in some happy compromise of difference. Instead, it brings about a tragic war where the only method to fight violence is with violence of erasure. This necessitates a re-evaluation of what the objectives of resistance are if and when the canon has been successfully deconstructed and the tower is destroyed.

#### 4. Conclusion

R.F. Kuang's *Babel* serves as a brutal fiction of Lawrence Venuti's translation theory, turning the imaginary violence of domestication into the literal engine reinforcing imperial conquest. Through the mediation of the "Translator's Invisibility" to the students of Babel, the novel maps the alienating mechanics of colonial extraction that reduce translators to simple vessels. The magic of silver-working is utilized as the central metaphor in the story and functions as a metaphorical embodiment that materializes Venuti's concept of "ethnocentric violence," by rendering transparent the semantic loss in translation and transforming it into an instrument that supports British hegemony. Through this framework, the violence of *Babel* demonstrates that the loss of all cultural difference is not merely an aesthetic preference, it is a political one that preserves and promotes the material of the empire and the political power the empire is built on.

The narrative arc thus shifts from an imposed invisibility to a radical visibility in a way that Venuti's strategy of "foreignization" becomes an urgent political necessity. The shift from revolutionary violence to academic complicity shows that in order to defy domestically totalizing systems, the protagonists must go beyond mere textual disruption. Hence, they plan the destruction of the institutional apparatus itself. As a result of the collapse of the Babel tower, the translator cannot continue to be a neutral mediator but must assume a proactive role in determining the course of history. In the end, *Babel* radicalizes the translator-figure by forcing a reckoning with the ethical demands of translation and insisting that in a world organized according to colonial power, translation is necessarily tied to the violence of betrayal and driven by the task of revolt.

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