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# **Stereotype or Just a Girl? How Does the Translation from English Into Dutch Influence the Stereotypically Girly Characterisation of Melissa/George from Alex Gino's *Melissa*?**

Lengers, Marieke

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Stereotype or Just a Girl?:

How Does the Translation from English Into Dutch Influence

the Stereotypically Girly Characterisation of Melissa/George from Alex Gino's *Melissa?*

Universiteit Leiden, Faculty of Humanities, MA Linguistics: Translation

Marieke Lengers

Supervisor: Drs. K.L. Zeven

Second Reader: Dr. A.G. Dorst

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Literature and society are in many ways intertwined, mainly due to the fact that the society that authors grow up in, their cultural identity and the customs they are used to are often reflected in their texts, which causes society to also influence literary translations. Translators, like authors, are influenced by the society they are a part of and therefore influence the context of the story they are translating in return. In addition to the influence of the cultural contexts of the author and the translator on the production of a text, the way the reader experiences said text is also influenced by the specific society they themselves are a part of. Therefore, not only is the reader's experience affected by the author and translator's cultural contexts, but also by their own, which means that reading as a process is complex and there can be many different possible perspectives on a story.

One of the more complicated aspects of the process of literary translation is the fact that, within the process of translation, changes can be made to the text that cause the plotlines or characters in the source text (hereafter ST) to be different from those in the target text (hereafter TT). Which parts of the text change often depend on what type of text is being translated and what the differences are between the source and target cultures. The textual changes made in a translation may influence the way the reader perceives a character, as the translator's descriptions might differ from the ones written by the author. I will be studying the effect of the translator's choices on the reader by analysing the (unintentional) changes made to the portrayal of a young transgender girl in the Dutch translation of an American middle grade novel and how this influences the way the reader perceives this stereotypically female character.

The novel I will analyse is *Melissa* (or *George* as the Dutch version is called) by Alex Gino and translated by Carla Hazewindus. It tells the story of the American middle schooler Melissa, who is transgender and is known as George to the people in her life. Although Melissa has been assigned 'male' at birth, she knows she is a girl. Despite how sure she is of this, she has not had the courage yet to tell her family or her best friend, Kelly. Melissa is obsessed with everything that can be

considered stereotypically 'girly'; she loves fashion, make-up and cannot stand to be reminded by others that she 'is' a boy. Aside from her interests, Melissa also behaves in what is perceived to be a more feminine manner, especially compared to her older brother Scott and the boys in her class. Where they are loud, aggressive, enjoy getting dirty and do not shy away from a fight, Melissa is emotional, quiet and prefers to stay away from all the designated 'boy'-areas, which she deems disgusting. Despite the fact that Melissa is mainly addressed as 'George' in the novel, with the other characters alternating between 'she/her' and 'he/him' pronouns, I will be using the name 'Melissa' and 'she/her' pronouns throughout this thesis.

Melissa's stereotypically female behaviour is integral to her character because it makes it clear to the reader that, despite the masculine name and the fact that the other characters consider her to be a boy, she is actually a girl. The way these characteristics are described and presented allow the reader to picture Melissa as a girl, even when told otherwise by the other characters. The choices made by the translator, specifically related to this part of Melissa's characterisation, are therefore very important. The reader's impression of the character might be different if she does not behave as stereotypically, and therefore obviously 'like a girl', in the TT as she does in the ST.

The characteristics mentioned above and the way the reader might perceive them are an example of the process of characterisation. In his book *Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts*, linguist Jonathan Culpeper explains this subject in detail. He approaches the process of characterisation in texts and plays from the perspectives of both cognitive psychologists and linguists. He defines characterisation as: "[the way] we form impressions of characters in our minds" (2). The process of characterisation includes the reader's prior knowledge, the characteristics a reader attaches to a character due to the way an author describes a character and the textual cues that these characteristics are derived from.

From this point of view, the character does not exist without the interaction between reader and text. The most important part of this interaction is the way the reader perceives a character, as

the character only comes to life through the involvement of the reader. Culpeper's theory on this process is relevant to the subject of literary translation, as it explains how the interaction between reader and text causes the characters to 'exist' and which parts of the text this is a result of. This provides insight into which changes made by the translator to which specific parts of the text will result in a different perception of a character and thus shows us which of the choices made by the translator affect the process of characterisation.

The interaction between reader and text and the resulting characterisation can be different in the ST than they are in the TT. This is a result of the changes made by the translator in an attempt to make the text more appealing or more understandable to their audience. These changes can be made on several levels of the text, for example, the words chosen by the translator might have different connotations than the ones chosen by the author or the translator may have chosen to change the environment of the story to better suit the TT. Additionally, the reader of the ST could potentially have a different cultural perspective than the reader of the TT, which means that the characterisation might also change because the reader views the character differently.

The reader's specific perspective on stereotypes can also influence the way they view a character. Similarly to changes made in translation, stereotypes are also culture-dependent, which means that some readers' cultural perspectives on certain character traits can lead them to consider these characters to be stereotypical, whereas other readers would not. Additionally, when a reader considers certain aspects of a character to be stereotypical, they are more likely to categorize other aspects of the character in a similar manner. Stereotypes are culture-dependent in the sense that stereotypes are not necessarily shared among cultures, rather which groups of people are stereotyped depends on their position within a specific culture.

Similarly, the definition of stereotypes can also differ widely, although this depends more on the academic field than on the culture. For example, psychologists Andersen et al. define stereotypes as "a social category labelled by a nominal term (i.e, a noun or noun phrase, e.g, redneck; republican

businessman) that functions to summarize a wide array of features of categorized persons” (192), while Culpeper defines them as “a set of beliefs which is ‘stored in memory as a cognitive structure and can then influence subsequent perceptions of, and behaviors toward, that group and its members” (Hamilton and Sherman in Culpeper 78).

When considering and combining both definitions, stereotypes appear to be a social category, which arises from a collective set of beliefs about what features belong to which specific group of people. The fact that people expect certain features when they encounter certain categories of people influences the way they behave towards this category of people. Additionally, if we look at the fact that these social categories are given labels and the perceptions regarding this category of people “are stored in the memory” (Culpeper 78), it makes stereotypes appear to be fixed, as people appear to have adopted this category as the way they perceive an entire group of people. Once this perspective is stored in the memory it becomes less likely to change and is more likely to be applied to any person who appears to exhibit the behaviours and features associated with this category. Similarly to the changes made in translation and a reader’s perspective on a story, the social groups which invoke stereotypes, as well as which features are deemed stereotypical, change depending on the cultural perspective.

A translation can change the stereotypical nature of a character, as the translator’s cultural lens might not lead them to view the character as a stereotype, which means they will not describe them the same. Additionally, the adaptation of the story to the target culture might cause these parts of the character to not have the same effect. This means that although I may find evidence for a character to be stereotypical in both the ST and the TT, the stereotypical parts of the character might differ widely regarding the level of how stereotypical they are. In the case of this thesis, while I will be looking at the ways in which the main character is stereotypically female, specifically in relation to her transness, the stereotypes she appears to perpetuate may be rooted in a completely different category in the ST than in the TT. All of the possible outcomes are dependent on how

stereotypical females are presented in both American and Dutch culture. Furthermore, the outcome of this analysis is also influenced by my own cultural lens, due to the fact that I am the main reader, as well as the cultural perspectives from the researchers whose theories I use.

The notion of stereotyping in (translated) literature has been studied many times before. Likewise, relatively extensive research has been performed on the subject of stereotypical female characters in (translated) literature. Many studies have been performed on the wide range of stereotypical traits that are assigned to female characters and the different reasons they exist. However, most of the attention regarding female stereotyping has been on the characterisation of cisgender women. Although the translation of transgender female characters has been studied to a certain extent, there is still an opportunity to provide more research. Additionally, there has been very little research into the characterisation of a transgender girl, specifically in children's literature. In an attempt to bridge this gap, I will be looking at the stereotypical femininity of the transgender pre-teen protagonist Melissa in the American middle grade novel *Melissa*.

I will do so by performing a close reading and subsequent comparative analysis of several scenes that emphasize the stereotypically feminine characterisation of the main character in an attempt to answer the question: 'in what ways is the stereotypical characterisation of a girl influenced by the choices made by a translator and what effects does this have on the story according to a comparative analysis of the American children's novel *Melissa* and its Dutch translation *George?*'

## Chapter 2: Theory

As mentioned before the focus of this thesis will be on the possibly stereotypically female characterisation of Melissa, a young transgender girl, in the middle grade children's novel *Melissa*. A proper analysis of this subject and this novel requires perspectives from scholars within the fields of translated children's literature (hereafter TChL), feminist translation, queer translation, gender studies, literary theory, psychology and linguistics.

Children's literature has been defined by Riitta Oittinen as "literature read silently by children and aloud to children" (4). When it comes to the theory on the translation of this specific type of literature, the main focus has been on how the translation can best be adjusted to its audience and what kind of adjustments are made for which specific audience. According to Oittinen, when translating a children's novel, a translator is always influenced by their own "child image" (4), which she describes as the specific child the translator pictures as their audience when they are translating. This image is both unique to the translator, due to the way their personal history influences how they view children, and partially shared by those within the society they are a part of (Oittinen 4). The components of the child image that are shared among a society consist of ideas on what is appropriate or inappropriate, what is understandable for children and what can be considered educational. The child image as a concept is especially relevant for a novel like *Melissa*, due to the fact that introducing LGBTQ+ subjects to children often leads to discussions among adults regarding if and to what level these subjects are appropriate for children. Regarding the topic of LGBTQ+ issues, child images can differ widely depending on the cultural identity of those concerning themselves with the interaction between LGBTQ+ issues and children's literature. This variation in perspectives caused by cultural differences might be visible in the changes made regarding the depiction of Melissa in the ST and the TT.

The child image is adults' perspective on what is right for children when it comes to literature. The influence translators, as well as authors and other adults who provide children with

books, have on the literature children consume is described by Themis Kaniklidou and Juliane House as:

[Translated children's literature] is related to children's socialization (Tucker, 1981; Zipes, 1983), with stories that play a formative role in children's first years of life and that help them from an early age to understand the world of adults around them. It is true that, when it comes to literature, children are left to the mercy of adults: they are dependent on parents or translators, who are engaged with the selection of books to be read and translated. (233)

As children grow they are partially shaped by the literature they come across, which means that the choices made by adults regarding literature have a great deal of influence on their development. The influential position this allows the author and translator to occupy in this process comes with a certain responsibility that affects the choices they make.

The stories written and translated for children are created according to what the person writing them considers to be developmentally appropriate, which is the case for both authors and translators. This means that because they may have a different perspective on what is 'right', translators might change parts of the stories they are translating. The changes made in translation appear to be the subject most studied within the field of translated children's literature; specifically the cultural filtering that occurs within the process of translating a children's book. According to Zohar Shavit, cultural filtering occurs often in translations of children's literature because those within the field think that the novel needs to be "adapted to the child's level of comprehension (as the adults understand it)" (174) or because, according to Kaniklidou and House, "they want the text to align with the "translators' and editors' moral, religious or political purposes" (234). According to Jan van Coillie, the subjects that fall under the categories of moral, religious or political purposes mentioned above are "sex and corporality, cruelty and violence, death, religion, the relation between parent and child, or desirable versus undesirable behavior" (146). These categories are sensitive subjects in many cultures and often spark debate amongst those who work with children's literature,

as they all have different opinions about what is or is not appropriate according to their own child images and belief systems.

Although the theory on cultural filtering is integral to the study of TChL and the interaction between cultures is always relevant to the study of translation, my use of House and Kaniklidou, Shavit and Van Coillie's research will be very selective. In the case of House and Kaniklidou, their focus on discourse does not align with the focus of this thesis, as focusing too much on discourse would take away from my in-depth approach to characterisation in *Melissa* by straying too far away from the main character. Similarly, Shavit studies a very different part of the relationship between TChL and its readers, namely how TChL contributes to the diversity within the children's bookmarket and how this impacts the audience. Lastly, Van Coillie's research is mainly focused on the position of TChL in the literary polysystem. All of these subjects do not fully align with the focus of this thesis, as the analysis in this thesis will be focusing on characterisation, and are therefore less useful. Because the focus of my thesis is a stereotypically female characterisation in a (children's) translation, I will mainly be using the more general theory written on TChL by the authors mentioned above, which provides a perspective on the way a translator approaches translating for their juvenile audience.

The way a translator views both the children they are translating for and the concept of gender, impacts the way they approach the latter. If they, for example, adhere to the very traditional idea of gender, namely that there are only two genders, which cause people to behave in stereotypical ways, or if they believe that children are only capable of understanding this depiction of gender, then their translations are likely to reflect this. The way gender is portrayed in novels can impact the way children view their own or others' gender. Xuemei Chen and Ge Song state:

Because of the "enculturating function generally ascribed to children's literature" (Flanagan, 2010, p. 26), the portrayal of and behaviours in children's literature are important issues. In contrast to the extensive research on the translation of adult literature from a gender perspective

(Simon, 1996; von Flotow, 1997; Federici and Leonardi, 2013), relatively little attention has been given to the intersection of children's literature and gender in translation. (2)

Song and Chen here refer to Flanagan's mention of the term "enculturating" (2), which indicates how an individual comes to learn values and appropriate behaviour through being submerged in their culture (Berry 547). Children's literature is generally seen as being capable of reproducing lessons or customs that are considered necessary to learn by the culture it is a part of and is therefore part of the enculturating process. The "enculturating function generally ascribed to children's literature" (Chen and Song 2) related to gender then indicates that children's literature teaches children what they need to know about gender and how they should behave according to the gender assigned to them.

Chen and Song specifically mention 'gendered bodies', which is a term most often mentioned in gender studies and is usually used to indicate how "[bodies] are shaped by sociocultural ideals of what female and male bodies should look like and be capable of (and further shaped by national, racial ethnic, and social class ideals for each)" (Lorber and Moore 4). In other words: gender is not innate and does not automatically result from a person's sex, but instead is derived from and adapted to sociocultural ideals. The idea of gender as a sociocultural ideal is also an important theme in *Melissa*, as the novel emphasizes how Melissa's assigned sex at birth (male) does not automatically mean that adhering to the sociocultural ideal of acting according to the male gender is natural for her. Lastly, Chen and Song mention "the intersection between literature and gender in translation" (2). The term intersectionality is mainly used to indicate that everyone and, in the case of the subject of this thesis, everything has "potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties and allegiances" (Tyson 359). The different areas that overlap within this thesis are TChL, (trans)gender studies, feminist translation and queer translation.

For this thesis it is important to distinguish between 'stereotypically female behaviour' and 'stereotypically feminine behaviour'. Although in many studies on gender and specifically female

gender, the concepts 'feminine' and 'female' are used as substitutions for each other, it is important to note that they are not fully interchangeable. When considering these terms it is important to keep two things in mind: the difference between sex and gender and the difference between the function of the words 'feminine' and 'female'. As mentioned before, sex and gender are not the same and one's gender does not necessarily have to result from one's sex. Rather, Judith Butler defined gender as a performance resulting from sociocultural norms and not the result of any biology or innate characteristics, or as Butler put it "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (33). In the case of femininity and female identity, this means that rather than someone exhibiting certain behaviours because they are female, the performance of these stereotypical behaviours are the reason why we consider someone to be female. People who are considered to be female, do not fit within this category because this stereotypically female behaviour is innate, but rather exhibit this behaviour because they know this is the behaviour that they should perform according to society's expectations.

Additionally, although femininity and female are connected in some ways, in the sense that those assigned female at birth will often perform femininity, any gender performance can include femininity. Femininity is about characteristics, which means that those who do not consider themselves to be female can still exhibit these characteristics, whereas female is a sex and/or gender category. Most importantly, if we view feminine and female as the same, we ignore the associations that come with femininity, for example, "weakness" or "gentleness" (Collins Dictionary, 'feminine'), which are not necessarily inherent to being female. Within this thesis I will mainly use the term 'stereotypical female', an identity which includes, but is not limited to, feminine traits. This term emphasizes the fact that Melissa's gender identity is female and she, as a girl, is displaying behaviour generally associated with females, rather than her being any other gender performing stereotypical femininity.

Part of the focus on gender in this thesis will be related to the translation of Melissa's transgender identity. This makes queer translation a very relevant field of study. To start with, the term 'queer' is generally used as an umbrella term for everything that falls outside of the norm or, as David Halperin puts it: "queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (Halperin in Baer 23). Queer translation, therefore, is the process of translating subjects that do not align with the standard. This is confirmed by the *Queer Translation Collective* in their 'Manifesto'. They explain the process of queer translation as challenging and complicating how identity is constructed through grammar, the playful use of pronouns and the rejection of the use of gendered pronouns which would lead to the omission of same-sex desire (Queer Translation Collective, "Manifesto"). This statement emphasizes the complexity of translating identity, when the definitions, descriptions and literary depictions of said identity are something people might find difficult to comprehend. Queering translation practice focuses on language use that allows for these complexities to be presented as true to the identity depicted in the source text as possible.

According to David Gramling, who is a scholar within several fields, among which queer studies, translation studies and literature studies, queer subjects in regards to translation are at times at risk of "sanitation" (496-497). In the context of the study of queer translation, sanitation is the erasing and adapting of overtly queer themes, as well as the target culture lexicon or grammatical structures not accommodating the translation of queer content (Gramling 496-497). The manipulation of a text through the examples above can cause the text to lose some of its 'queerness'. On the position of the translator Emily Rose states:

That the translator is not impartial is not necessarily negative, but manipulation is "intrinsically connected to power, to a desire to redefine reality, to a desire to control behaviour and to shape identities (or entire literary or cultural traditions) to particular ideological expectations" (5-6). The translator has the power to shape transgender identity in their translations. (496)

Translators have the power to shape transgender identity in the sense that for people who do not know any transgender people, the portrayal of a transgender character will be their only reference point for what transgender people are like. This is especially true in the case of a novel like *Melissa*, which was written to teach children about what it means to be transgender (School Library Journal, “Alex Gino on Debut Novel ‘George’, and the Importance of Transgender Voices in the Kid Lit World”). It is important that the translator is aware of their own knowledge and biases regarding this subject as this might shape the perspectives of their audience.

Aside from queer translation, theory on the depiction of (stereotypical) gender in literature and translation is also important. Most of the research conducted on both gender and translation has been on adult novels, which means that most of the written theory is not adapted to children’s literature. Within the field of feminist translation, the approaches have largely been from a political perspective. Feminist translation scholars, like Sherry Simon and Luise von Flotow, have written about the similarities between the positions of the translator and women in society as both are considered inferior in comparison to their counterpart, namely the author for the translator and men for women (Simon 1), and the way translation could be used to increase women’s social position through the adaptation and revision of older works (Von Flotow 30).

Although the abovementioned perspective is very important to the field of feminist translation and women in translation, it does not fully align with the focus of this thesis. Despite the fact that I will be looking at the position of women in both an original work and a translation and, more importantly, the actions of the translator in regards to the potentially stereotypical portrayal of a female character, this thesis will not contain the same activist approach as the ones that are mentioned by Von Flotow. My approach will be less focused on the improvement of the portrayal of women in literature, due to the fact that the portrayal of women and girls in this specific book, though at times stereotypical, serves a different purpose. Because this book is focused on the coming of age of a transgender girl, the portrayal of this girl could potentially be stereotypical for different

reasons. The potentially stereotypical portrayal in the book does not appear to necessarily aim to reinforce female/male inequality, but rather tries to explain to children the difficulties of experiencing your gender in a different way than what is expected of you.

Although the approach mentioned earlier does not necessarily suit this thesis, the perspective of feminist translators is still important, especially the comments made by both Eleonora Leonardi and Vanessa Federici (2) and Von Flotow (163) mentioning the power literature and translation have in shaping gendered behaviour, which was also mentioned by Ge and Song in regards to children's literature. Federici and Leonardi specifically state: "translation requires skills that go beyond the linguistic aspect because we know, as also acknowledged by feminist scholars, that it determines national and social identities. Translation is a discursive practice that forms and transforms gender identities and helps reconsider the notion of sexual difference" (2). Here they mention that a translator needs to be aware of the culture that their text will interact with as this text holds the power to shape gender identities and change people's perspectives on sexual difference.

Both literature and translation enforce, reinforce and challenge societal perspectives on gender. What we read shapes our perspective, something which is especially true for children's literature, which as mentioned before, holds an "enculturating function" (Flanagan in Chen and Song 2). Translators and specifically those translating for children have to be aware of the way they portray characters and how this could potentially cause children to expect certain behaviour from the 'real-life versions' of these characters. In her book *Gendered Behaviour* Gina Rippon mentions how "we must remember that our children's developing social brains will always be on the lookout for the rules and expectations that go with being a particular member of a social network" (203). Due to the fact that children are still 'new' to the world, and therefore have no preconceived ideas, they try to make sense of it by categorizing certain behaviour as 'right' or 'wrong' according to what they see, experience or hear from others.

Children, in that sense, are impressionable, which means that stereotypes in children's literature can hold a lot of influence as they introduce or reinforce the idea that certain groups of people will always exhibit certain behaviour. There are many stereotypes for many different groups in society, which are also reflected in literature. On the subject of feminist translation and stereotypes Von Flotow writes:

when women 'write the female body' they write on a subject that has hitherto been described in terms of the stereotypes of the lover ('whore'), the devoted and unsexed mother, or the untouchable Holy Virgin... Feminist writers have identified sexuality as the factor underlying these stereotypes, and have responded by breaking open these stereotypes and moving beyond these cliches. (17)

In addition to the stereotypes von Flotow describes in the quotation above, there are many other stereotypically female characteristics mentioned by translation- and literary scholars and psychologists. I have compiled a list of characteristics from research performed by scholars from several different fields, as a way to not be limited to one single perspective. Chen and Song and Von Flotow offer stereotypical characteristics from the point of view of translation scholars, Lois Tyson from the perspective of literary studies and Endendijk et al. offer a psychologist's perspective. The following characteristics were mentioned in their research: passivity, incapability and dependence, weakness, gentleness, quietness, (physical) beauty, fragility (Chen and Song 3-5), being nurturing, being (over)emotional (irrational), submissiveness, frailty, modesty, timidity, being self-sacrificing (Tyson 81-86) and a lack of fanaticism and assertiveness (Endendijk et al. 587). The abovementioned stereotypes are all used to discredit a woman's power, as they negate a sense of assertiveness, strength and capability.

On this subject Tyson states "[the idea that women are] "emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive... [has] been used very successfully to justify inequities, which still occur today, such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions,

paying men higher wages... and convincing women that they are not fit for careers in such areas as mathematics and engineering” (81). Although the abovementioned characteristics are all part of the ways women can be stereotyped, they do not all occur in every single portrayal of a stereotypical woman. More specifically, not all of them are relevant for the study of female stereotypes in TChL, especially the ones that fall into the sexuality category mentioned by Von Flotow. Stereotypical portrayals of young girls differ from those of adult women, which is why I will focus on a select few characteristics. I will mainly be focusing on the following characteristics from the list mentioned above: passivity, incapability, dependence, weakness, being prone to tears, gentleness, quietness, beauty, fragility, being (over)emotional, timidity, shallowness and insincerity.

Characteristics like the ones mentioned above, though stereotypical, could be integral to, for example, Melissa as a character. According to Willie van Peer, a character is “what readers infer from words, sentences, paragraphs and textual composition depicting, describing or suggesting actions, thoughts, utterances or feelings of a protagonist” (Van Peer in Culpeper 9). More simply said, this means that the reader collects and interprets information that creates an image of the character in their head. The language used and the specific words chosen to describe a character are therefore very important to the way the reader will view them, which is something that a translator has to be very conscious of. The words chosen by the translator and the connotations that are attached to them can cause a reader to perceive a very different character in the TT than they would have in the ST.

The process of the reader inferring information related to a specific character from a novel and creating an image of said character in their mind, as mentioned earlier, is called “characterisation” (Culpeper 2). The following concepts are mentioned by Culpeper in his book *Language and Characterisation People in Plays and Other Texts* as either influencing or interacting with the process of characterisation. To start with, I will explain the most basic way readers make sense of the character actions they encounter in a story: categorization. Something can be

categorized when it consistently displays features that are similar enough to the prototype of the category to be viewed as the same (Culpeper 62). Categorisation usually occurs when a person encounters external stimuli. The cognitive processes which are defined by this are called “bottom-up” or “data-driven” processes (Culpeper 28). While “top-down” or “conceptually-driven” processes are determined by what Culpeper calls the “fund of human knowledge” (45), which consists of a person’s previously lived experiences. The fund of human knowledge is different for every specific person, but there will be some overlap in experiences for those who have had similar cultural upbringings. These previously lived experiences come together in schemata, which are collections of previously acquired knowledge on a specific subject, which according to Culpeper “shapes how we view, remember, and make inferences about new information” (64).

Whereas schemata influence how we view, remember and categorize certain things, the context mainly influences our perspectives. The context is also something to be interpreted and therefore does not always lead to the same perspective. This means that similarly to the fact that schemata vary among people, which causes them to view things differently, a different interpretation of the context of a situation can lead to a different perspective (Culpeper 63). This indicates that the way we view other people and fictional characters is in a sense also context-dependent, which means that the characterisation of a character does not look the same way for every reader because every trait and action will be interpreted through a specific cultural lens.

The abovementioned traits and actions that a reader can infer a character’s characterisation from are called “characterisation cues” (Culpeper 164). According to Culpeper there is a distinction between explicit and implicit characterisation cues: explicit characterisation cues are the parts of the text where characters make explicit statements about their own ‘personality’ or that of other characters, whereas implicit characterisation cues are the parts of the text where the reader has to draw their own conclusions about a character based on “linguistic behaviour” (164).

Within explicit characterisation cues there is also a difference between “self-presentation” and “other-presentation” (Culpeper 167). Self-presentation is when a character provides explicit characterisation cues about themselves and other-presentation is when they provide that same information about other characters in the text (Culpeper 167). When reading these cues the reader has to remain aware of the character’s reasoning behind providing this information about themselves or others because there might be a specific motivation behind it, which means it might not align with the rest of the characterisation. For this type of critical reading Culpeper has provided the term “the discounting principle”, which indicates that “we must discount aspects of self-presentation that are likely to be motivated by strategic reasons...For other-presentation we must similarly pay attention to discounting effects” (168).

Similarly to the fact that we need to take into account that the differing perspectives between readers, as well as the differing perspectives between translator and author might lead to a different characterisation, we also need to take into account that characters might have specific perspectives that may serve a specific purpose, which means that the meaning of some characterisation cues is also context-dependent, or at least character-dependent. Aside from these characterisation cues being character-dependent, we also need to pay attention to what the effect of the author and the translator’s differing perspective is on self- and other-presentation and how this information comes across to the reader. If the translator’s perspective on a character’s ideas and intentions is different from that of the author, the reader of the TT may be presented with different information than the reader of the ST, which might lead to changes in the characterisation. In that sense keeping the discounting principle and the perspectives of the translator and the author in mind are similar; when reading and forming a characterisation in their mind the reader has to remain aware of who is presenting this specific information and what might have influenced them.

In his book, Culpeper also mentions the relatively well-known theory on flat and round characters, which allows a reader to attribute character typologies to a character based on the

information they have inferred from, for example, the abovementioned characterisation cues. This theory may be useful when it comes to performing a basic analysis of a character, paired with for example Culpeper's characterisation model, which will be discussed later. Although the category 'flat character' might sound like it would suit most stereotypical characters, due to stereotypical characters generally lacking the depth that would make them more three-dimensional, there is a difference between the two. Culpeper defines flat characters as characters that are associated with "simplicity, stasis, immunity from conflict, and external life (that is, we are not given direct access to a character's thoughts). In addition, flatness is often associated with characters who exist mainly to contribute to a particular aspect of the text such as the plot, or another character's characterisation." (56). He connects round characters to the opposite characteristics like: "complexity, change, conflict, and inner life" (Culpeper 56). Lastly, Culpeper mentions that "with regard to characterisation, one can describe flat characters as typically schema reinforcing and round characters as typically schema refreshing" (95).

According to Culpeper, E.M. Forster defined flat and round characters as the following: "[flat characters are] 'humours', 'types', or 'caricatures'. 'In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality; when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round' (1987: 73)" (Forster in Culpeper 52). He defines round characters as being "defined by implication: those who are not flat are round" (Forster in Culpeper 52). Culpeper criticizes Forster's definitions due to their simplistic nature, especially regarding the lack of any further definition regarding round characters.

I am inclined to agree with Culpeper's criticism, especially if I try to relate this theory to my own focus on stereotypical characterisations. According to Forster flat characters are 'humours', 'types' or 'caricatures' (Forster in Culpeper 52), which, due to the fact that they are types, would mean that stereotypical characters are often flat characters. Although, according to Culpeper, flat characters are typically schema-enforcing, stereotypes are often constructed around a single idea

and stereotypical characters are usually of a more simplistic and more static nature, there is no automatic connection between flatness and stereotypes. The fact that a stereotype is a type does not automatically mean that a stereotypical character is flat. Rather, the way flat and round are presented as complete opposites in the definition above is too simplistic in this sense and therefore cannot be connect to stereotypical characters in this manner. Whether or not a stereotypical character is a flat or round character depends on the character's role in the story, as well as the level of insight the reader gets into this character's inner world.

David Fishelov introduced more specific definitions of flat and round characters: textually flat, textually round, constructionally flat and constructionally round. When a character is textually flat, it is only ever depicted from one perspective, which means it always does or says the same things or the story always emphasizes the same traits (Fishelov 426). A textually round character has a more rich and elaborate 'personality', which grows over the course of the story. The reader gets an insight into the mind of the character, knows their name, sees the character in different situations and encounters many different traits (Fishelov 426). Constructionally flat characters are tied to a category. The reader categorizes them according to the information they have gotten from all levels of the text (Fishelov 426). Constructionally round as a classification is mainly used "when we cannot reach a constructed type" (Fishelov 426).

Culpeper also proposes a model that explains and provides insight into the characterisation process, although he does offer the warning that a model often leads to a simplified version of the information a researcher is looking for. Within the model Culpeper explains several parts of the reading process of a text. The entire process of understanding a character occurs within the control system, which means that the process of reading for a character also occurs here. Within this control system several steps lead to a character impression: one of which is the reader's prior knowledge. As mentioned before, prior knowledge is the knowledge within the reader's long-term memory and allows them to make sense of the characters they encounter based on their previously lived

experiences (Culpeper 36). In the situation model, the combination of prior knowledge and textual elements lead to meaning representation, which means that they lead to the reader's understanding of the text. The situation model contains the parts of a text that lead to a reader's understanding of a character, which includes, for example, their beliefs or emotions (Culpeper 36). The character a reader infers from the text is influenced by a reader's prior knowledge, both about real people and other fictional characters they have encountered (Culpeper 36).

Similar to the situation model, the textbase also contributes to meaning representation. The difference between the two resides in the fact that the textbase only includes the "propositional content" of the text (Culpeper 37), part of which can be connected to the character. Culpeper uses the definition 'proposition' for "a state, an event, or an action[, which] frequently has a truth value with respect to a real or an imaginary world" (Graesser et al. in Culpeper 29), which means that these parts of the text are to some degree similar to the parts of the world that the reader understands. The textbase helps the reader understand the character even if most of the information they have is inconsistent or incoherent (Culpeper 37).

Lastly, Culpeper explains the surface structure. This includes the linguistic choices authors and translators make that are connected to the characters and will "undergo syntactic and semantic analyses in order to form the textbase" (Culpeper 37). Despite the fact that it can form the textbase through analysis, it does not necessarily have to. Culpeper states: "formal surface features, if they are deemed relevant, may be incorporated into the situation model." (37). Whereas the analysis of the surface structure can turn it into the propositions of the textbase, the main and most influential parts of the text may be part of the situation model based on their relevance to the text.

Although most of the theory by Culpeper is not directly related to translation, it will still be useful for my analysis. His theory on characterisation provides me with clear points to focus on in relation to the subject I have chosen. This allows for a more structured approach when it comes to my analysis. This structured approach will then provide me with two separate characterisations, one

from the ST and one from the TT, which I can compare to see where the translator's choices led to changes and what effect this had on my perspective on the character. The theory on the perspective of the reader will allow me theoretical insight into the effect these differences might have.

## Chapter 3: Method

The analysis in this thesis will be used to answer the questions: *in which ways is the stereotypical characterization of a transgender girl influenced by the choices made by a translator and what effect does this have on the story according to a comparative analysis of the American children's novel *Melissa* and its Dutch translation *George*?* I will be analysing and comparing the way the reader may perceive the character Melissa in both the ST and the TT. This analysis will mainly be based on my own experiences reading the novel, rather than a comparative study of multiple readers, as this will be an in-depth analysis of a reader's perspective on the ST and the TT, supported by the theory on characterisation outlined in chapter one.

As mentioned before, *Melissa* is an American middle grade coming of age novel about the experience of a young transgender girl written by genderqueer author Alex Gino. The novel came out in 2015 and was until 2021 known as *George*. The title became controversial as this was the main character's deadname, the name given at birth that can give a transgender person intense feelings of discomfort as this name does not align with their gender identity, which is why it was changed to the main character's preferred name. Despite this, *George* has remained the title of the Dutch translation, translated by Carla Hazewindus, which came out in 2016.

The subject of the novel is considered to be controversial, as not all adults appear to agree that children should be introduced to queer topics. This makes the novel an interesting case study; if the person working on the novel has strong opinions on works like this, it may influence the way they approach this type of novel. Additionally, the fact that the original author is genderqueer and can therefore relate to the main character's experience, but the translator, as far as I am aware, cannot, also means that they have very different perspectives on this subject, which makes for an interesting comparison. All in all, the novel's controversial subject combined with the novel's target audience, children, and the possible differences between the American source culture and the Dutch target

culture will likely have had an impact on the translator's choices, which may cause the reading experience of the ST and the TT to be different.

This analysis will focus on specific traits within Melissa's character that align with the image of a stereotypical woman. Several excerpts from the ST and TT in which these traits are emphasized will be analysed separately and then compared, with this analysis mainly being rooted in queer translation theory, gender studies and Culpeper's characterisation theory. Although, as mentioned in the first chapter, Culpeper's book *Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts* contains a characterisation model that would allow me to establish a basic characterisation, I have ultimately decided that this model would not provide me with insight into the character in a way that is relevant to the subject. Therefore, although I will be applying Culpeper's theory to my analysis, I will not be using the model.

To be able to provide an in-depth analysis of the main character's stereotypical female identity, I have divided the analysis into three parts. These three parts are based on the list of female stereotypes that are applicable to children's novels mentioned in chapter one: passivity, incapability, dependence, weakness, being prone to tears, gentleness, quietness, beauty, fragility, being (over)emotional, timidity, shallowness and insincerity. I have used several of these stereotypical traits to create three categories based on the traits most often displayed by the main character. The categories are: beauty, the feeling and expressing of emotions and a lack of assertiveness.

The categories 'the feeling and expressing of emotions' and 'a lack of assertiveness' both include several of the stereotypical traits, with 'being prone to tears' and 'being (over)emotional' forming the category 'the feeling and expressing of emotions' and 'passivity', 'incapability', 'weakness', 'fragility' and 'timidity' forming the category 'a lack of assertiveness'. A focus on 'beauty' is often seen as one of the most typically 'female' traits, as well as something that is often imposed on women as a standard to live up to. This makes 'beauty' an important facet in the life of a woman. Its importance and the fact that 'beauty' consists of several subjects, e.g. make-up and fashion, but

also physical fitness, causes this one trait to be a category by itself. Because there are several instances in the novel where Melissa exhibits behaviour that could fall within these categories, I have multiple examples to compare, which will allow me to perform a more in-depth analysis. I will look at these characteristics and try to pinpoint if they indeed cause the character to fall in the category of 'stereotypical woman' and how the translator's choices regarding the depiction of these characteristics might affect the reader's perspective.

I will start with an analysis of the connection between Melissa and 'beauty'. I have broadened this category beyond just descriptions of Melissa's physical beauty. Rather, it will consist of an analysis of how Melissa is shown interacting with not only the way she looks, but also with the way she positions herself in regards to anything that has to do with physical appearance. Examples of this are descriptions of her perspective on clothes, make-up and her relationship with her body. Xuemei Chen and Ge Song defined physical beauty as a stereotypically female characteristic (5), but Cynthia Griffin Wolff also defines the interest in fashion as stereotypical for women. She quotes Virginia Woolf when she defines "the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes" (Griffin Wolff 205) as a typical interest for women. I have included this focus on outward appearance in this section because it fits best under the 'beauty' umbrella.

To analyse this subject I have chosen several excerpts from the novel. In these excerpts Melissa is reading her (very stereotypically girly) fashion magazines, dressing up with Kelly, considering her own body and discussing being a girl with her mom. When analysing these excerpts it will be important to take into account that Melissa is transgender, because this impacts the way she is described, how she carries herself and how she views her own body. According to the perspective on what a stereotypical woman is, women are very fixated on how they look, but there might be additional reasons for Melissa's focus on physical appearance. One of the reasons for her being focused on her own appearance might be that she could be experiencing gender dysphoria, which is "clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the

one with which they identify” (HRC Foundation, “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Definitions”). Because dysphoria can play a significant role for transgender people in regards to their relationship with their body, this means that this might also influence Melissa’s focus on her own appearance. I will therefore also be looking at how Melissa’s perspective on her own physique in relation to stereotypical femaleness, as her physique is different from the stereotypical female body, is depicted in both texts. This will give me additional insight into the reason behind her interest in stereotypically female clothes and make-up, in the sense that it might be innate or solely function as a way for her to counter her feelings of dysphoria.

After the ‘interest in general appearance’ section, I will continue with the ‘the feeling and expressing of emotions’ section, here I will be looking at how Melissa expresses emotion and how this expression can be related to being a stereotypical girl. For this part I have chosen the following excerpts: Melissa cries after reading *Charlotte’s Web*, Melissa gets bullied for her reaction to *Charlotte’s Web*, Melissa gets into fights with both Kelly and Scott and lastly, Melissa cries after her performance in the school play.

It appears to be more stereotypically female to be emotional and to have a tendency to cry easily. Griffin Wolff mentions that women have been depicted as emotional in literature for a long time: “there is a long tradition which maintains that woman is essentially emotional” (210). She elaborates on this when explaining how women were defined by men as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ depending on the way they displayed their emotions: “good women cried easily; bad women were self-contained (221)... With this obsessive focus on emotionality, women came increasingly to be defined as purely emotional, without rational competence worth mentioning” (Griffin Wolff 211). Despite the fact that the perspective of a potential suitor is not relevant in *Melissa*, this does indicate a long history of the stereotypical depiction of emotions regarding female characters.

When analysing Melissa’s emotions I will be looking for characterisation cues that indicate that she lacks control over her emotions, cries easily and is more likely to be ‘overemotional’. During

my analysis I will be trying to answer questions like 'how does she express her emotions?' and 'in which situations does she become emotional and does she behave as expected in regards to her surroundings?' The answers to questions like these should hopefully provide me with an answer to what degree Melissa expresses her emotions in a stereotypically feminine way, how this relates to the fact that she is transgender, namely does she express her emotions very obviously differently from her male classmates, and how the ways she expresses emotions differ in the ST and the TT.

According to stereotypes men express their emotion differently than women do. Tyson states "[t]raditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive" (81). The connection between masculinity and strength causes anger to be the emotion that is tied most strongly to men. Tyson states: "it is not surprising, in this context, that anger and other violent emotions are the only emotions permitted, even encouraged, in men, for anger is a very effective means of blocking out fear and pain, which are not permitted, and anger usually produces the kind of aggressive behaviours associated with patriarchal manhood" (82-83). Due to the fact that there appears to be a big difference in men and women regarding the stereotypes when it comes to expressions of anger, I will specifically be paying attention to how Melissa is described when something happens that might be upsetting. Despite the fact that anger is a more 'stereotypically masculine' emotion, this does not necessarily mean that women do not experience anger. To be able to gauge whether or not Melissa's anger is stereotypically feminine, I will be making a distinction between if the character appears to just be feeling angry or if she is also expressing this anger in a stereotypically masculine manner, e.g. showing aggression.

In the 'lack of assertiveness' chapter I will be looking at how Melissa approaches certain situations. In this chapter I will mainly be considering her approach to confrontation, both when it comes to fighting and speaking up for herself. In their text, Xuemei Chen and Ge Song mention passivity as a stereotypical trait for girls that occurs often in children's literature (3), which means

that Melissa should be less assertive than her male counterparts. For this part of the analysis I will look at the excerpts in which Melissa gets bullied, Melissa discusses her fight with the bullies with Kelly and Melissa confronts her bullies. Stereotypically feminine behaviour tends to lack assertiveness, as men are considered to take care of problems from the perspective of the 'provider' role (Tyson 83). I will therefore be looking at if and how Melissa speaks up for herself and how the way this is described aligns with the female characters in the novel and differs from the male characters.

After analysing these traits as they appear in the ST and the TT separately, I will be comparing the evidence I found for Melissa being a stereotypical girl in both the ST and the TT, to see if both depictions are as stereotypical as I am expecting. After this comparison, I will be looking at how these traits are different in both texts and how the translator's choices impact the way I, as the reader, experience the character and if this is very different from the original.

## Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

### 4.1: Beauty

As mentioned before, there is a connection between the stereotypical image of women and the concept of 'beauty'. Often dressing up in skirts or dresses and caring about make-up is presented as the ultimate way of performing femininity and emphasizing that you are a woman or a girl. Aside from Virginia Woolf's perspective mentioned earlier, this sentiment is reinforced by Chen and Song in their article when they explain the "feminine beauty ideal" by using a statement made by Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (5). The feminine beauty ideal is "the socially constructed notion that physical attractiveness is one of women's most important assets, and something all women should strive to achieve and maintain" (Chen and Song 5). Women and girls are told by society that the stereotypically 'correct' way of performing femininity and being a proper woman is by paying attention to your appearance, as is evident in the way Melissa interacts with subjects related to her appearance.

Throughout the novel *Melissa* there are several characterisation cues that indicate that Melissa is fixated on make-up and what appears to be her idea of 'girly' clothes. The scenes consist of both explicit and implicit characterisation cues and are presented in the novel as one of the main pieces of 'evidence' that Melissa is really a girl. In spite of how she is addressed by the other characters in the novel, her interests in fashion, make-up and the colour pink are used to emphasize her general 'girly' nature. Additionally, these interests are at times also used by the other characters as a way to characterise Melissa as a girl. The end of the novel reinforces this idea that this interest makes Melissa a girl, as the last chapter consists of Melissa and Kelly dressing up in skirts and putting on make-up to go to the zoo after Melissa has come out to both Kelly and her mother. There are multiple instances within the novel where Melissa's fascination with make-up and stereotypically

'girly' fashion is emphasized. I have chosen to analyse four excerpts, both the ST and the TT-versions, which appear to place the most emphasis on what Melissa is experiencing.

#### 4.1.1: ST

The first excerpt describes a scene where Melissa is looking at a typical teen girl magazine and appears to experience a sense of wonder and excitement at what she sees on the pages:

George had never worn make-up, but she pored over the range of colors on the left side of the page. Her heart raced in her chest. She wondered what it would feel like to really wear lipstick. George loved to put on ChapStick. She wore it all winter, whether or not her lips were really chapped... (Gino 5)

Words and phrases like "pored", "her heart raced in her chest" and "loved" (Gino 5) serve as implicit characterisation cues and emphasize the passion Melissa holds for the subject of make-up. Additionally, there appears to be a sense of longing to wear make-up being conveyed in the sentence "she wondered what it would feel like to really wear lipstick", supported by the "she wore it all winter, whether or not her lips were really chapped" (Gino 5). This shows the reader that Melissa has found, for lack of better words, a 'loophole' where she can wear make-up without people figuring out that she is a girl. The fact that she feels like she has to find a loophole even though she does not dare to 'live as girl' yet, implies Melissa's passion for stereotypically 'girly', and in her case gender-affirming, things like make-up; she wants to wear make-up badly enough to risk doing something that is 'strange' or might be questioned.

The second excerpt solidifies Melissa's love of make-up as an integral part of her characterisation. In this excerpt Melissa and her best friend Kelly play dress up before going to the zoo:

The closet and most of her dresser drawers were open, displaying an array of girls' clothing, and Kelly had laid out an assortment of makeup on her desk. The air smelled of perfume, several bottles of which were lined in a neat row next to the makeup.

'Welcome to Kelly's Salon. Whaddaya think?'

George's heart thumped in her chest. It was as if all of the pages in her magazines had come to life in Kelly's bedroom. (Gino 178)

Melissa once again appears to be portrayed experiencing a sense of wonderment. Similarly to the first, this excerpt contains implicit characterisation cues that seem to indicate her passion for fashion and makeup. Melissa is described as having her heart 'thump' in her chest, which could indicate either anxiety or excitement. This phrase is accompanied by the experience being described as "all of the pages in [Melissa's] magazines coming to life in Kelly's bedroom" (Gino 178). The magazines are presented to the reader as Melissa's most prized possessions in the novel, which means that the comparison indicates that she is happy about this development. Additionally, the reader knows that Melissa has thus far not been able to express herself as the girl she is. Kelly's clothes and make-up give her the opportunity to finally be herself, which, aside from her general interest, is likely to be another reason for her excitement.

Despite the possible evidence found here, this part of my interpretation of Melissa as a character is influenced by the prior knowledge mentioned by Culpeper (36). I am aware of the fact that a large part of girls Melissa's age like make-up and fashion, even if this is only a childhood interest. Additionally, as the reader, I am also aware of the fact that Melissa would love to act 'like a girl', but cannot because she feels like she has to hide the fact that she is transgender. This allows me to easily connect Melissa's love of make-up to her wanting to 'act like a girl', which is usually similar to being a stereotypical girl.

The following excerpt depicts the connection between Melissa and 'girly' clothes. The first excerpt is part of a conversation between Melissa and Kelly about what they will be wearing on their trip to the zoo:

'Like a skirt?' The hair on George's neck tingled just saying the word *skirt*.

'Sure. When *girls* dress up, they wear skirts. I have a lot to teach you about being a girl, George – Oh.' Kelly stopped. (Gino 167)

This excerpt once again shows Melissa's enthusiasm about being allowed to dress up in what she deems to be clothing for girls and thus according to what she longs to present herself as. In this excerpt she appears to be fixated on being allowed to wear a skirt, as is evident by her reaction: "the hair on George's neck tingled" (Gino 167). This appears to indicate excitement instead of fear, as a 'tingle' is a painless, rather light feeling. Additionally, the word 'skirt' is placed in italics, which makes it stand out as something special to Melissa. Lastly, Kelly makes a statement that can also be seen as an explicit characterisation cue; she mentions that girls wear skirts when they dress up (Gino 167), therefore implying that if all the girl-characters in the novel wear skirts, Melissa is automatically a girl as soon as she wears one.

Similarly, when Melissa comes out to her mother, the main piece of evidence that Melissa provides her with regarding her gender identity is also about Melissa wearing a skirt:

'You really do feel like a girl, don't you?'

'Yeah, I do. Remember that time when I was little, when you found me wearing your skirt as a dress?' (Gino 170-171)

Both Melissa and her mother present the reader with explicit characterisation cues. Melissa's mother states: "you really do feel like a girl, don't you?" (Gino 170). She poses this as a question, but by adding the 'don't you?' it is evident that she does not expect Melissa to deny the statement.

Additionally, Melissa's mother uses the emphatic do, which stresses that Melissa indeed feels like a

girl and allows her mother to present this as something obvious. In response, Melissa provides her mother with an example of her being a girl; she mentions how she wore her mother's skirt when she was little, which then indicates that the skirt functions as a signifier for 'being a girl'. This idea that a skirt is one of the most 'womanly' articles of clothing a person can wear is reinforced by Tyson, who states: "analogously, one of the most 'feminine' styles of clothing for today's woman is the tight skirt" (87). Melissa's possible excitement at being allowed to wear "one of the most 'feminine' styles of clothing for today's woman" (Tyson 87) reinforces the fact that she is interested in being a stereotypical girl.

Aside from her interest in stereotypical 'girly' fashion and make-up, there are also several instances where Melissa appears to feel uncomfortable with the fact that her body is non-typical for a girl. Although this discomfort with her body, also known as 'dysphoria' as mentioned before, would in some sense negate her being a stereotypical woman, it does emphasize her focus on her appearance and her desire to have a specific physique, which is in line with what Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz mentioned regarding the "feminine beauty ideal" (Chen and Song 5). The main part of her body Melissa appears to struggle with, as alluded to by the novel, is her penis, which, according to the traditional perspective on the sex binary, would indicate that she is male. Melissa, however, does not identify with the male gender and therefore feels uncomfortable with this reminder of what would cause society to deem her a boy. There are three instances in the novel where the novel mentions Melissa's genitals or her issues with penises.

The first instance is when Melissa's teacher takes her to the boys' bathroom so she can calm down after being upset: "the whole room was about being a boy, and when boys were in there, they liked to talk about what was between their legs. George tried never to use it when there were any boys inside" (Gino 17). The fact that Melissa tries to *never* use the bathroom while at school, because it confronts her with own physique, is an implicit characterisation cue and shows the reader that her discomfort runs deep. There is another striking part about this excerpt, as well as the two other

excerpts where Melissa's body is discussed: "she immersed her body in the warm water and tried not to think about what was between her legs..." (Gino 44) and "there was nothing George dreaded more than when boys talked about what was in her underpants" (Gino 117), which is the fact that none of the excerpts actually name the body part that causes Melissa discomfort. The only instance where Melissa's genitals are actually mentioned by name is when Jeff, one of Melissa's bullies, states: "Hey Rick. It looks like someone's finally starting to grow some balls." (Gino 117), which is a (rather impolite) saying which indicates that a person has become brave.

One of the reasons for this censoring of the word 'penis' (or any variations) could be that mentioning it in children's book does not align with the child image of the author, as they could consider the explicit description of nudity or genitals to be inappropriate for children. This would be in line with Chen and Song's statement that "sexuality and queer elements" (5) are often censored in children's literature. This, however, does not appear to be likely in the case of *Melissa* as the only part the author has chosen to omit is the name of the genitals. The references, however, like "what was in her underpants" (Gino 117) or "what was between their legs" (Gino 17), still make it rather obvious what is being discussed here. Another theory on why the word 'penis' is omitted, is also related to the author's child image. The author might have considered it to be confusing for their young readers if Melissa was a girl, but she had a penis, which most children will grow up being taught, is something which would make her a boy. As the novel was written to teach children about the experiences of a transgender person, this also appears to be unlikely.

This brings us back to the idea that the omission is connected to Melissa's discomfort surrounding her idea that she does not have a 'female body', which appears to be the most likely. In that case, it means that, similarly to the boys bathroom, Melissa's discomfort is so severe she prefers to avoid the topic altogether. Despite the fact that the character wishes to avoid it, the effect that the omission has on the reader is that it draws the reader's attention exactly to that which is being omitted, therefore foregrounding it. By drawing the reader's attention to Melissa's avoidance

regarding her genitals, the author also draws the reader's attention to her discomfort, or dysphoria, which in turn provides the reader with insight into the experiences of a transgender child's (possible) relationship with their body.

#### 4.1.2: TT

The excerpt below is the TT-version of the scene where Melissa is looking at make-up in her magazines:

George had nog nooit make-up gebruikt, maar ze bekeek aandachtig de verschillende kleuren die aan de linkerkant stonden afgebeeld. Haar hart klopte in haar keel. Ze vroeg zich af hoe het zou voelen als ze echte lippenstift op zou doen. In ieder geval vond ze het heerlijk om lippenbalsem op te hebben. Ze gebruikte het de hele winter door, het maakte niet uit of haar lippen ruw waren of niet. (Hazewindus/Gino 12)

The characterisation cues in this excerpt establish Melissa in a similar manner to the ST; she is passionate about make-up. Words and phrases like 'aandachtig', which indicates that a person is focused on what is front of them, and 'heerlijk', 'delicious' or in this case general enjoyment, emphasize Melissa's passion for make-up. The descriptive language used in the ST appears to convey Melissa's passion the slightest bit more positively, mainly because a word like 'pored', which indicates that a person is fully absorbed in something (Van Dale), is slightly stronger in meaning than 'aandachtig'. An alternative to 'aandachtig' could have been 'Melissa had nog nooit make-up gebruikt, maar ze ging helemaal op in de kleuren die aan de linkerkant stonden afgebeeld'. Additionally, the connotation for 'haar hart klopte in haar keel' is different from 'her heart raced in her chest' and is in most cases used less positively. An alternative in the TT could have been 'haar hart bonste', as in most novels 'haar hart klopte in haar keel' is used to indicate fear or anxiety. This would mean that the thought of make-up would make Melissa anxious rather than excited.

The phrase 'haar hart klopte in haar keel' is used again when Melissa and Kelly dress up to go to the zoo together:

Haar kledingkast en bijna alle lades van haar commode stonden open. Kelly had ook alvast allerlei make-upspullen klaargelegd op haar bureau. De kamer rook naar parfum, afkomstig uit verschillende flesjes die in een keurige rij naast de make-up stonden,

'Welkom bij Kelly's Salon. En wat vind je ervan?'

George' hart klopte in haar keel. Het was alsof in Kelly's kamer de pagina's uit al haar tijdschriften tot leven waren gekomen. (Hazewindus/Gino 203)

Similarly to the excerpt above, Melissa's excitement appears to be less obvious in the TT than it is in the ST. The main part of the excerpt that indicates Melissa's excitement is the comparison to her beloved magazines.

In the next excerpt Melissa appears to be slightly apprehensive when confronted with the possibility of wearing a skirt:

'Je bedoelt met een rokje enzo?' De haartjes in George' nek prikten toen ze het woord 'rokje' uitsprak.

'Tuurlijk. Als meisjes zich leuk aankleden, trekken ze rokjes aan. Ik moet je nog heel veel leren over hoe je een meisje moet zijn, Geo... O.' (Hazewindus/Gino 190).

The addition of 'enzo' at the end of Melissa's question implies a certain uncertainty, as this shortened form of 'enzovoort', which means 'and so forth' (Van Dale), is usually used to imply that there is more, but the speaker is unsure what that might be. This uncertainty could largely be attributed to the fact that Melissa does not yet know what the possibilities of 'acting like a girl' with Kelly are and is therefore a little apprehensive. However, the phrasing does not depict the excitement the reader knows Melissa feels when it comes to 'girly' fashion, make-up and being allowed to 'be a girl'. Additionally, although "de haartjes in George' nek prikten" (Hazewindus/Gino

190) appears to be a softened version of what would in this case be ‘het haar in George’ nek stond recht overeind’, which indicates fear, the use of the word ‘prikten’, which can be translated to ‘sting’ in English (Van Dale), still has a relatively negative connotation. An alternative could be ‘tintelden’, which translates to ‘tingled’ and has a more positive connotation.

The second excerpt in which Melissa discusses wearing a skirt, however, does indicate a sense of passion and is also used as evidence for Melissa being a girl. In this excerpt Melissa talks to her mother about being transgender:

‘Je voelt je echt een meisje, hè?’

‘Ja. Echt. Weet je nog dat ik toen ik drie was jouw rok als jurk had aangetrokken?’

(Hazewindus/Gino 193).

In this excerpt Melissa confirms to her mother that she does feel like a girl and uses an anecdote to support her statement. When Melissa states that she does feel like a girl, she uses the word ‘echt’, which aside from ‘really’, can be translated to ‘truly’ or ‘genuinely’ (Van Dale). Melissa here states that her identity is the truth, with the example she has chosen confirming that wearing skirts is an example of her girliness and therefore part of her identity as a girl.

Even though the phrasing of the excerpts that consider Melissa’s interest in make-up and fashion is different, those that discuss her discomfort with her genitals are phrased the same way in the TT as they are in the ST. The excerpt in which Melissa describes her experience of going to the boys’ bathroom, similar to in the ST, does not mention the word ‘penis’: “Deze ruimte was alleen maar voor jongens, en de jongens die hier kwamen praatten graag over wat ze tussen hun benen hadden. George probeerde er nooit naartoe te gaan als er iemand binnen was (Hazewindus/ Gino 24). Similar to the excerpt in the ST, it is described as “wat ze tussen hun benen hadden” (Hazewindus/ Gino 24), which is the Dutch equivalent of ‘what was between their legs’.

The phrase 'what was between her legs', is translated in the same manner in the excerpt where Melissa is in the bath: "Ze liet zich in het warme water zakken en probeerde niet te denken aan wat er tussen haar benen zat..." (Hazewindus/Gino 55). Additionally, 'what was in her underpants', is also kept the same in the Dutch translation: "Voor George was er niets verschrikkelijker dan wanneer jongens begonnen over wat ze in haar onderbroek had" (Hazewindus/Gino 134).

### 4.1.3: Comparison

There are several characterisation cues, which, although they are at times implicit, indicate that an interest in physical beauty is part of Melissa's character, which presents her as a stereotypical girl. However, when it comes to Melissa being a stereotypical girl, there appears to be a slight difference in the way her relationship with fashion and make-up is described in the ST and the TT. In the ST, Melissa appears to mainly be excited about stereotypical 'girly' things like make-up and skirts. She expresses a sense of wonder when it comes to make-up and a sense of excitement and an innate love for dresses and skirts, as shown by the anecdote about her wearing her mother's skirt as a toddler. In the TT, however, she still appears to like make-up and fashion, but the connotations of the descriptions used also appear to depict a sense of anxiety or nervousness when it comes to being allowed to wear make-up or skirts. This would mean that in the ST it is part of her characterisation that Melissa is by nature stereotypically interested in make-up and fashion and she is excited to discover this world, as she is only 'allowed' to do so at the end of the novel. In the TT, however, Melissa is also by nature stereotypically interested in make-up and fashion, but she is also slightly apprehensive when she is finally 'allowed' to experience this, as it is something she is unfamiliar with, which would make a slight anxiousness part of her characterisation.

According to B.J. Epstein, when it comes to depicting gender, translators "can draw attention to gender itself and to related issues, such as the treatment of female characters, by choosing to highlight, to add in, or, indeed, to remove particular aspects of a text" (121). If we would apply

Epstein's theory to the results discussed above, this would mean that the translator 'added in' this possible apprehension and anxiety when it comes to Melissa's relationship with stereotypically 'girly' interests. This could be because the translator wanted to emphasize the issues related to Melissa's transgender identity, namely that despite the fact that she appears to be naturally interested in topics like fashion and make-up, it is something that she has to hide for a large part of the novel due to fear of judgement.

Despite the differences between the ST and TT when it came to stereotypically 'girly' interests, the excerpts that consider genitals and nudity did not appear to change in the translation. This is especially interesting because according to Van Coillie, within TChL, "the most commonly omitted or altered passages are those concerning nudity and sexuality" (Van Coillie 147). He adds: "however, the opposite occurs as well. Depending on his/her image of the child and the sexual norms in a specific society, a translator may exaggerate taboo-breaking elements" (Van Coillie 147). According to Van Coillie, when it comes to excerpts containing nudity, translators, depending on their cultural identity, choose to either make this scenes more ambiguous or more explicit, depending on what is appropriate for children according to their child image. In the case of the excerpts analysed above, author and translator appeared to agree on the way Melissa's body should be described, namely to omit the specific terms of the body parts discussed and to describe it in such way that it was still clear for the audience what Melissa's descriptions referred to. This means that Melissa's discomfort with her body and her dysphoria are a part of her characterisation in both the ST and the TT.

## 4.2: The feeling and expressing of emotions

There are certain ways of feeling and expressing emotions that are considered to be stereotypical for women. In general these stereotypes include the idea that women are purely emotional (Griffin Wolff 210), as opposed to men's more rational nature (Tyson 81). Additionally,

according to stereotypes, women struggle to control their emotions and lean more towards crying and being overdramatic as a way to express them (Griffin Wolff 221). Similarly, women are also considered to not get angry, but rather cry instead, when confronted with something upsetting, whereas anger is considered to be the ultimate expression of masculinity for stereotypical men (Tyson 82).

In the following excerpts we see Melissa in difficult situations and the way she expresses her emotions in response to these situations. Melissa appears to express her emotions in stereotypically female ways, e.g. crying and showing very little anger, even when it would be appropriate for the situation. These two parts of the way she expresses emotion, although they also make sense with how much she struggles in the story, appear to be used as a way for her to come across to the reader as more soft and feminine and thus as a stereotypical girl. Specifically her lack of anger is usually contrasted with situations where the boys in the novel do express anger or aggressive behaviours. I will be analysing six excerpts in which Melissa experiences a range of emotions, which lead to various behaviours. Because there are several instances in which Melissa cries and not all of them are needed for an in-depth analysis, I have chosen two that provide the most insight into her character and the way other characters respond to her.

#### 4.2.1: ST

The following excerpt describes Melissa's response to *Charlotte's Web*, the book that is integral to Melissa's journey to sharing her identity with the people closest to her. This is also one of the very first insights the reader gets into Melissa's emotions.

A tear dropped onto George's book and spread into a spiderweb on the page. She breathed in carefully, trying not to make a sound. Shallow breath followed shallow breath until she was dizzy. She inhaled deeply, and as she did, she sniffled. Loudly. George heard whispers, clear in the quiet room.

'Heh, some girl is crying over a dead spider.'

'That ain't no girl. That's George.'

'Close enough,' followed by laughter. (Gino 12)

In this excerpt the reader sees Melissa crying because of the sad ending of *Charlotte's Web*. This is a very clear instance where Melissa is responding in a way that is considered to be 'overemotional' (Tyson 81), and thus stereotypically female, according to her peers. Both Melissa herself, and her classmates consider crying over a book to be showing too much emotion. It is important to note here that I will be classifying Melissa's response as 'overemotional' for the purpose of this research, but as *Charlotte* signifies a certain kind of hope for Melissa while she is struggling with her transgender identity, this response does not solely stem from Melissa's femininity or her tendency to be overemotional.

The fact that Melissa predicts her classmates' negative responses can be seen in the fact that Melissa is "'trying not to make sound"' (Gino 12) to hide the fact she is crying. As expected her classmates immediately start whispering in a judgemental way: "Heh, some girl is crying over a dead spider" (Gino 12). Simply referring to *Charlotte* - whom is very important to Melissa and is referred to by name often - as 'a dead spider' indicates, at best, a lack of interest or care for the character of this book, but most likely indicates a sense of ridicule in response to Melissa. This, paired, with the laughter that follows emphasizes the children's disapproval of Melissa's emotional response.

Additionally, after the children hear someone crying in response to the novel, they immediately assume it is a girl, which is in line with the idea that "boys are typically 'bigger and stronger,' and girls are 'weaker and more prone to tears'" (Chen and Song 5). Melissa's emotional response functions as an explicit characterisation cue: it immediately establishes her identity, due to the fact that the children instantly categorize her as a girl because in their eyes she is acting like one. Even when they notice it is Melissa crying, whom they still see as a boy, they state 'close enough',

referring to the fact that due to Melissa's general behaviour, crying included, they consider her to (almost) be a girl.

This perspective on it being strange for boys to cry is reinforced in an excerpt where Melissa, a few days later, once again gets bullied for crying over Charlotte's death: "as she bent down to get a dictionary, someone in the room sniffled. George's stomach lurched when there was another sniffle and a snort, followed by the words, 'Oh, Charlotte, I miss you so,' and snickers. George bit her lower lip and walked the long way back to her seat, to stay as far from Jeff's and Rick's desks as possible" (Gino 66). Here, two of Melissa's classmates, Jeff and Rick, imitate her crying and laugh at her. This emphasizes how Melissa, a boy in the eyes of her classmates, showed stereotypically 'wrong' behaviour by crying, as "anger and other violent emotions are the only emotions permitted" (Tyson 83). This idea of how Melissa is incapable of acting the 'right' way according to her perceived gender is emphasised by the way she responds to the bullying: rather than getting angry and retaliating, as is expected from men, Melissa chooses to hide away and to "stay as far away from [their] desks as possible" (Gino 66).

Even when Melissa does get angry, she still does not quite behave the same way her male classmates do. As we will see in the next category, when Jeff gets angry at Melissa he immediately attacks her, whereas in the following two excerpts all Melissa appears to do is scream once and then she immediately leaves or apologizes:

'Oh, well. At least you tried.' Kelly shrugged. 'That's what my dad says.'

'AAAAAHHHH!' George screamed in Kelly's face. 'I don't want to hear what your dad says!' (Gino 72)

'Charlotte isn't dumb!' George threw her fork down. It ricocheted off the edge of her plate and twirled end over end in the air. All eyes were on the utensil, which spun as if in slow motion. It hit the ceiling and bounced on Scott's head before rattling to the floor.

'Ow!' Scott yelled. 'Did you see what he did, Mom? He tried to kill me!' (Gino 76)

In these two excerpts we can clearly see that Melissa has become angry, mainly from the use of exclamation points and the word 'screamed', the connotation of which implies more emotion than 'shouting' as indicated according to its synonyms 'cried' and 'howled' (Thesaurus.com, "Scream").

Although there could be considered to be some sort of intimidation going on in regards to Melissa screaming in Kelly's face, she does not appear to move that close to Kelly on purpose. At the start of the conversation it is actually Kelly who grabs Melissa by the shoulders, which causes them to be really close to each other. Additionally, whereas Chen and Song state that "boys are typically 'bigger and stronger,' and girls are 'weaker and more prone to tears'" (5), Melissa and Kelly are not positioned in this way. As mentioned before, Kelly is the one who moved this close to Melissa, which implies that this was comfortable for her. Additionally, there is no indication in the novel of a physical difference between the two, nor is Kelly intimidated by Melissa or does she cry after Melissa screams at her. Both of them are upset, but it is Melissa who cries after this incident, being described as "holding back tears" on the bus (Gino 73). Melissa is thus not positioned as 'the boy' in this scene, nor is Kelly positioned as 'the girl', which means that there is no difference between them here, they are just two girls having an argument.

Similarly, while Scott implies that the throwing of the fork was purposeful aggression; "he tried to kill me" (Gino 76), we can see from the description of the incident that Melissa threw the fork on the table in frustration after which it bounced in Scott's direction on accident. Melissa did not mean to hit her brother on the head, but was struggling to control her frustration as Scott's comment was the final straw after struggling with her identity, being disappointed by her teacher and fighting with Kelly. Additionally, she is described as being "in a daze" (Gino 77) and therefore shocked at the fact that she actually hurt him, which implies that this is a rare occurrence for her. Although Melissa's circumstances are rather unique for a pre-teen girl because of her transgender identity, her response is in line with a stereotypically female lack of control regarding emotions.

Aside from experiencing negative emotions like anger and sadness, there is also an instance where Melissa cries due to feeling overwhelmed by the fact that she finally experienced a moment where she was openly a girl because she was able to play Charlotte in the school play: “the moment George reached the ground, she cried too. She slumped against the backstage wall, hugging her knees as she cried in sadness and joy” (Gino 157). Here Melissa is described as crying being her main response to overwhelming emotions, which, once again, connects her to ‘being prone to tears’ (Chen and Song 5).

#### 4.2.2: TT

In the TT-version of the excerpt that describes Melissa’s feelings regarding Charlotte, the responses of both Melissa and her classmates are largely the same:

Er viel een traan op haar boek, die zich als een spinnenweb over de bladzijde uitspreidde. Ze haalde voorzichtig adem en probeerde geen geluid te maken. Ze ademde zo snel en oppervlakkig dat ze er duizelig van werd. Toen ademde ze even diep in, en terwijl ze dat deed snifte ze. Heel hard. Er werd gefluisterd, maar in de stille klas kon George het duidelijk verstaan.

‘Hé, er zit een meisje te janken om een dooie spin.’

‘Dat is helemaal geen meisje. Dat is George.’

‘En wat is het verschil?’ Gelach. (Hazewindus/Gino 19)

The use of “probeerde geen geluid te maken”, as well as her classmates mockery regarding “een meisje dat zit te janken om een dooie spin” (Hazewindus/Gino 19) indicate that, similar to in the ST, both Melissa and her classmates consider her behaviour to be wrong. The main differences here are the word choices in the sentence ‘Hé, er zit een meisje te janken om een dooie spin’. Words like ‘janken’ and ‘dooie’ are harsher in nature than ‘crying’ and ‘dead’, in the sense that they are the

informal versions of the Dutch translations of these words, which emphasizes how ridiculous this specific classmate thinks Melissa is being. The original use of the word 'janken' is to indicate the crying of a dog or wolf (Van Dale), and unlike the more neutral 'huilen', it is usually used to indicate that a person is crying about something that should not be cried about. Similarly, 'dooie' is the informal version of 'dode', and is usually used to indicate that the death it is attached to is unimportant.

Additionally, while in the ST the bullies state 'close enough' regarding Melissa being a girl, which means that according to them she is almost a girl but not yet fully, the bullies in the TT-version ask "wat is het verschil?" (Hazewindus/Gino 19), indicating that there is no difference at all and Melissa is a girl. Despite the fact that this is used to bully Melissa because the children do not know that she is indeed a girl, the wording in the TT validates that Melissa is already a girl, whereas the wording in the ST implies that there is still something lacking.

Similarly to the abovementioned excerpt, there is also very little difference between the TT and the ST when Melissa is bullied by Jeff and Rick, with the main difference being the use of the phrase 'schrok op': "Toen ze zich bukte om een woordenboek te pakken, hoorde ze iemand sniffen. George schrok op toen er nog een keer werd gesnift en gesnikt, gevolgd door de woorden: 'O, Charlotte, ik mis je zo,' en gegrinnik. Ze beet op haar onderlip en liep de lange weg terug naar haar tafeltje, waarbij ze haar best deed zo ver mogelijk uit de buurt van Jeff en Rick te blijven" (Hazewindus/Gino 79). Although the ST presents Melissa's reaction to the bullying as 'her stomach lurched', which could indicate a number of negative emotions and responses, e.g. fear, sadness, nausea or being generally upset, the literal translation of the Dutch version solely indicates fear. 'Schrok' is the past tense version of the word 'schrikken', which according to Van Dale means "door een plotseling angstgevoel bevangen worden" or 'to experience a sudden feeling of fear'.

The use of 'schrok op' implies a sense of the stereotypically female 'fragility' mentioned by Chen and Song (5), as Melissa is presented as immediately being afraid when she feels that

somebody is mocking her, probably due to several earlier instances of bullying and her trying to hide the fact that she is a girl. An alternative for 'schrok' could have been 'kreeg een knoop in haar maag'. Additionally, as mentioned before, fear as a characteristic is not allowed to be part of the image of the stereotypical male (Tyson 83), as they have to remain strong and powerful, something which Melissa, from this perspective, appears to be failing at. Lastly, the idea that Melissa is fearful is additionally reinforced by the fact that she stays as far away as possible from Jeff and Rick's tables.

Melissa's anger is presented less strongly in the TT than it is in the ST, mainly due to the layout of the text. In the excerpt where Melissa gets into a fight with Kelly, the "Aaaahhh!!" (Hazewindus/Gino 86) is presented less aggressively. Despite the TT-version having two exclamation points instead of one like in the ST, all the letters are in lower case, apart from the 'A' denoting the start of the sentence, rather than in upper case like in the ST.

'Nou ja. Je hebt het in ieder geval geprobeerd,' zei Kelly opgewekt. 'Dat zegt mijn vader altijd.'

'Aaahhh!!' gilte George recht in Kelly's gezicht. 'Ik wil helemaal niet horen wat je vader altijd zegt!' (Hazewindus/Gino 86)

Additionally, the use of 'gilte' makes Melissa appear more feminine in the TT than in the ST, where the author used 'screamed'. The literal Dutch translation of 'screamed' would be 'schreeuwen'. 'Gillen' is generally used to describe a high-pitched, usually feminine, scream and is largely attributed to girls, whereas 'screaming' is more gender-neutral and does not have specific connotations.

Melissa's incident with Scott is changed in a similar way to her incident with Kelly:

'Charlotte is niet achterlijk.' George smeeet haar vork neer. Die stuiterde tegen de rand van haar bord en vloog omhoog. Alle ogen waren gericht op het eetgerei, dat als in slow motion

ronddraaide. De vork ketste tegen het plafond, viel op Scotts hoofd en kletterde vervolgens op de grond.

'Au!' riep Scott. 'Zag je wat George deed, mam? Hij probeerde me te vermoorden!'

(Hazewindus/Gino 90)

In the sentence "Charlotte is niet achterlijk" (Hazewindus/Gino 90), the exclamation point at the end of the sentence, which is part of the ST, is missing. This makes Melissa's outburst a little less aggressive than it is in the ST. The use of the word 'smeet', however, has a more aggressive connotation than 'threw' and causes Melissa to appear more angry, as the Dutch word 'smijten' is usually used to indicate that something is thrown with a lot of force.

Lastly, the final excerpt remains largely the same in the TT as it does in the ST: "Zodra ze weer op de grond stond, moest George ook huilen. Ze liet zich tegen de achterwand zakken, sloeg haar armen om haar knieën en huilde van verdriet en geluk" (Hazewindus/Gino 178). Here, once again, we see Melissa crying due to the overwhelming emotions she is feeling.

#### 4.2.3: Comparison

Although Melissa's characterisation seems to be largely the same in the ST and the TT, she appears to be more stereotypically female in the way her emotions are depicted in the TT. In both texts she seems to be very emotional, as is expected of stereotypically female character, but she is more scared and less angry in the TT, both of which are expected character traits for stereotypical women.

Because Melissa's characterisation in the TT includes more anxiety and less anger, she could come across to the reader as more soft and feminine. Due to the fact that she appears to be more scared, and thus comes across more helpless or weak in comparison to the boys in her class, and she is less angry, an emotion which is decidedly unfeminine according to several scholars mentioned

above, Melissa appears to be more 'clearly' a girl in the TT. Additionally, Melissa's girliness is emphasized more strongly in the TT, as the mockery in excerpt number one is phrased in such a way that she is already categorized as a girl, rather than almost being a girl.

The translator appears to have chosen to be less ambiguous when it comes to the stereotypically female parts of Melissa's characterisation than the author, although there is already decidedly little ambiguity in the ST. This is in line with Oittinen's idea that oftentimes characters in children's stories are less ambiguous (86) as a way for children to understand them more easily. This part of Melissa's characterisation might function as way for the novel's target audience to more easily understand that Melissa is a girl, even though she is addressed as 'George' and the other characters use he/him pronouns to describe her.

### 4.3: Lack of assertiveness

When it comes to stereotypes, men are generally thought of as strong and assertive and women as weak and passive (Chen and Song 5). This weakness and passivity is often used to emphasize their male counterpart's strength because it allows the men to display this strength by saving the helpless girl, which is a classic trope in fairy tales and also occurs in the novel Chen and Song analyse in their article (5).

Although Melissa does not get saved by a male counterpart when she gets in trouble, there is a distinct lack of assertiveness in these situations. Melissa is portrayed as timid and quiet and whenever she does behave more assertively she is easily overpowered, especially when it comes to encounters with boys. Melissa's timidity and lack of assertiveness appear to be an integral part of her character, which, additionally, might represent the author's child image, namely in the sense that children understand characters better if they are less ambiguous (Oittinen 86). If Melissa was more assertive, she would have been too similar to the boys in the novel, which may have made it hard for children to see the innate nature of her identity as a girl.

Although her timidity and lack of assertiveness appear to be innate and align with the idea of a stereotypical girl, there could be another explanation for these traits. As Melissa is transgender and does not yet want others to know she is a girl, but also severely dislikes that they see her as a boy, these traits might also function as a way for her to not attract much attention to herself. The timidity and lack of assertiveness could then also function as a way for her to be perceived as a boy as little as possible and for her to be able to hide the fact that she is a girl a little longer.

#### 4.3.1: ST

The main instances where the reader sees Melissa's lack of assertiveness are connected to Melissa's bully, Jeff. In the first excerpt Melissa decides to play a prank on Jeff for making fun of Charlotte. This leads to Jeff and Rick attacking her:

But she wasn't made of metal, and her eyes were as helpless as the rest of her. Jeff was a head taller, and he was thick too. Jeff's pinkie was the size of George's index finger, and Jeff kept pounding his fist into his other hand. Rick stood behind George. He wasn't as tall as Jeff, but he was taller than George, and stronger.

Putting a hand on each of her shoulders, Rick easily held her in place. (Gino 117)

There are several parts of this excerpt that are quite striking. First of all, the excerpt explicitly states that Melissa is helpless, even before Rick restrains her. Melissa is convinced that she cannot fight or do anything in this situation and thus does nothing, emphasizing her own passivity. The rest of the excerpt explains in detail how much weaker Melissa is than both of them, which is in line with the idea that "boys are typically 'bigger and stronger,' and girls are 'weaker and more prone to tears'" (Chen and Song 5).

After Melissa gets suspended because of the incident, she gets a call from her best friend Kelly: "'What happened to you?' Kelly asked, not bothering to say hello. 'Everyone's saying you

picked a fight with Jeff. But I told them that was impossible because you've never been in a fight in your life, and that Jeff must have been the one to start it. I mean, really, who's gonna pick a fight– you or Jeff?" (Gino 130). This excerpt allows Melissa a little more agency; the way Kelly phrases "everyone's saying you picked a fight with Jeff" (Gino 130), does not imply that Melissa was passive in this fight. Rather, by phrasing it as 'you picked a fight', she implies that Melissa was the initiator of the fight and therefore, at least at the start, the more assertive party. However, this agency is undermined by the fact that Kelly ends with "I mean, really, who's gonna pick a fight– you or Jeff?" (Gino 130). The use of 'really' implies a sense of irony, Kelly here presents the idea of Melissa as the initiator as something unimaginable. We as the readers, know that Melissa indeed, albeit not necessarily to cause a fight, provoked Jeff. Kelly's question, however, provides the reader with an implicit characterisation cue regarding Melissa, namely that she, although she provoked Jeff in this instance, is not usually assertive enough to pick a fight.

This is followed by Melissa answering Kelly's question with just a 'yeah' to which Kelly responds:

'Yeah, what? Yeah, you're there? Yeah, you threw up on Jeff? Or yeah, you picked a fight?'

'All three.'

'What the heck, George? What were you doing, picking a fight with the biggest bully in our class?' (Gino 131)

This excerpt once again allows Melissa a sense of agency. The use of "picking a fight" implies Melissa being assertive, while the use of "you threw up on Jeff" (Gino 131) also implies that it was a purposeful reaction to Jeff's assault, rather than Melissa vomiting because of the punch to the stomach. This frames her as not remaining passive in this fight, but rather as choosing a different way of fighting back.

The last excerpt is a different confrontation between Jeff and Melissa after Melissa has performed as Charlotte in the school play:

'Oh, shut up. I'm talking to George here. He's more of a girl than you'll ever be.'

'Leave her alone!' George yelled.

'Or else what?' asked Jeff.

'Just leave her alone.' George stared at the ground. (Gino 165)

Aside from Jeff once again affirming Melissa's female identity, we see Melissa here being both assertive and passive. When Jeff turns his attention to Kelly, Melissa immediately defends her by shouting "leave her alone" (Gino 165). Notable here is that Melissa has come out to both Kelly and her mother already, which may have made her feel more hopeful and therefore a little stronger. Melissa here asserts herself in a way that puts her on more equal ground with Jeff, but she immediately undermines herself when Jeff asks: "or else what?" (Gino 165) as she does not have an answer. Despite showing a little assertiveness, Melissa feels like she cannot do anything else and therefore remains more passive, which is reinforced by the fact that Melissa puts her head down and stares at the ground, making herself smaller in the process. Melissa thus remains helpless.

#### 4.3.2: TT

In the TT-version of the excerpt below, Melissa is still passive, but the words chosen to describe her passivity are slightly less explicit:

Maar ze was niet van ijzer en met haar ogen kon ze net zo weinig als met de rest van haar lichaam. Jeff was namelijk een kop groter en hij was ook zwaar. Zijn pink was net zo dik als George' wijsvinger en hij bleef maar met zijn vuist in zijn hand slaan. Rick, achter haar, was kleiner dan Jeff, maar wel groter dan George, en sterker.

Rick pakte George van achteren stevig bij haar schouders, zodat ze niet weg kon lopen.

(Hazewindus/Gino 135)

Most noticeable here is the lack of the explicit 'helpless' in sentence one, as well as the lack of 'easily' regarding Rick holding Melissa. Although the phrase "daar kon ze net zo weinig mee"

(Hazewindus/Gino 135), does indicate that Melissa cannot defend herself physically, thus rendering her just as helpless in the TT as she is in the ST, the emphasis on her body makes this excerpt less about Melissa immediately considering herself helpless, which leads to her remaining passive, but rather depicts her as physically incapable. Thus the phrasing makes her appear weak, rather than lacking in assertiveness. This, if we separate this from her general passivity throughout the novel, allows for the possibility that Melissa would do something, if only her body was stronger.

The TT-version also lacks the 'easily' when describing Rick restraining Melissa. The translator used "zodat ze niet weg kon lopen" (Hazewindus/Gino 135) as a way to compensate. This addition gives the reader information about the logic behind Rick's actions, but leaves out something which denotes that Melissa is easily overpowered. By framing the situation this way, Melissa is rendered passive through Rick's actions, not through any physical weakness or any choices she has made. This, paired with the idea that Melissa cannot fight back because she is weaker than the boys, portray her as solely physically weak(er), rather than physically weak and lacking assertiveness.

When Kelly calls Melissa to ask her about her fight with Jeff, the most striking part in the TT is the lack of irony when Kelly asks who started the fight: "'Wat is er gebeurd?' vroeg Kelly, zonder zelfs maar hallo te zeggen. 'Iedereen zegt dat je met Jeff hebt gevochten. Maar ik zei dat dat helemaal niet kon, omdat je nog nooit hebt gevochten en dat Jeff vast is begonnen. Wie is er eigenlijk begonnen, jij of Jeff?'" (Hazewindus/Gino 149). In the ST Kelly asks: "I mean, really, who's gonna pick a fight- you or Jeff?" (Gino 130), which as mentioned before, indicates, through the use of irony, that the idea of Melissa picking a fight is ridiculous. In the TT, however, Kelly asks "wie is er eigenlijk begonnen, jij of Jeff?" (Gino 149). The use of 'eigenlijk', which in this case is used as clarification, depicts Kelly as

genuinely being curious. This presents to the reader a Kelly whom, although she says otherwise in the sentence before, does think that there is a possibility that Melissa started the fight. This causes the reader to be presented with the idea that Melissa is at least possibly capable of being assertive.

Another striking choice in the TT is the use of 'gevochten'. Whereas in English the phrase 'getting into a fight' can be used for both a physical fight and two people being angry with each other, in Dutch there are two separate words: 'vechten' to indicate a physical fight and 'ruziën' to indicate two people being angry at each other. The choice of the translator to use 'gevochten', frames this situation as Melissa and Jeff participating in an equal battle, rather than her getting mad at Jeff and playing a prank on him as revenge and then getting attacked. This perspective presents Melissa as just as assertive as Jeff and frames the fight as though it was between equals.

The excerpt after Melissa responds to Kelly once again largely remains the same:

'Hoezo, ja hoor? Ja hoor, je bent er nog? Ja hoor, je hebt Jeff ondergekotst. Of ja hoor, jij bent begonnen?'

'Alle drie.'

'Jemig, George! Dat je ruzie durft te maken met de grootste pestkop van onze klas!'

(Hazewindus/Gino 149)

The main difference here is Kelly questioning Melissa's actions in the ST; "What were you doing, picking a fight with the biggest bully in our class?" (Gino 131), and her commenting on Melissa's bravery in the TT; "Dat je ruzie durft te maken met de grootste pestkop van onze klas!"

(Hazewindus/Gino 150). The use of the Dutch word 'durven' means that in this excerpt Kelly perceives Melissa to, at least partially, be brave enough to start a fight with Jeff. The way Kelly's statement is phrased denotes admiration from her side, rather than judgement, which presents Melissa's actions to the reader in a more positive light.

The last excerpt depicts Melissa's assertiveness in the TT, or lack thereof, in a similar way to the ST:

'O, hou je kop. Ik heb het tegen George. Hij is meer een meid dan jij ooit zal zijn.'

'Laat haar met rust!' schreeuwde George.

'Of anders?' zei Jeff.

'Laat haar gewoon met rust.' George keek naar de grond. (Hazewindus/Gino 187)

Similar to in the ST, Melissa starts out quite assertive by defending Kelly, but then undermines herself by giving up when Jeff questions her and making herself smaller by looking at the ground.

### 4.3.3: Comparison

Despite displaying passivity in both the ST and the TT, Melissa appears to be slightly more assertive in the TT. In both texts she is depicted as weaker than her male counterparts and responding passively, but in the TT she, at times, appears to be unable to fight back or be assertive due to circumstances beyond her control; e.g. her physique or Rick restraining her, whereas in the ST she appears to be unwilling. Additionally, the phrasing in the TT awards her more agency than in the ST. The characteristics mentioned above, however, can also be connected to Melissa's identity as a transgender girl. Several of the excerpts consist of descriptions of Melissa being bullied and it is strongly implied that this is not a recent development, which, paired with her own internal struggles, might have made her too frightened to be assertive in these situations.

For the purpose of this research, I will connect Melissa's lack of assertiveness mainly to her being a stereotypical girl. From this point of view, the changes made in translation cause there to be a difference between the characteristics that can be inferred from the characterisation cues in the excerpts above; the main characteristic in the excerpts from ST appears to be passivity, whereas the

main characteristic in the excerpts from the TT appears to be physical incapability. Both characteristics are in line with what is expected from a stereotypical female character according to the list mentioned earlier in this thesis, which means that when reading these excerpts the reader does encounter traits that lead to a stereotypical female characterisation for Melissa. The different traits, however, might lead to a different stereotypical characterisation

#### 4.4: Discussion

As said by van Peer in Culpeper's book: "Character, it can hardly be denied, is what readers infer from words, sentences, paragraphs and textual composition depicting, describing or suggesting actions, thoughts, utterances or feelings of a protagonist" (Van Peer in Culpeper 9). This means that if the 'words, sentences, paragraphs and textual composition' change, as often happens in translation, the reader might experience a different character. This appears to, partially, be the case for Melissa.

The choices made by the translator do at times have an effect on Melissa's characterisation. Although she is a stereotypical girl in both the ST and the TT, due to aligning with several stereotypes both personality- and interest-wise, certain aspects of her characterisation have changed in the translation. The most important traits that connect her to the stereotype remain the same; both in the ST and the TT Melissa is interested in fashion and make-up, is very emotional and stays passive in tense situations.

The differences in characterisation between the ST and the TT occur in several of the translator's choices, ranging from word changes which hold different connotations to changes to the lay-out in parts of the text. There are parts of Melissa's characterisation in the ST that make her more stereotypically 'girly' than she is in the TT and vice versa, but in general it cannot be said that she is more of a stereotypical girl in one of the texts specifically. In the ST Melissa is more excited about fashion and make-up and more passive than she is in the TT, which would make her more stereotypically 'girly', but her anger is also more visible to the other characters, which is considered a

stereotypically male trait. Similarly, Melissa is more anxious about the possibilities of 'acting like a girl' and more assertive in the TT, which at times makes her slightly less stereotypical, but she is also more often scared instead of angry and physically weaker.

The traits mentioned above that are different in the two texts still align Melissa with the idea of a stereotypical girl. The trait that is different from the stereotype in the ST is visible anger, which according to Tyson is associated with males (82-83). Although anger is at times mainly associated with males, if it was visible in the case of Melissa, this could also mean that she has lost control over her emotions, which, as mentioned before, is a decidedly stereotypical female trait. Similarly, the traits that are different in the TT are anxiety and more assertiveness, the former which is often also tied to the stereotypical traits 'weakness' and 'fragility' as this means that Melissa gets scared easily and at times lacks bravery. The choices made by the translator thus do cause change in Melissa's characterisation, but the changes do not make her less stereotypically 'girly', just stereotypical in different ways.

As these changes are small they do not appear to affect the story. The novel remains educational for its target audience regarding the subject of being transgender; it is still obvious for the novel's target audience that Melissa is a girl, even if she gets addressed differently, and her process still teaches the reader the same lessons.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of the characterisation of Melissa, a young transgender girl, and how this characterisation relates to stereotypical portrayals of young girls. Melissa is the titular character of the American middle grade novel *Melissa* and its Dutch translation *George*, which was translated by Carla Hazewindus. I have drawn from multiple theories and disciplines for my analysis, namely theories regarding TChL, feminist translation, queer translation, gender studies, literary theory, psychology and linguistics. I set out to answer the questions: *In which ways is the stereotypical characterization of a transgender girl influenced by the choices made by a translator and what effect does this have on the story according to a comparative analysis of the American children's novel Melissa and its Dutch translation George?*

Melissa is clearly presented as a girl in both the ST and the TT, with the character herself stating that she is a girl and the use of she/her pronouns in reference to Melissa throughout the entire novel. Aside from these rather obvious characterisation cues, there are also specific parts of her characterisation that can be connected to the idea of the stereotypical girl. The main stereotypical characteristics that seem to apply to Melissa are in regards to her interaction with the concept 'beauty', specifically her passion for fashion and make-up, the way she expresses and processes her emotions and how she approaches conflict and other difficult situations. I analysed excerpts belonging to these three categories and used the results of this analysis to answer my research question in two parts: *In which ways is the stereotypical characterization of a transgender girl influenced by the choices made by a translator and what effect does this have on the story?*

## 5.1: Answering the question:

*In which ways is the stereotypical characterization of a transgender girl influenced by the choices made by a translator?*

The effect of the choices made by the translator on the stereotypical characterization of Melissa is very minimal. If we look at the novel in its entirety, the characteristics that appear to make Melissa a stereotypical female character remain largely the same. However, when paying closer attention to the details, it appears to be the case that, although Melissa is presented in a stereotypically female manner in both texts, the kind of stereotypical characteristics and to what degree she exhibits these traits differ. In both texts Melissa loves fashion and make-up, is uncomfortable within her own skin, is emotional in a stereotypically female manner and lacks assertiveness. However, the choices made by the translator in the TT cause Melissa to appear to the reader slightly differently. Aside from the traits mentioned above, Melissa also appears anxious, angrier and slightly more assertive, yet also physically weaker, in the TT.

These changes, however, do not influence Melissa's stereotypical nature, rather they cause Melissa to exhibit other traits from the list of stereotypical traits mentioned earlier in this thesis and thus allow her to still be presented as a stereotypical girl. Anxiety and physical weakness both point to the stereotypical fragility associated with women, and although anger is an 'unfeminine' emotion, the fact that she struggles to control this specific emotion still categorizes her as a stereotypical woman. Similarly, although she is slightly more assertive, she is either overpowered by the boys in the story or does not have the strength to act upon this assertiveness, which still places her in the category of a stereotypically fragile girl. Thus, although certain choices made by the translator cause Melissa to be presented slightly differently, she still comes across as a stereotypical girl.

## 5.2: Answering the question:

### *What effect do these changes have on the story?*

As the changes made by the translator are small and do not change the fact that Melissa is a stereotypical girl, they do not have much of an effect on the story. The story is mainly focused on Melissa's process as a transgender girl and her slowly finding acceptance with the most important people in her life. As Melissa remains very obviously a girl in the TT, even with the changes made, the impact of the translator's choices on the story, and therefore the audience, is very small. The main issues that could have arisen from the changes made in the translation in regards to the story, are changes that would alter the gender presentation of the character in very obvious ways, which could potentially have an impact on the novel's target audience's understanding of the novel. As the changes do not cause there to be any ambiguity in regards to Melissa being a girl, something which TChL scholars think child readers will struggle with, the text remains just as understandable as the ST is. Similarly, as Melissa's approaches to experiences and situations and the consequences of her actions do not change, the story progresses the same. There is no change to Melissa's development, which means that there is no change to the pace of the story.

## 5.3 Reflection

In this thesis I focused on three categories of stereotypical behaviour. These categories were created from combinations of several traits on a list of stereotypically female characteristics, which was comprised of the results of other research on female stereotypes and adjusted to TChL. I used these three categories as a way to be able to perform a more in-depth analysis and selected the traits that appeared to be the most suited to the novel *Melissa*. Due to its focus on excerpts from a single novel, the scope of this study was limited. The focus on three specific categories that can be found in excerpts from the novel that were specifically selected for the purpose of this research, means that it does not provide insight into all stereotypical female characterisation that occurs in

translated children's literature. Additionally, the use of three specific categories and several, but not all, characteristics also mean that several traits have not been taken into account. This could provide a further opportunity for research on this specific novel, which when compared to or combined with my research could provide a more conclusive answer to the research question.

I sought to provide an in-depth analysis of the gender of a character that, due to the several relevant aspects of her gender identity, required the use of several different theories. For this analysis I have used a combination of research on TChL, feminist translation, queer translation, gender studies, literary theory, psychology and linguistics. There have not been many studies in which these theories are combined and which concern the depiction of transgender identities in translated children's literature, which, although this allows this thesis to potentially bridge a research gap, means that I can only compare my results to studies that are partially similar. Nevertheless, the studies performed on female gender stereotypes in TChL by Chen and Song and on female stereotypes in literature by Katinka Zeven and Aletta G. Dorst, do prove that the choices made by the translator do indeed affect female characterisation. This means that, although the changes in *Melissa* were minimal, the resulting change in characterisation is similar to the evidence found in other studies.

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