



British Comparative Literature Association Graduate Conference in association
with the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

The Media of Translation / Translation between Media

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Abstracts

Plenary I

Intermediality and Synaesthesia: literary translation as centrifugal Practice

Prof. Clive Scott

University of East Anglia

This paper argues, within the general framework of a 'centrifugal' approach to literature, for a translation which develops a phenomenological rather than semiological vision of intermedial exchange. In fact such a vision gravitates away from the intermedial towards the synaesthetic, towards a translational strategy of cross-sensory prosthetics. But there are obvious obstacles to overcome: the limitations of the alphabet (e.g. its inevitable hostility to the paralinguistic, and to the incorporation of ambient reality) parallel those of notation in modern music and make desirable similar reinventions of the language. French Lettrism offers one kind of model of revolution, but much progress can be made less radically, by reconceiving onomatopoeia/ideophonic writing (including homophonic translation). The enterprise suggests a new role for the handwritten, too, as a trace of the vocal and the sub-vocal, and as the assimilation into language of the gestural. Finally, the paper addresses the significance of paginal space in the proliferation of sensory experience, more particularly in the activation of new kinds of audibility and in the prosthetic extension of the vocal by the visual. The paper closes with a brief consideration of three suites of translations of Apollinaire's 'Éventail des saveurs' (*Calligrammes*, 1918), which attempt to put the theory into practice.

Plenary II

Pastoral, After History: The Apple Orchard (Sebald, Hamburger, Richter)

Prof. Mary Jacobus

University of Cambridge

Writing history, for Benjamin, 'belongs to the concept of citation'. This lecture examines the relation between pastoral, translation, and history by way of the citational, focusing on the figure of the apple orchard that features in Sebald's *Rings of Saturn* account of his visit to the poet and translator Michael Hamburger--a visit recapitulated by Tacita Dean's film of Hamburger in his orchard. Sebald's poem 'After Nature' also explores the relation between pastoral, violence, and history, invoking a series of pictures; a coda examines Gerhard Richter's banal photographic pastorals as a related example of Benjamin's 'dialectical image' or historical knowledge in the present.

Visual Arts and Literature

'Is Photography an Art?': Virginia Woolf on painting, photography and Russian writers

Darya Protopopova (New College, University of Oxford)

'Sometimes by accident an untouched amateur photograph of a great personage will drop out of an album or of an old drawer, and instantly the etchings, the engravings, the portraits by Watts and Millais seem insipid and lifeless. Such is the effect of [Maxim] Gorky's Notes upon Tolstoy.' This is the opening of Virginia Woolf's review of Maxim Gorky's memoirs of Leo Tolstoy, published by the Hogarth Press in 1920. Woolf's review leads to several aspects of her writings which this paper will discuss: Woolf's involvement in translating and publishing Russian literature and her interest in 'visual' images of the Russian writers created by their biographers.

Woolf's allusion to Watts and Millais also leads us to her interest in the language of art criticism. Woolf, sister of the painter Vanessa Bell and close friend of the art critic Roger Fry, repeatedly sought assistance in art terminology, drawing parallels between painting and literature. Fry and Woolf shared a group of words with which they described their favourite characteristics in art: sincerity, vitality, intensity, and freedom. They appear in their writings with remarkable regularity, applied here to a landscape by Van Gogh, there to the poetry of T.S. Eliot.

The central problem that concerned both Fry and Woolf was the problem of realism in art. Fry (in his articles on Post-Impressionism) and Woolf (in her essays on 'character in fiction') ask the same question: 'what is reality?' They expose relativity of such definitions as 'true', 'real', and 'convincing', arguing that it is the power to suggest and to stir the reader's/viewer's imagination that makes a painting or a novel a true work of art. The problem of realism in art takes us back to Woolf's preoccupation with the question of why the realism of Tolstoy and other Russian novelists is not merely 'photographic' (Letter to Vita Sackville-West, 8 September 1928).

The Art of Doodle

Mariya Ustyenko (Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies, University of Essex)

In the age of sophisticated software, wide mass use of internet communication, cell phones and artificial intelligence the semiotic studies seem bound to follow suit but what if we turn away from the captivating world of digital sign systems and focus our attention on printed word and illustration? Where do we draw the line between the image and the text if the image itself is created out of words or phrases? Does an author's doodle or sketchy illustration constitute a separate material for the scholar interested in text? What if the text "illustrates" the illustration? How do we interpret works of art that come from authors who are constantly shifting between different media of expression such as performance, poetry, painting or photography? These are the questions that I would like to explore in my talk "The Art of Doodle" using examples from the works of two poets both of whom in their time managed to confuse critics trying to classify their work and thus compare Emily Dickinson's letter-poems now available through Dickinson Electronic Archives and Patti Smith's exhibition catalogue "Strange Messenger: The Work of Patti Smith".

Dino Buzzati and Arthur Rackham: an intermedial and intercultural relationship

Valentina Polcini (Department of Modern Languages, University of Exeter)

My paper will examine how the visual art of the English illustrator Arthur Rackham (1867-1939) has been translated into narrative word by the Italian writer Dino Buzzati (1906-1972). Buzzati's interest in Rackham's book illustration casually began during his teens but then became paramount in shaping his poetics of the fantastic. Figurative memory, in fact, is particularly strong in his early novels *Barnabo delle montagne* (1933), *Il segreto del Bosco Vecchio* (1935) and *Il deserto dei Tartari* (1940). It ranges from the description of illustrations – like a sort of *ékphrasis* – to the appropriation and reworking of some aspects of Rackham's visual sources (i. e. personification of natural elements, fairy-tale atmospheres and characters). The verbal translation of images contributes to convey Buzzati's theme of the loss of imagination in the transition from childhood to adulthood. This narrative process is also linked to Buzzati's nostalgic mode and to his concern that the fantastic side of life – or, in other words, the magic harmony between human beings and animate nature depicted by Rackham – is seriously endangered in contemporary society. Buzzati's intermedial translation also raises questions regarding the transmission of meaning and intercultural contact: it is in fact significant that, since Buzzati could not read English, he read the texts that were accompanied by Rackham's illustrations either in their Italian or French translations.

Samuel Beckett: Identity as art object

Georgina Guy (English Department, King's College London)

My paper will engage with an exhibition entitled *Samuel Beckett* (Pompidou Centre, Paris, 2007), examining this as an event of intermedial translation. Many galleries display the lifetime 'travail' of a single artist, however, this exhibition goes further, attempting to display the identity of a human life as an exhibitable object.

In my paper I will ask how the multiplicity of matter displayed, including pieces which inspired Beckett as man and as artist, those influenced by his 'travail', as well as representations of his own work and biography, attempts cumulatively, via the form of exhibition, to translate Beckett's identity from cultural material into art object.

In this context I will raise questions regarding the conception of translation as a process of intermedial transference; is it possible to translate an identity into an art object and if so what mediation occurs via this act of translation, particularly when the subject is no longer accessible to us? Can identity transcend the materiality of the human body via this kind of translation and if so what fidelity to the original being can we hope to maintain by reconstructing a personality and consciousness in a different form?

Poetry and Music

Rhythm as medium: a psychosomatic approach to the translation of formal poetry

Antoinette Fawcett (School of Literature and Creative Writing, University of East Anglia)

In translating poetry from one language to another how far is it helpful to think of the rhythms and / or formalized metres of a poem as being a medium in themselves? Do rhythm and metre carry meaning or affect, or both, or neither? Can an approach to the translation of poetry which perceives rhythm in this way liberate itself from concepts of preservation and equivalence?

This paper will use evidence collected from the early stages of a creative-critical Ph. D. project on the translation of work by the Dutch Modernist poets Martinus Nijhoff and Gerrit Achterberg to question some assumptions about the part that rhythm and metre play in source texts and in their translations. The approach will be practical and pragmatic, drawing on glosses, draft translations, the translator's journal and on Think-Aloud Protocols, that is to say, audio-recordings of the translating self.

This evidence will be set in the context of the work of several other translators and theoreticians, including that of Roman Jakobson, Walter Benjamin and Clive Scott.

Conclusions from this early-stage work will necessarily be tentative but will point the way to recognizing the true effect of rhythmic qualities in the translation of formal poetry.

'Rather like, or unlike... a fugue': analogy or translation for The Music of Poetry

Katherine Firth (English, Oxford Brookes University)

In the first decades of the twentieth century, W.B. Yeats, Florence Farr and Ezra Pound were experimenting with performing poetry to music. In Yeats' essays on 'Speaking to the Psaltery' (1902-07), in Farr's book on *The Music of Poetry* (1909) and in Pound's opera *Villon* (1921-33), they pursued means of setting poetry to music without losing poetry's essential relationship to speech. As a translator and composer, Pound was integral to modernist debates about translation from one language, discipline or culture to another (as in 'A Retrospect' 1917). Pound's description of his multi-voiced, multi-linguaged, typographically radical long poem *The Cantos*, as 'rather like, or unlike subject and response and counter subject in a fugue' (1927, *Letters*) has been widely misunderstood, not least by W.B. Yeats in 'A Packet for Ezra Pound'.

Yeats' attempts to consider the music of poetry have long been ridiculed or dismissed (George Bernard Shaw called them 'the maunderings of an idiot-banshee'). Discussion of Pound's interest in the music of poetry has often been focused on the problem of music and form, particularly of *The Cantos*. Furthermore, Yeats, Pound and Farr did not always agree with, or even understand, one another. By centering the debate on the transcriptions and recordings, *The Music of Poetry* is shown to have been not merely a theory or analogy, but a complex aural performance.

Revealing the Secrets of the Ayan: drum poems from the Akyem Kingdom of Ghana

Nana Oforiatta-Ayim (Department of African Languages and Cultures, SOAS)

Ghana is made up of a series of states, each comprising several kingdoms that continue to play an important role in government and for the public at large. One of these is the Akyem kingdom, whose inception dates back to the 14th Century. The kingdoms' history and authority are legitimised through layers of artistic forms holding coded meanings, present in the 'Stool' or throne, cloths, swords, finial-topped staffs, dances and poetries, such as the Ayan. The Ayan are drum poems. Poems told by drums in drum language, which speak of incidents that cannot be spoken of explicitly. But, these Ayan are no longer being passed down as assiduously as they once were. In an effort to preserve them, I have translated them into Twi, then English and proceeded to analyse them, that is, constructed a parallel narrative to fill the gaps that the drum poems had purposefully left out. This exercise was further complicated by my being related to the Stool and thus made privy to contexts that I was not permitted to reveal in my research. I propose to look at the legitimacy of translating or elucidating information that has purposefully been obscured and what is lost or gained in the process. I will also look at how poets have 'translated' the tropes of drum poetry, and the nexus of music and language, into contemporary form.

Performance and Translation

Poetic Gestures, Modernist Choreographies

Cecile Guédon (London Consortium, Birkbeck College)

This paper sets out to define the device of gesture both in poetic and in choreographic terms. For early Modernism, the notion of aesthetic gesture operates as a hinge between poetry and dance – two forms of art in constant exchange. In Stéphane Mallarmé and Rainer Maria Rilke's textual responses to the crisis of language, the performed gesture gains prominence, eclipsing the written word. Paul Valéry is quick to register the impact of their choreographic stylistics on Modernism at large. I wish to go further and suggest that the modernist transformation of poetry into gesture marks the time at which motion spreads across the artistic spectrum, shaking traditional codes of representation, bringing paradigms of pre-linguistic, non-discursive experiences to the fore. Dance supersedes the traditional models of music and painting, bringing the three-dimensional depth of time and space into the aesthetic discourse; the notion of rhythm thereby acquires the dimension of an overarching category, bridging fluidly heterogeneous forms of artistic expression. The poem becomes a stage, and poetry a matter of abstract choreography, rhythmical modulations and dynamic effects. This *ars poetica* translates in terms of time and space the communication of perceptions from the writer to the reader: poetry from then on is implicitly modelled upon the gesture, and reads as an enactment.

Translating Performance: Electra cha-cha-cha?

Kate Eaton (School of English and Drama, Queen Mary)

Is the language of performance encoded in a play script's DNA? How can this language be extricated, deciphered and re-encoded when a play is trans(loc)ated and rotated through time and space? Who is the theatre translator? What is their role in all of this? How should they keep the company of actors?

In 1941 Virgilio Piñera wrote a parody of Cuban society and Greek myth entitled *Electra Garrigó*. The play baffled and offended its audience in equal measure when premiered in 1948. It now has such canonical status in Cuba that it is in danger of being cast in theatrical aspic; outside of Cuba it is conspicuous by its virtual absence in translation.

Fifty years on from the Cuban Revolution and sixty-one years after the premiere of *Electra Garrigó* how will this play be seen and interpreted by British audiences? What is the language of its performance? What strategies might a theatre translator use to unravel 'meaning' and tease out the text from page to stage without breaking the strand that links Ancient Athens to downtown Havana?

By analysing the play and my work with actors to develop my translation of it, I shall consider these questions.

Translation in performance: meaning and theatrical shift in Tony Harrison's translation of Hecuba by Euripides

Geraldine Brodie (Centre for Intercultural Studies, University College London)

"It's one thing to strive for relevance – it's another to drain away the play's enigmas in the quest for easy access", wrote Victoria Segal in her Sunday Times review of Tony Harrison's new translation of Euripides's *Hecuba* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2005. My paper will analyse the transfer from text to stage in this production, testing what Gadamer might call the interpretation of Euripides's play through dialogue: here, the dialogue of the translator not only with the original Greek text but also with other versions and productions of the play over the centuries. Furthermore, collaborative practices within theatre enable this dialogue to be extended to include other theatre practitioners (not least, director and actors) in the presentation of meaning to the audience, a shifting presentation which may divert from the static written product of the text. Drawing on my research in theatre archives and contemporary reception for this production, I will examine the role of translation in the relocation of meaning through performance and demonstrate the multiplicity of new conditions resulting from a movement through time, language and medium. Harrison identifies "that bond of empathy and compassion that can cross centuries" as the affect of the play for its audience. My paper investigates transmission of this affect through the distinctive process of translation for performance.

Translation / Theory

Language as Media: Belarusian-English Literary Translation

Svetlana Skomorokhova (Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies, University of Warwick)

Expanding on Roman Jakobson's classification of various kinds of translation (intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic), the paper regards translation as intermedial activity and examines the current views on the issue expressed by translation theorists. The existing metaphors of the nature of language involved in translation are re-evaluated, e.g. the metaphor of water colour change employed by Yanhong Xu (1998, p.19) to describe the process of linguistic change in interlingual translation (according to it, two languages are just different shades of water colours), is rethought in terms of the application of two dissimilar materials (oil and water colour) in artistic process.

Varying prosodies of English and Belarusian, as well as the examples of literary translations from Belarusian into English, will be used in support of theoretical assumptions.

A Metamorphosis? Translation as rewriting in Kafka and Borges

Sarah Roger (St. Edmund Hall, University of Oxford)

In 1938, three significant events take place in the life of Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges. First, he translates Franz Kafka's short stories for publication in Spanish. Second, his father asks him to rewrite his failed novel to compensate for his shortcomings as an author. Third, he comes up with the idea for "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*"—the short story about writing and rewriting that becomes his seminal contribution to literary theory.

Borges finds something compelling in how Kafka's relationship with his father manifests itself in his writing—it is the root, for Borges, of Kafka's prevailing sense of failure. Borges highlights this sense of failure in his translations of Kafka and also in his own writings. It is present in Borges' liberal view of translation; as well, it can be traced to his father's work as a translator. For Borges' father, translating is a creative act equal to writing an original piece, but even an original piece cannot be considered a literary success.

Borges uses this paternal Kafkian guilt as a productive theme in his writing. He questions what constitutes an original text and whether a son can use his writing to justify himself to his father. In Borges, problems of translation and originality are linked to what it means to be a successful author, ideas that are (ironic) precursors to literary theories of authorship and ownership

'This language I speak, it's haunted'. Reading and Translation in Patchwork Girl

Rose Hepworth (Screen Media and Cultures, University of Cambridge)

Shelley Jackson's hypertext novel, *Patchwork Girl* (1995), an early work of electronic literature, is an intriguing reworking of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Although by today's standards, *Patchwork Girl* might seem somewhat primitive in appearance, it remains a seminal work, celebrating the advance of literary narratives into the digital domain. Jackson's work internalises creative and theoretical fascinations arising from this relocation of stories. The protagonist, a female monster, has been created by Mary Shelley but authored by Shelley Jackson who enlists the reader's help in reconstructing both monster and story.

A translation of sorts operates at a number of levels. Jackson's narrative is an interpretative adaptation of Mary Shelley's story, translating a number of Shelley's themes into the digital age. However, there is also a translation of language from page to screen and it is here that translation transcends analogy. The reader of *Patchwork Girl* must learn a language that is spatial as well as verbal and which employs a grammar of images and hyperlinks. Jackson's exploration of this process picks at the stitches of translation so that the search for idealistic equivalence unravels leading her and her monster to conclude that, like the hyperlink and the text itself, 'I am most myself in the gaps between my parts' – girl, story, and meaning all reside *between* media, perhaps even in the translation itself.

Plato's Play-dough, or For Cheerful Spirits Find a Happy Medium: The Origins and Significance of the Materialist Conceptualisation of Translation

Miles Layram (English and Related Literature, York University)

The rise of formalist, post-Gorgian classical rhetoric was bound up with the physical sciences, and this helped to produce a materialist conceptualisation of the verbal medium. Having traced this idea from Plato's *Phaedrus* and the Theophrastus fragments through to Quintilian and the other late-classical rhetoricians, I shall then discuss its importance within the Renaissance.

First, we shall examine the materialist-remoulding concept within the *De Copia* of Erasmus. We shall then look at the centrality of the remoulding idea within the Renaissance curriculum. In addition to being taught how to "translate" in its modern sense of transmigrating content from one vernacular to another, pupils were also taught how to remould the verbal medium within any given vernacular, for example changing prose into verse, one syntactical permutation into another, and so on. This multi-directional art of transposition was at the centre of the Renaissance educational system.

Having shown that the classical tradition made the concept of the expressive medium both central and corporeal, I shall then examine how the romantic tradition has popularised the opposite approach, sidelining the concept of form to the point of invisibility in order to elevate the "gist", or paraphraseable content. I shall end by assessing the present and future implications of this anti-formalist tendency for translation and intermediality, and consider some of the potential benefits of a return to formalism.