# TABLE OF CONTENTS

*Interview with Breon Mitchell and Uwe Timm: Collaboration Between Translator and Author* ........................................... 1  
Rainer Schulte

*Not Getting it Right* ................................................................. 8  
David Ferry

*From Dean to Deantrepreneur: The Academic Administrator as Translator* .............................................................. 14  
Abby Kratz and Dennis Kratz

*Translating Diversity: The Distinct and Variegated Voice of Clifford Geertz* ........................................................... 20  
Gregory Conti

*Sad Tropics, or Tristes Tropiques?* ........................................... 27  
Liane Gutman

*Renditions: 30 Years of Bringing Chinese Literature to English Readers* ................................................................. 30  
Audrey Heijns

*Whispered Urgency: Translating Sound and Momentum in Raffaello Baldini’s “E’ Malan”* ........................................... 34  
Adria Bernardi

*On the Cathay Tour with Eliot Weinberger’s New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry* .................. 39  
Steve Bradbury

*Method or Maestri: Two Approaches to (Teaching) Translation* ................................................................. 53  
Gregory Conti

*Translating India: Enabling Tamil and Sanskrit Poems to be Heard in English* .................................................. 58  
R. Parthasarathy

*The Mexican Poet Homero Aridjis* ........................................... 69  
Rainer Schulte

*BOOK REVIEW*

*The Return of the River* by Roberto Sosa, tr Jo Anne Engelbert ................................................................. 72  
*Steven F. White, Reviewer*
Scattered Crumbs
A Novel
Muhsin al-Ramli
Translated from the Arabic by Yasmeen S. Hanoosh
$16.95, paper

Set in an Iraqi village during the Iran-Iraq war, Scattered Crumbs critiques a totalitarian dictatorship through the stories of an impoverished family. A father, a fierce supporter of Saddam Hussein—here called only “The Leader”—clashes with his artist son, who loves his homeland but finds himself literally unable to paint the Leader’s portrait for his father’s wall. Scattered Crumbs, the winner of the 2003 Arabic Translation Award, was first published in Arabic in Cairo in 2000. This translation captures the subtle sarcasm of the original text and its elliptical rhythms.

Angry Voices
An Anthology of the Off-Beat New Egyptian Poets
Translated, with an introduction, by Mohamed Enani
Compiled by Mohamed Metwalli
$19.95, paper

“A superb and unprecedented translation of contemporary Arabic poetry from Egypt. This volume speaks to the contemporary Arabic cultural scene by juxtaposing poeties that have generated controversy—vernacular poems, prose poems, as well as new poems in the formal tongue—and by boldly, carefully, and elegantly presenting a range of poetry that has not always received warm welcome in its home territory.”

—Marilyn Booth, translator of Nawal Sadawi’s Memoirs from the Women’s Prison (California, 1994) and author of May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt (California, 2001)

TEN THOUSAND DOLLAR PRIZE
The Arabic Translation Award was established to support and to publish fine translations of important Arabic writing. Presented by the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies at the University of Arkansas and the University of Arkansas Press, the prize awards $5000 to the translator, $5000 to the original author, and publication of the translation. For submission guidelines, please see www.uapress.com or contact Anna Moore at aamoore@uark.edu or 800.626.0090.
RS: Breon, how did you develop your relationship with Uwe Timm while you were working on the translation of his novel *Morenga*?

BM: The first thing I think of when I translate is what sort of questions I can ask that would be meaningful and not simply make my job easier, a job that I should be doing myself. So I try first to do as much work as I can to avoid unnecessary questions and leave only those that I actually have real difficulty in figuring out. But I do try to contact the author early.

RS: *Morenga* is a novel that relies heavily on historical facts. Thus, what research did you initiate before you thought about contacting the author?

BM: One of the specific questions for me was what parts of the novel might be factual material taken from history or actual printed documents where I might find an English equivalent translated at that period. That is the sort of thing that is sometimes difficult to know without asking the author.

RS: At this point, we should ask Uwe to give us a short introduction to the background of his novel, *Morenga*, to get a sense of the historical events that build the subject matter of the novel.

UT: To begin with, it’s a historical novel, based on facts. I knew right from the start that I didn’t want to write a documentary, although that was a period when documentaries were being written. Instead, I wanted to write a book that also took a fictional approach to the material. It was precisely the combination of fact and fiction that interested me. The novel is about a rebellion in the former German colony of South West Africa between 1904 and 1907, when Germany was a colonial power, when the Hereros and the Hottentots rose up against the Germans. So there are things in it that a writer would never have made up. If they had been invented, you would think the author had gone too far. For example, the vocabulary of punishment, when the Germans discuss techniques for flogging the African natives. Those are things that are taken directly from historical documents. There were other matters, however, that seemed to me to demand fictional treatment. For example, the figure of Gottschalk, a veterinarian, who arrives in Africa and is changed by it; how he first experiences it, how it alters him, and how those alterations are revealed in his character. That is all fictional; the protagonist of the novel, Gottschalk, is a fictional character. And there are other straightforwardly fictional elements dealing with the country’s history. For example, there are three tales that are, so to speak, borne by oxen, that tell us about the country.

RS: Breon, could you elaborate on how your collaboration with Uwe Timm came about and what you did when the two of you were working together?

BM: It was a great deal of fun to translate this novel, because I learned a lot from it. I knew very little of the period, very little about Germany’s colonial history. So I read books, articles, and essays and tried to understand as much as
I could about the period. I tried to make sure as I translated that I stayed true, as far as I could, to the language actually spoken at that time. I was able to take a trip through Germany with other translators around that time, sponsored by the Goethe Institut in Munich, that allowed us to meet with German publishers and authors. And that trip started in Munich. The Goethe Institut arranged for me to meet Uwe Timm, to have breakfast with him, so that we could get to know one another and say hello, and for me to say that I was the translator. That was our first meeting. And we got along very well from the start. Uwe was kind enough to talk with me about the language of the novel and some of the things that he wanted to do, which gave me a better insight into the sort of details I should watch for, particularly the pleasure that he took in reproducing language, of the military Prussian officer caste, for example. I could see how much fun he had had working with that language, and it inspired me to try to see whether I could reproduce it fairly accurately. He told me that if I came back to Munich to work on the translation, he would be happy to have me be a guest in his home, and we could go over any questions I had. So we actually decided at that point that I would return in the summer after doing a draft of the translation. We actually decided at that point that I would return in the summer after doing a draft of the novel.

RS: In turn, Uwe, what research methods did you pursue before you began to write the novel?

UT: Yes, they corresponded exactly to those Breon made, who as a good translator worked his way into the novel. These were the things that preceded the novel: first, a knowledge I’d had since childhood. My father was an officer, and I heard many stories at home of this completely strange and different world, about Africa and its totally different customs, with a different civilization and a totally different way of thinking. That stuck with me through childhood, adolescence, and my student years. And I always read about Africa and attended lectures about it, about ethnology. That all stayed with me. Later, as I began to work my way into the novel, I studied the documentary evidence in detail. I visited what was then still South West Africa, Namibia today, worked in the archives, and even interviewed people who had taken part in the uprising, very old people I met personally. I looked through photographic material, read letters and diaries. In a sense, I constructed a room, a sort of echo chamber you might say, that I realized was filled with more material than I could ever use, and yet it was necessary to have it, to hear the echoes of something of which little remained, of the things I had read and absorbed. All that took place before I began to write, before I had selected a form, which could be called montage-like, where various sorts of texts are worked in. That was precisely what I was interested in. I was interested in what sort of mentality was expressed in the language. How do officers talk, how do ordinary soldiers talk, how do people who want to be farmers talk? What sort of mentality lies behind a person’s desire to come to a foreign country, to oppress other human beings, to torture or kill them? That’s what interested me, and then I worked for four years on this novel, writing, working out various narrative strands that were constantly interrupted by the insertion of documentary material. That was the preparatory work, and the way the novel was structured, a simple structure in itself.

RS: Now let’s talk about the actual work you did when the two of you got together in Munich.

BM: When I arrived at Uwe’s home in Munich, I had completed a draft of the translation that I felt was pretty good. It was by no means finished, but I had gone completely through the novel, and I had marked every question by putting a check mark in the margin of any page where I wanted to ask something. I had some general questions that I needed to find out about too. Each morning, we would sit side by side and go through the novel. Uwe had the German in front of him and I had the English, turning pages until we found something. What he looked for at first were things in the German, where he wondered what I had done. So he would read quickly — knowing the text very well — and then he would say: How did you handle this, this is something a little difficult I think. And I would find the passage. We would look at it and see whether or not my version of it corresponded in some way to what he saw as a problem. And that was interesting, because there were some cases in which I had seen no problem at all in the German where he pointed out a certain difficulty. Sometimes I had solved the problem without thinking about it, almost by chance. And at other times, he alerted me to the problem, and we could work something out. I remember once he mentioned the word “Harz,” for instance; he suggested I should say “Harz Mountains” so that it was clear what it was, even though the word “mountains” was not in the German. But I had already done that, because I knew the reader would probably need it. That was a very small point. So he would stop when he found something, and I would stop when I saw a checkmark in the margin and ask him about it, and he would explain to me what the
German meant, or whether it was the vocabulary that was important, or whether it came from an actual historical source. Often, he would turn to a map, to a book of photographs, or to a particular document he owned and say, “you can find it in here.” And I would stop and find things. I think one particularly interesting example was Morenga’s diary. He had quoted from it, and it appeared to be actual passages from a diary originally written in English. In the German text, it was in German. There was a reference to it as having survived only in photographs in a book published in 1910. And I had no idea whether it had been totally invented by Uwe Timm or whether it was a real book. So at that point I said, “what is this? Is this real or have you made it up?” And Uwe brought out the book and said “here it is,” and skimmed through it to find the photos of the diary, with the German below it. And using the photographs of this real diary, I was able to transcribe the English precisely, so that the translation is a montage of the original English diary of Morenga. And in that sense, a very satisfying translation!

RS: What you saw then was the photograph of the English?

BM: The English diary, handwritten by Morenga. There was a German translation in the footnotes, which was quoted in Uwe’s text, including a question mark after one of the words that the German transcriber couldn’t decipher. There is no question mark in the English, because I was able to figure out the word.

UT: I have some personal experience with translations. My previous works have been translated into about 15 languages. I just want to say I’ve really never had such a positive experience as I’ve had with Breon. That has to do with the exactitude with which he prepared his work. And it’s also related to the fact that we worked together. It’s a good rule of thumb that if a translator doesn’t have any questions, there will inevitably be flaws. You find them automatically. It simply can’t be the case that a translator doesn’t have any questions about a novel. What was so amazing was that our work together was such a pleasure, that it was fun. The detailed preparations Breon made, and all the things he had thought through, made me go through everything again and made me think about precisely what I had in mind when I wrote something. It was really a model collaboration, which could be seen even in the fact that we played tennis with each other, and he’s a very good player and blew me off the court. He was mean enough not to mention how good he was. He was a champion player. The more effort that’s put into a translation, the more preparation, the more precise it is, the better it is too. I can only say I’ve never worked more intensively and closely with a translator than with Breon.

BM: And it was a great deal of fun.

UT: And it’s a wonderful reward that this work results in a book lying here that I’m happy with, including the way it looks, the paper, everything.

BM: Of course the translator never knows every question to be asked. So it’s important that Uwe also brought up his own questions on the basis of the German text. That is really an interesting and effective approach. There were other questions that I asked that only he could answer. I’ll tell you one minor one. In Gottschalk’s diary — he keeps a diary — there was one entry that consisted of a single word, “Paddentraum.” I wondered whether this had something to do with Pfad, like a path, maybe he’s on the road, dreaming at night, he has a dream of the path. Should I translate it “dreampath” or Paddy like an Irishman’s name? I said to Uwe, “I don’t understand what this is, correct me if I’m wrong and we can change it.” But as I remember, Uwe said: “This is more a private matter: Padde is a nickname for my daughter. It was really a dream about my daughter.” Something no reader could know, of course. I finally translated it “Paddidream.” Someone who reads the translation will say: What’s this? But someone who reads the German will say the same thing. And the answer lies inside Uwe’s head. But I know the answer now, as the translator, and what I find so interesting as a person who loves literature is the unique insight a translator gains into the mind of the author. It’s the closest possible reading of a text. And if an author is open to helping the translator, then much is learned and revealed that would not normally be discovered. For example, if an academic were to come to an author and say: what do you mean by that word, I don’t understand it, the author would normally reply, you’re the reader, figure it out. But with the translator, the author says “I have to help this poor man some way. I’ll tell him what it actually is. He’s doing his best.” But now, if someone reads the English version and asks me, what is this, I can just say, you’re the reader, it is up to you to decide what it is. I wanted to say another thing about mistakes. In a long novel, it’s inevitable that there are going to be some mistakes. That’s what later print-
ings are for. But there are also sometimes mistakes in the German. A German editor has missed something, there is an inconsistency, there is a date wrong, maybe a name misspelled. There were three or four typographical errors where I asked Uwe: is this right? He said: Well, no, it’s incorrect in the German. It’s a typographical error. They just didn’t catch it in proofreading. That is good to know, too. Sometimes it’s not so obvious, and it might change the meaning. There is another thing I think is important. What a translator does not want is to have a glaring error in the first paragraph or the last paragraph of a book or a chapter. So after I was completely finished and we were parting, I said to Uwe, I’ll send you the opening two pages and the closing two pages of every chapter. Just read those pages, if you have time, and see whether you see anything. It’s just one further check so that the novel won’t appear with a mistake in the very first paragraph.

BM: When I was translating the military language, in particular the description of the battles, I realized that many of the reports were documents that were actually published at the time. I thought it might be possible to find English equivalents to draw on. And so I went to the British Library and checked out several English-language books about the Hottentot rebellion. And they described the battle scenes. Now none of the battle scenes in Uwe’s novel are simply a collage of actual documents, but the descriptions are similar, so I spent a good deal of time noting various vocabulary and phrases in a little notebook, phrases that referred to the horses, the way guns were fired, the sounds they made, feelings and emotions that the soldiers had, in the tone and style of 1904 and 1905. Then I worked those into my translation, so echoes of real phrases used in 1905 occur in the description of the battles in English.

UT: I think that has added importance because it’s a matter of learning about states of consciousness. My working hypothesis is that you can’t approach these matters from our own point of view as a matter of course, or describe what happened back then with our contemporary language. First of all I don’t have the experience to write about Africans, there isn’t a single place in the novel where an African is portrayed from within, through some sort of aesthetics of empathy. I would find that inadmissible and naïve, it simply wouldn’t do. It’s a matter of learning something from the language of the time, of discovering how people came to humiliate others back then, to hold them in such low esteem, to kill other human beings. It truly resembles a plan for later genocide, one that finds its culmination in Auschwitz, this destruction of the Hereros. And investigating what happened is only possible if you don’t approach the matter naïvely by describing it in today’s language. Thus, the major effort and energy the translator expends on the task, including even academic research, to put this all into English so that we can at least approximate the experience. And I think it’s also important for the English reader to see the consciousness that lay behind what happened then.

RS: And that comes precisely from the various levels of speech. Each of them, the military language, the language of Morenga, and the language of Gottschalk.

UT: Its various layers of language, or one might say, various voices that speak.

BM: And in this case, the actual vocabulary that was used at the time helps to create that voice. For example, how do we describe military action? I already mentioned going to the British Library and reading battle descriptions. Many technical terms changed between World War I and World War II. And present-day dictionaries give definitions for modern warfare, not definitions from 1905. And so I used a German-English military dictionary from World War I put out by the British Government, showing the technical vocabulary of World War I in German and English. Another example was the book Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution by Kropotkin, an important book in the novel, that influences the spiritual development of the characters. It is often quoted in the diaries, in paragraphs or lines. I could have just tried to translate the German in the text into English, but instead I found a translation of Kropotkin’s work published in 1902. I found every passage and quoted it word for word, because it has that feel and flavor of 1902. Interestingly enough, that is the only translation that has ever been done of Kropotkin’s Mutual Aid, and it’s still in print today.

UT: And this feeling is maintained in the longer excursions built into the novel like short stories, leading into the interior of the land, told by an ox. The first is in a language that is quite Biblical, since it’s about a missionary entering South West Africa. And that too, it seems to me, is a totally different level of language, which probably has an equally Biblical flavor in English.

BM: There I used the King James version, of course,
because that was the version that English-speaking missionaries in Africa would have used. I found the equivalent passage in the case of actual quotations, and simply quoted the King James version, and that is a beautiful translation, but there were also passages in which African characters, for example one called The Prophet, write in a biblical language that is neither standard English nor German, but a biblical language deformed in a way that is very powerful and striking. To reproduce that language, I had to give it a Biblical flavor and yet make sure it didn’t sound simply like an English pastor or missionary. It had to sound like a native using the English language in a Biblical way.

RS: How was the book received in Germany when it was first published?

UT: It was reviewed very positively. It was very well received. Very good reviews.

RS: So far, there has only been one review published in the The New York Times.

UT: Yes, that is correct.

BM: Morenga was first published in 1978, and it was a book ahead of its time, in terms of both its style and its subject. Instead of becoming outmoded, it’s become more and more relevant as the years have passed. This is seen partly in the fact that it was reissued several times. This translation is based on a new edition that reflects some authorial revisions, published in the year 2000. So it is both an older novel in a sense and yet a new novel. What has happened in America is also quite interesting: most books that catch on in America in universities are read because they are translated into English. This is a book that first found acceptance in America in the universities among students of German and was required reading in graduate courses here at Indiana University in post-colonial literature. Two years before this English version appeared, the MLA had a special session devoted in German to Morenga, and Uwe came to New York, and Washington University, St. Louis, and I think four different professors gave papers on the novel. So in a sense, this is a case in which the English market and English reading public are catching up with a novel already known and already read in German departments here in the United States. It is certainly important and relevant today. What I am hoping is that now English Department graduate students, who are quite interested in post-colonial literature, will begin to read it too.

UT: Perhaps I might add a word here. Something that has always pleased me is that when this novel appeared, Morenga was rediscovered in Namibia. He had been totally forgotten. Only the victor’s story was known. He had been completely erased. And he was discovered again. Historians started studying his life, and his son was located, who had survived the massacre. There’s a German documentary film about this son. So Morenga was recovered for Namibia. We can only hope, now that there is an English version, that it will also be read more widely in Namibia.

RS: I would like to make another observation that may or may not be related to your novel. Günter Grass has just published his novel Crabwalk and Jörg Friedriech has published his book Der Brand (“The Fire”), both of which have cause quite a stir in Germany and abroad, since both texts deal with what the British, the Americans, and the Russians have inflicted on Germany during World War II. Has this something to do with the notion that all of a sudden we are trying to show on the one hand what the British and the Americans and the Russians did to Germany and here what the Germans did to the indigenous Hottentots in West Africa?

UT: Of course that was a part of Germany’s repressed history when the book first appeared twenty-five years ago. Most people didn’t know there had been a rebellion, they knew that Germany had colonies, but not much more. The novel has always been in print, it’s gone through various editions, I should send them to you, Breon, because it’s very interesting. The editions varied. The book was always in print, but it also helped open up a discussion in Germany, to get it under way. That was a side effect, but my primary interest was simply to write a novel that manages, by means of language and within language itself, to describe something that’s quite difficult to grasp, the notion of the foreign. And to advance a little our sense of the consequences it had, the foreign, the Other, always looked down upon and seen as inferior. Those are the roots buried in this novel. They’re buried in all European nations, by the way. The cruelty in the Belgian Congo is indescribable. The French in Algeria, and the English, have acted with unbelievable brutality. These are deep roots that go back to an understanding that permanently elevates itself and degrades others in foreign countries. And to extend that into language itself, we still see it today in everyday things, this standard degradation of others simply because they are different,
and we see how that is expressed in language, that what’s I was trying to do and that was a part of this work. That’s why it’s important that Breon has given so much of his time, energy, and effort as a translator to bringing all this out in the English language. It’s not just a matter of making things clear to the reader, not just translating the meaning, he could sit down and do that in a month, it’s that he brought out the phenomenon of how language determines emotions, shapes them and changes them, this historical phenomenon anchored in language itself, that’s what requires so much work.

BM: There are so many levels on which this book is interesting for American readers, even American readers who know very little about German history. The novel manages in a very complex but striking way to operate simultaneously on at least three different levels. One of those levels is to recreate the history of the German colonial experience in the war against the Hottentots in 1904, an extremely interesting historical level that Uwe opened up to the German people, and, as he said, to the Namibian people, who had forgotten Morenga. But there is a second level that is unavoidable: the whole question of genocide and the Konzentrationslager, the concentration camps. You cannot help but think of what happened during the Nazi period to the Jews, which seems overshadowed by the sorts of things that were happening in Africa. And there seems to me a third level as well: we know there are Gastarbeiter, Turks and others, in Germany now, and that the country is having a great deal of difficulty in dealing with this. So to my mind, the novel takes place in 1905, perhaps in 1936 or 1937, and in 1978, and in the year 2000 as well. And all of this is present simultaneously. This is not simply a German problem, it’s a human problem, it’s about history and how we treat others. In post-colonial literature, there is an interest in the historical relationship between a dominant power and a people that has very little power. And this is what comes out so strongly in this novel. The book appears shortly after the war in Iraq and is reviewed as a novel about a dominant power that attacks a small defenseless nation, one that can’t possibly hope to stand up against it.

RS: I would like to have Uwe follow up on a question that Breon mentioned earlier. This is a revised version of the original novel. What prompted you to either rewrite certain passages or add certain passages? How was the novel modified and why?

UT: Not in any major way, but there were revisions, I altered a few things when I read through the novel again. The book was, after all, written over 25 years ago, and there aren’t many books that are still being sold, read, and discussed after 25 years. I took the opportunity of a new edition with DTV to go through it again, and I think in two places I struck out passages that just seemed too long. For example the report to the Prussian Academy of Sciences by Dr. Leonhard Brunkhorst. I based this on an actual document, but one that, given the academic style of the time, was simply too long-winded. I found this document interesting because the author was considering various methods of rendering colonialism more modern and efficient. What was the modern form of colonialism, the present-day form if you will, how could it be made more efficient. He objected to the tradition of flogging, to shooting people. He praised English colonial politics, which did in fact differ greatly from that of the Germans, the English were far less involved than the Germans, who thought they had to establish order by flogging and the like. Well, that was one of the places where I found I could cut passages without losing what I wanted to convey. As we grow older, we develop a different sense of time, and I find that in general I have less patience. I can’t say exactly, but I think I struck out some pages. Other than that I made only minor revisions. I can’t think of anywhere else that I rewrote longer passages. So they were minor revisions, where I thought, oh, my god, the past perfect, that bothers me now in this passage, I’ll just take it out.

BM: When the publishers at New Directions got my manuscript, they saw that there were parts of it that seemed to be official military reports and diary entries and so forth and they were having difficulty as they read distinguishing what was what. So they said, we want to see the German, the designer wants to see the German text, and I sent them the German edition to look at. Well, it goes pretty much straight through, with breaks of course, but with a single type size. The New Directions designer decided to put some of the collage-like material into smaller type, thinking it would be easier to read. I wonder whether you thought this was a good idea, Uwe.

UT: I think it’s really a very good idea. I must say that the English edition is much better than the German one. That’s because of the typography. I think it’s very well done, it’s an excellent solution, and if there’s a new German edition I would try to get them to do the same thing. The text of Morenga is easier to read in the...
English version than it is in the German. The book isn’t easy for German readers either. It’s a relatively difficult book to read. The second thing I would take over from the immense amount of work that Breon did is to leave the text of Morenga’s diary in the original English. I think it’s important for the American reader of the English version that I never tried to imagine in German how a Nama or an Englishman would speak German. A Nama appears, he speaks Nama of course, as you would imagine, and all at once I might be writing about it and he’s speaking German. It just wouldn’t work. Or an Englishman might appear who is suddenly speaking German, and the reader would surely think, come on, he should actually be speaking English. The only way to handle it is by indirect speech, by reporting that he said such and such. But you mustn’t write that an Englishman, Major Eliot, comes in and says “Wie geht es Ihnen?” That makes no sense at all. However, it’s often done in historical novels, in otherwise good novels, without even thinking. It’s a way of dominating others, a double domination in which you simply make people suddenly speak German.

BM: One more thing about Morenga’s diary. What I find so wonderful about discovering the original text in English is that it allowed a text to appear that was authentic and perfect and strong and powerful. As a translator, I would never have dared to translate it into English like that. It would have been too hard for me to put myself inside Morenga and imagine how would he have spoken. Uwe also avoids speaking from inside Morenga. In the diary you have to, and the translator faces the same problem: how to do it. We solved that problem because we have Morenga’s English — the perfect “translation.”

UT: That’s what’s so wonderful, books are living organisms after all, texts are living organisms. As long as you work on them they keep changing as you write, and I make many, many revisions. There are six or seven different versions that I incorporate, quite varied ones. As long as an author is still alive he can still make changes. And the great thing is that this organism lives on in the translation, that’s the exact situation, it’s truly a reanimation, a further opportunity for change. There are always new translations, and this reanimation, that is, the air, the breath of language entering in, is something miraculous.

Biographical Notes for Breon Mitchell and Uwe Timm

The interview was conducted in both German and English. The German comments by Uwe Timm were translated by Breon Mitchell.

Breon Mitchell has received several national awards for literary translation, including the ATA German Literary Prize, the ALTA Translation Prize, and the Theodore Christian Hoepfner Award. In addition to Uwe Timm’s Morenga, his recent translations include a new version of The Trial by Franz Kafka, The Silent Angel by Heinrich Böll, and the collected short stories of Siegfried Lenz. Breon Mitchell is Professor of Germanic Studies and Comparative Literature and Director of The Lilly Library at Indiana University, a repository of rare books and manuscripts from all ages. He is also a past-president of ALTA.

Uwe Timm’s novel Morenga was published in German by Kiepenheuer & Witsch in 1985 and in English in 2003 by New Directions. Timm has established himself as one of the most important contemporary German novelists. The Invention of Curried Sausage (Die Entdeckung der Currywurst), translated by Leila Vennewitz and published in English by New Directions in 1995, was a bestseller in Germany. Other novels by Uwe Timm published in English include The Headhunter (Kopfjäger), Midsummer Night (Johannisnacht), and The Snake Tree (Der Schlangenbaum). His most recent novel, Am Beispiel meines Bruders, appeared in Germany in 2003.
NOT GETTING IT RIGHT

By David Ferry

[Keynote Address delivered at the ALTA Conference in Boston, November 2003]

The words “keynote” and “address” scare the life out of me, because in accepting the honor of giving one of those things I might give the impression of pretending that I know more than I know or that I have the confidence to go out on a boat on the open waters of generalization, believing that anything I have to say will somehow find a right key signature for all the music of all these learned people. And the word “address” is intimidating to me because it seems to ask for a tone of voice I’m not accustomed to. I can’t go out on these treacherous waters of generalization about the art of translation, and I can’t speak for anybody’s experience other than my own. But I can talk about some of the things that give me the most pleasure when I’m engaged in translating something wonderful, and failing to get it right, and I can only do that with the help of examples. My subject is pleasure, the pleasure of hearing somebody else’s voice and the play-acting pleasure of pretending for awhile, all the while knowing it’s your own voice, pretending. Self-deluded, and yet not, you have the illusion, and yet you don’t, that you’re in on how the wonderful thing happened, and you almost have the sense, until you wake up the next morning, that you did it, right along with Horace or Virgil or Sin-leqqu-unnini. But waking up the next morning, if it provided the experience of seeing how you failed, supplied simultaneously — the other side of the same coin — the pleasure of seeing more vividly the poem you were trying to translate, of seeing more vividly, and with love and envy, how it was written. So in this sense, seeing how and where you didn’t get it, you are in on it with the writers you’re failing to translate. Sometimes this seeing allowed you to improve the translation, but often it demonstrated thrillingly how there were things in the target poem that were unreachable.

The translation is always in trouble because its field of work is always the complex organization of linguistic structures appropriate to its own language and of minute choices made within that foreign linguistic context, subject also to the limitations of the translator’s talent, the limitations of his knowledge, the pressures of new (and perhaps to some degree irrelevant) understanding he brings to bear because of his own biography and education and because of what one might call his sub sequentality to the work he’s translating, and because of his own agenda, the special and tendentious impure purposes of his own, maybe because of which he undertook the translation in the first place.

Dryden says somewhere that a translation is always like a speech from the gallows, confessing its crimes and presenting the criminal evidence. All I can do, as I say, is to give a few examples of the troubles I’ve gotten into and the compromises I’ve given in to in order to do the work; and I hope to show how my experience of doing these has provided me with exhilarating experiences of reading the originals. I want to keep saying it over and over: vivid experiences of failure to get it right are vivid and exhilarating experiences of seeing what the right thing was that you failed to get right. Translation is not only an activity of writing; it’s an activity of reading, and the values of that activity of reading have their own authority, sometimes distinct from the final results of the activity of writing. I hope this resonates with the experience of other translators of wonderful texts.

The first poem I ever translated was Ronsard’s *Quand vous serez bien vieille*, and it was the experience of working on this translation that showed me my limitations and also, thank goodness, showed me that they’re not always all my fault.

Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir à la chandelle,
Assise auprès du feu, dévidant et filant,
Direz chantant mes vers, en vous émerveillant:
Ronsard me célébrait du temps que j’étais belle.

Lors vous n’aurez servante oyant telle nouvelle,
Déjà sous le labeur à demi sommeillant,
Qui au bruit do mon nom ne s’aille réveillant,
Bénissant votre nom de louange immortelle.

Je serai sous la terre et fantôme sans os,
Pars les ombres myrteux je prendrai mon repos;
Vous serez au foyer une vieille accroupie,
Regrettant mon amour et votre fier dédain.

Vivez, si m’en croyez, n’attendez à demain;
Cueillez dès aujourd’hui les roses de la vie.
When you are very old, at night, by candlelight,
Sitting up close to the fire, unwinding or winding the
thread,
Marvelling you will murmur, telling over the songs
of the dead,
“Ronsard praised this body, before it became this
fright.”

Not one of your companions, dozing over her
spinning,
But hearing you say these things, in her old woman’s
dream,
Will be startled half-awake, to bless your famous
name
For the praise it had deserved of my immortal
singing.

I will be under the earth, my body nothing at all,
Taking its rest at last, under the dark myrtle;
There you’ll be by the fire, a hunched-up old woman

That held off my love for a long look in the mirror.
Listen to what I say, don’t wait for tomorrow:
These flowers in their blossom go quickly out of
season.

I remember with such pleasure the quietly elaborate syn-
tax of Ronsard’s clauses, broken in on quite suddenly at
the end of the first quatrain, when she is imagined saying
to herself: Ronsard me célébrait du temps que j’étais
belle, “Ronsard praised this body, before it became this
fright”; and I remember being proud of that line of the
translation because of the way it ended with that rhyming
word “fright,” with its two meanings, one the recogniza-
able social idiom (“I look a fright”), the other looking for-
ward to the terrifying grave; and I now think, though I
still like it, that my solution to that line violated, to a
degree, the tone of du temps que j’étais belle, or, you
might say, melodramatized what she is saying. “Before it
became this fright” sounds more like the English meta-
physical or Cavalier poets I was then reading in a con-
centrated way, as a graduate student in the 1950s, and
there’s a smart-ass quality to the solution that’s at odds
with the noble regretfulness of du temps que j’étais belle.
This is even more the case with another line that I was
also proud of: “There you’ll be by the fire, a hunched-up
old woman / That held off my love for a long look in the
mirror.” In fact, I was knocked out, callow self-praiser
that I was, because of the phrase “for a long look in the
mirror” that I found to express the meaning of votre fier
dédain, and now when I reread the translation I see that
once again, still more noticeably, I was reading
Ronsard’s poem as if he was an English poet of a some-
what later period and that I had been reading that English
poet in graduate school. The line now seems to me to
violate the ordonnance, the decorum, of Ronsard’s poem
and of the great line, stated with elegant abstractness,
Regrettant mon amour et votre fier dédain, “Looking
back with regret at the time of my love and your proud
disdain.” There are so many more possibilities in the
analysis of her character, her situation, her culture, the
manners of the social and erotic world of her youth in
that Regrettant mon amour et votre fier dédain than the
simple vindictively witty accusation attempted by “for a
long look in the mirror.” The accusation of vanity is in
the Ronsard line, but there’s a nobility in that proud dis-
dain that isn’t there in that long look in the mirror, that
diagnosis of her problem as vanity. Still, I had my own
agenda, in this case also a formal one. I already had the
subsequent line, “Listen to what I say, don’t wait for
tomorrow,” and I couldn’t find a rhyme that worked, not
in “sorrow” or “borrow” or “furrow” or anything else,
and the open-ended, vowel-ended “mirror” seemed to
work with “tomorrow.” I was looking for and had to find
a technical solution for a detail of the English poem, and
I use this motive to say from the gallows that “for a long
look in the mirror” wasn’t all my fault.

I could go on with the criminal evidence: “I will be
under the earth, my body nothing at all, / Taking its rest
at last, under the dark myrtle ….” There’s a power in
the sudden declarative beginning the sestet of the poem, Je
serais sous la terre, that may be there, to a degree, in “I
will be under the earth,” so directly rendered, but “my
body nothing at all” doesn’t get what there is in the
spooky fantome sans os that so denies je prendrai mon
repos. That boneless unanchored wrath-ghost must be
reposeless, and indeed is, in a sense, proleptically the
reposeless speaker of the poem. In my translation “I will
be under the earth, my body nothing at all, / Taking its
rest at last, under the dark myrtle,” “my body nothing at
all, Taking its rest at last” misses this entirely. I should
say, though, that I had other fish to fry. I needed a rhyme
or off-rhyme for “myrtle,” and “at all” supplied one, and
“Taking its rest at last” pleased me because of the inter-
nal rhyme or off-rhyme of “rest” and “last.” The transla-
tor is always writing his own poem, with its own
demands and exigencies.

There are the wonderful sounds in the Direz chan-
tant mes vers en vous émerveillant that I tried for in the
sounds of “Marveling you will murmur, telling over the

Translation Review
songs of the dead,” but it’s not the same music, of course, and it’s a thinner music, and the ambiguities in *en vous émerveillant* and the relation of this inward marveling, marveling at his songs, marveling inside her dozing herself (*en vous*) at her beautiful once-self and the praise it had deserved, and the relation of the sounds of this to *demi-sommeliant* and *ne saille reveillant* in the next quatrain — let me say them over again:

   Direz chantant mes vers, en vous émerveillant:
   Ronsard me célébrait du temps que j’étais belle.

   Lors vous n’aurez servante oyant telle nouvelle,
   Déjà sous le labeur à demi sommeillant,
   Qui au bruit do mon nom ne s’aille réveillant,
   Bénissant votre nom de louange immortelle,

— the rich sounds of this, create the environment in which she is at one with those other old women, her servants, around her, she marveling at the past, within herself, and they brought only half-awake by the noise, *bruit*, of the name “Ronsard.” And I got none of the comedy of *bruit*, the noise that woke them up, halfway, and the way it undercuts, to a degree, though only to a degree, the superb arrogant claims of his *louange immortelle*.

My point is two-fold: regret at how much I missed, but the knowledge of how I missed it, how I had to miss it, through lesser talent (of course), and through the intrusions into the translation of another mode of poetry, provides me with an intensive and pleasurable reading of what it is that I missed. Translation is, in my opinion, the closest form of close reading, and the knowledge of its errors is, so long as one has tried to do one’s best, among its positive values.

When I’m translating a poem like this, or a passage from Virgil’s Georgics, say, or a Horatian ode, there are many things about the experience of doing so that feel like the experience of working on a poem of my own, though there’s the odd and in many ways misleading sense, in the case of the translation work, that I can see what’s happening more clearly than I can see what’s happening in the uncertain mole work of writing a poem of my own, inching forward in the dark, pawing at it and butting my snout against it. Horace gave me the example of the sentiments, the narrative, the figures of speech, the example of the tones of voice and of the shifting tones of voice, in his case the dazzling shifting tones of voice, and of course I didn’t get them right. I didn’t have the talent to do so, and the exigencies of my language prevented me from using all the resources of his. But I knew where I was going and I didn’t have to go fearfully into my own dark to try to find my way. Which of course doesn’t mean that I could successfully follow where Horace was going, though I could always look ahead and see him there ahead of me. It means, in fact, that because I had his poem there, brilliantly lit by its serial successes, line after line, it made my failures to get it right brilliantly clear to me as well. And because his poem shone such a light on its successes, and I could so clearly see where I had failed, I could always feel disappointed with what I had done and exhilarated about what I had at any rate at least tried to do, and because I could feel that the intense experience of reading his poem that the translation task demanded gave me some confidence that I could at any rate show the reader something about the wonderful thing I had not gotten right. My translation, for whatever it was worth, was the record of my experience of reading the Horace and of trying to show the reader what was in it. The locus of my embarrassment was also the locus of my exhilaration.

When in Ode iv.13 Horace so cruelly addresses and describes Lycia,

   Lycia, the gods have given me what I asked for;
   Lycia, Lycia, yes, they have certainly done so:
   Lycia’s getting old, and she wants to be
   Still beautiful, and still she goes to parties,

   And she drinks too much, and a little teary, sings
   A tremulous song that’s meant for the ears of Cupid.
   But Cupid’s eyes are on Chia playing the lyre,
   For Cupid scorns the old. So tell me, Lycia,

   What is it you expect? Cupid scorns you.
   He scorns your graying hair and yellowing teeth.
   Old crow that watches from a dead oak tree
   As wingèd Love flies by to another tree,

   Neither your purple gowns of silk from Cos
   Nor the costly jewels with which they are adorned
   Can ever bring you back the things that time
   Has locked away for good in its well-known box,

and then there’s one of those heartbreaking Horatian shifts of register:

   Where has your beauty gone, where has it gone,
   Where is your fair complexion, where, alas,
   The grace with which you walked? Lycia, you,
   Whose breath was the very breath of love itself,
Who stole me from myself, oh, Lycia, you
Who exulted so when beautiful Cynara died,
Leaving your beauty unrivalled, where has it gone,
What is there left? When Cynara died young

The gods gave early death to her as a gift,
And, Lycia, they gave all your years to you
To give the young men something for them to laugh at,
Old crow, old torch burned out, fallen away to ashes,

I thought I’d got it, I thought we’d got it, Horace and I,
and then the next morning, so to speak, I read once again
the Latin of the quatrain in which the wonderful shift of
registers occurs, and heard

Quo fugit venus, heu, quove color? decens
quo motus? Quid habes illius, illius,
quae spirabat amores,
quae me surpuerat mihi,

heard that quo … quove … quo, quid and quae and quae,
and the pun, or whatever you call it, on venus, so that
Quo fugit venus means both where has your sexiness
gone and where has your once-patroness goddess Venus
gone to, abandoning you, just like her son Cupid flying
away, and when I heard the rhymes on venus, motus,
habes, and then the anguished, repeated illius, illius, so
cruelly and, one might say, tragically impersonal, Quid
habes illius, illius, “What do you have left of her, of her?” and when I thus heard and saw and thus realized
the intensity of the Horatian organization of what he
said, I knew the game was up and how my translation
had gone its own way, partly of course because I’m so
far from being Horace, partly because the Latin linguistic
resources were doing things my English linguistic
resources couldn’t do or didn’t want to do. I wasn’t
translating, if translating means bringing it over; I was
following, as best I could, the example of what I was
reading, and of course I was missing quite a lot, missing,
strictly speaking, all of it. This is, I think, what Frost
meant in his famously misunderstood “The poetry is
what is lost in the translation.” The exhilaration of hav-
ing tried was still there, and of course the humiliation of
not having gotten it, but also something else, because the
act of translation isn’t only an activity of trying to bring
it over, leaving the original for dead; it’s also an act of
reading, the most focused and vivid experience of read-
ing that there is, and that has its own value. Seeing what
the translation couldn’t get is an intensely pleasurable
experience of coming to realize what the original did get.
And that’s where, for me, the original survives.

For another example, there’s this from Virgil’s
Second Georgic, which I translated as follows:

Worse than winter’s
Harshness and the tyranny of the sun
Are the buffalo and the deer when they can get
In at the vines and make themselves free with
them;
And sheep and hungry heifers feed on them too.
The coldest frost, and the most oppressive heat
That weighs down on a thirsting landscape, don’t
Do half as much harm as the beasts with their
venomous teeth
And the scars of their gnawing on the helpless
stems.
This is the crime, no other, for which the goat
Is sacrificed to Bacchus at all the altars,
And old-time stage plays first began on such
Occasions, with, in rural villages,
Or down at the crossroads near them, singing
contests
And dancing on oiled goatskins in the meadows.
And indeed, even today, in country places,
With lots of laughing, the peasants put on fear
some
Masks made out of hollowed cork, and chant
Their uncouth verses, and, Bacchus, sing their
joyful
Songs to you, and on the pine-tree branches
Hang little amulet faces that sway in the breeze,
And so the vines grow ripe and lavishly
Bring forth their fruit, and every vale and glade
Is full to overflowing, everywhere
To which the pleased god turns his beautiful
face.
So, as is right for us to do, we’ll sing
Our rustic songs in honor of the god,
And, taking the goat by the horn, we’ll lead him
up
To the sacrificial altar, and afterwards roast
The rich goat meat on spits of hazelwood.

Here, in this lavishly anxiously joyful propitiation
of gods and weather and chance that can turn against you
anytime at all, it’s knowing that you can’t possibly do
what one word, oscilla, can do. When you see the line
oscilla ex alta suspendunt mollia pinu,
that I translated as
“and on the pine-tree branches / Hang little amulet faces
that sway in the breeze,” I couldn’t get what’s in the single
word oscilla, “a little face,” for the Latin word
is based on the word from which we get “oscillate,” oscil-
lum, “something that turns,” as if of its own accord, and
therefore I couldn’t get the full force of the relation
between this line and, a little later, complentur vallesque
cavae saltusque profundi / et quocumque deus circum
caput egit honestum, “and every vale and glade / Is full
to overflowing, everywhere / To which the pleased god
turns his beautiful face.” This god whose amulet is hang-
ing on the swaying branches of the pine tree may or may
not turn his pleased beneficent face toward you, and
whether he does or not is a matter for the breeze, but not
only for the breeze but because of his very nature, built
into and expressed by the name of his mask, oscilla. I
could not get, not in a million years, the whole effect that
the relation between these two lines establishes, and that
organizes our whole experience of the great passage
about the uncertainties of the farmers’ situation, and all
our situations, that are the cause of our propitiations and
the reason we have to make them look so much like joy.
The anxiety is everywhere in the passage, to be sure, but
it’s that word, oscilla, the self-shifting face of a god, in
its relation to that other word quocumque, “wherever,
whithersoever,” that I couldn’t possibly fully get.

Sometimes, of course, the failures that a thrilled
reading of the original provide one with the knowledge
of, are inevitable consequences not just of differences in
talent, or time, or the resources that come, rightly or
wrongly, from one’s other reading, but of what the syn-
tax of another language can do. I’ve used this example
before, in another recent talk, and in print, but it’s an
instructive one, I think, the 18th Ode of Book III of
Horace’s Odes, “To Faunus,” that, as a matter of fact, has
in mind this very passage from the Georgics:

O Faunus, when, pursuing a nymph in flight,
You come to the edge of the sunny fields of my farm,

Be gentle as you pass across those fields
And in your passing by propitious be

To the nurslings of my flock, I pray, for when
The fullness of the year comes round again

We celebrate your day and on that day
A tender kid is offered up to you

And in the mixing-bowl there’s plenty of wine,
That’s love’s companion, and the incense smoke

Pours out with many odors from the altar,
And all the flocks and herds can play in the fields,

And all the people, too, in holiday dress,
Keep holiday among the idle creatures,

Because it is your day; among the lambs,
Who have no fear of him there is the wolf,

On holiday too, taking a friendly walk
In honor of you; and in your honor, too,

The trees have scattered their leaves upon the ground,
And he whose daily toil it is to dig,

Dances today, stamping his holiday feet
In triple rhythm on the enemy earth.

There’s the final quatrain of the Latin,

inter audacis lupus errat agnos;
spargit agrestus tibi silva frondes;
gaudet invisam pepulisse fossor
   ter pede terram,

the first line of it: inter audacis lupus errat agnos. I tried
to get in some sense of how sinister it is by that gangster
“taking a friendly walk.” But there’s really no way for
English syntax to do what the Latin does. That holiday
wolf lupus, right in the middle of those for-the-moment-
audacious lambs, is exactly halfway along in his wander-
ing among them, too close for comfort, the grammar of
the line proleptically dismembering the lambs, coming
between their adjective, audacis, and their noun, agnos,
between their audacity and their bodies; the wolf is wan-
dering in there, he’s good at that, harmless today, this
holiday day, but watch out tomorrow, this is the way he
hunts. And there are the last two lines of the final quat-
rain: gaudet invisam pepulisse fossor / ter pede terram:

   gaudet, “rejoices,” next to invisam, “the hated.” There’s
   something frantic in the joyful holiday dancing of
   pepulisse, “striking, beating,” (it can also mean “driving
   away, rejecting”). The object of that adjective, “invisam,”
hated, which is right in there, in the holiday line, and the
adjective turns out to be attached to the earth the digger,
fossor, has to dig in, on all those other days, but in the
Latin the object is held off while all that joyfulness and
frantic dancing is going on. *Terram* springs its surprise as the last word of the poem. I think I did spring some of that surprise by holding off “enemy,” or, as I might have said it, “hated,” until the penultimate word, but I lost some of the force of its adjective, *invisam*, as Horace introduces it in the preceding line, in there like the wolf in the context of that rejoicing and that dancing, making us wait for its attachment to its noun. I had to spring the surprise more bluntly, less insidiously, by coupling adjective and noun, “enemy earth,” as the last two words, so some of that complex activity of the last two lines was irrevocably lost. Here again, I don’t see how I could have done it differently, because English syntax can’t do some of the things Latin syntax can do. I couldn’t get it right, but my point is that this failure isn’t simply an experience of disappointment, it’s also an experience of vivid close reading. The work of the translator (I’m sure you feel that too, as fellow-translators), when dealing with a wonderful text, is the most intense and vivid kind of reading that there is, and there’s joy in this that the necessary failure makes even more vivid. Of course this compensatory joy in the reading occurs only when you can feel that you’ve after all done your best and brought your translation to the point of its inevitable helplessness.

I’m no good at big generalizations, so I can only have tried to show by several examples this experience of thrilled readings, of the attempt by translation to show some qual the many things it misses.
FROM DEAN TO DEANTREPRENEUR: THE ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATOR AS TRANSLATOR

By Abby R. Kratz and Dennis M. Kratz

The academic title dean derives ultimately from the Latin word decanus, which refers to someone in charge of a group of ten. It was most commonly a Roman military term for the leader of a squad of ten soldiers. Caught in the crossfire of the changes sweeping through higher education, many current deans may find the military origin of their title uncomfortably appropriate. It is all too tempting to apply metaphors of war to all academic administrators, to think of them as the leaders of mercenary soldiers engaged in a noble crusade against ignorance or, less romantically, as under-equipped leaders of learned but unruly soldiers. Many colleges are struggling to establish their niches or “beachheads,” are competing for increasingly scarce resources, and are discovering that they need to form strategic alliances to survive. Without question, the position of dean stands directly in multiple lines of fire.

The challenges facing academic deans and the changing nature of the position have spawned a significant corpus of criticism and commentary, with such instructive and intriguing recent titles as The Dilemma of the Deanship, “The Academic Dean: An Imperiled Species Searching for Balance,” and The Changing Nature of the Academic Deanship. This essay addresses the role of the dean in an environment of change. We will view that role through the lens of our experience as administrators in a rapidly growing component of a large university system first in light of a conceptual frame developed by Rosabeth Moss Kanter with regard to corporate management in what she calls our “post-entrepreneurial” age. Second, we will posit the emergence of a new model of the deanship, the deantrepreneur, and suggest the implications of this model for the recruitment and preparation of the next generation of academic leaders. Third, we will argue that these changes make translation uniquely relevant to the practice of administration and, by extension, the education of administrators.

At first glance, linking academic administration and translation may seem fanciful, if not perverse. After all, translators have expressed the belief that they suffer a lack of respect in many academic settings. Nonetheless, recent developments in the nature of administration and in the theory of academic leadership, coupled with the emergence of translation as a model for understanding a wide range of cross-cultural communication, suggest that administrators are in fact “translating” much of the time. Therefore, practical acquaintance with the process of translation could make them better communicators and more effective leaders.

As apt as battle metaphor may be for the life of the contemporary dean, it is even more apt to apply to this enterprise imagery drawn from play and game theory, especially as developed by Johan Huizinga and his successors. Game imagery has been applied productively to numerous areas of endeavor. In her influential book When Giants Learn to Dance, Kanter made use of the same metaphor when she urged corporate executives to think of themselves as engaged not in war but in a worldwide fiscal Olympics. To be sure, academic administrators often think of themselves as engaged in games of a particularly challenging variety, games more like cartoonist Bill Watterson’s “Calvinball,” with its endless improvised variation, addition, and subtraction of rules, than pastimes like baseball or basketball. In a comparison that works equally well for education, Kanter likens the “game” of business to the croquet match in Alice in Wonderland, in which everything, including Alice’s mallet (a flamingo), and the ball (a hedgehog with a mind of its own), keeps changing and shifting. The game of higher education in Texas, where we work, includes such new and elusive challenges as the pressures of externally imposed accountability, fiscal constraints allied with an idiosyncratic formula funding system, shifting demographics, diversity initiatives that are often linked with retention goals, and, of course, the far-reaching thrusts of technological advancement.

Indeed, Kanter’s research on new approaches to management and the images she uses to relate her findings seem particularly applicable to higher education. Contemporary education at all levels is often likened to a business. Many changes, for better and worse, in current practice have resulted from the application, not excluding the misapplication, of business principles.

The parallels between universities and businesses in today’s environment of global economy, diversity, and rapid technological change are striking. Kanter’s analysis of the situation of business at the start of the last decade as operating in a highly competitive global environment...
in which traditional hierarchies and assumptions are being continually challenged effectively describes the situation of higher education now. As she noted about business then, we in education are in the midst of an exciting and dangerous era that is a “good time for dreamers and visionaries” only if they are also “disciplined, frugal pragmatists” (Giants, 17-18). In Kanter’s prescient words, “the future will belong to those who embrace the potential of wider opportunities but recognize the realities of constrained resources” (Giants, 18).

Another condition links business and education. Scholars in both worlds have been decrying the deleterious effects of fragmentation and extolling the value of systemic solutions and integrated approaches that promote agility, flexibility, and responsiveness. Peter Senge described the 1990s as the decade of “systems integration.” Writing of creativity in education, psychologists Robert and Michele Root-Bernstein state that “there is no point in teaching a liberal arts and sciences curriculum that continues to fragment knowledge and creates specialists who cannot communicate across disciplinary lines. Education must focus on the trunk of the tree of knowledge, revealing the ways in which the branches, twigs, and leaves all emerge from a common core” (317). Kanter, who emphasizes the importance of adaptable structures in an era of rapid change, identified the following four characteristics of management that are outmoded and unsuited for the game now being played: elaborate hierarchies, slow decision-making processes, in-house rivalries, and risk-averse behavior (Giants, 344). We wonder how many of these four outmoded qualities still characterize the world of public and higher education. Underlying all four of her undesirable qualities is the assumption that slowness is a liability today, when swift response to rapidly changing conditions is often a requisite for survival.

Kanter and others have argued persuasively that the new global environment requires not only new structures that foster innovation and adaptability but also a new kind of leadership. Writing more than a decade ago, Kanter based her proposal on the belief that business had entered a new age characterized by global interaction, an information-based economy, cultural diversity, and rapid technological change. She described this era as “post-entrepreneurial” because it requires incorporating entrepreneurship, previously associated with individuals acting independently to create their own companies, into the life of the organization. The key characteristic of the entrepreneurial mind is generally considered to be the ability to recognize and seize opportunities and then convert these opportunities to marketable ideas. Kanter suggested that businesses need to nurture such people and such thinking within their ranks. We need, she declared, the “intrapreneur,” or individual whose entrepreneurial actions take place within and for the company and receive organizational sanction, resources, and rewards (see Kuratko, 96). Companies, she argued, had to find a way to create a marriage between entrepreneurial creativity and corporate discipline, cooperation, and teamwork (Giants, 10-11). We suggest that higher education also has joined that era and is bound by its mandates for organizational change. Kanter’s analysis proved correct for the world of commerce. It is time for universities to provide leadership and adopt new structures more suited to the demands of the post-entrepreneurial world.

Deans have begun to play an increasingly complex and pervasive role in this new environment. If we are to foster intrapreneurship — the process of creating valuable innovation within an organizational setting — the dean, as the primary liaison between the faculty and everyone else, is a vital link. This new kind of dean, the deantrepreneur, is the intrapreneur who understands the intricacies of the university and the world of education. The deantrepreneur knows how to involve faculty in developing appropriate and positive responses to the educational challenges facing colleges and universities today. The deantrepreneur is a visionary who can raise funds, realizing that vision without funding is hallucination. We suggest that in many universities, he and she already exist. Indeed, a review of the history of the deanship reveals an inexorable evolution of the role from dean to deantrepreneur.

The academic dean, the head of a discipline-specific college within a university, has a long and inconsistent history. It is a role that has never been standardized and is still evolving. Until the 1930s, the deanship tended to focus on student concerns. By the mid-1940s, however, the emphasis had shifted from direct supervision of students to concern specifically with curricula, faculty, and budgets. The addition of responsibility for budgets, along with increasing responsibility for hiring and promoting faculty, raised the status of academic deans and signaled their evolution into a role more like that of business leaders. This business orientation continued to grow during the following decades. To the deans’ other considerable duties were added quasi-legal obligations related to grievance mediation, contract termination, and student complaints. During the past decade, the deanship has become increasingly managerial in nature, particularly as presidents began shifting such external duties as alumni...
Deans are now expected, in the words of a recent study, to take on administrative identities commonly associated with corporate business managers. These include “figure-head, leader, liaison, monitor, disseminator, spokes-person, entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator” (Wolverton, 7-8).

The lists of duties assigned to deans by university handbooks and the criteria by which they are evaluated reflect the growing complexity of the position. Advertisements for academic deans today reveal and reflect this evolution. The position now inevitably requires a capacity that has been described as “the maintenance of balance between the various external and internal demands” on universities (Wolverton, 7). The changed nature of the deanship has even reached the press. Consider the lead paragraph of an article that changed nature of the deanship has even reached the internal demands on universities (Wolverton, 7). The changed nature of the deanship has even reached the press. Consider the lead paragraph of an article that appeared in the Cavalier Daily from the University of Virginia on April 8, 1997: “University officials searching for two new important dean positions are beginning to realize the perfect recipe for a successful dean: a blend of academic background, mixed with leadership abilities and an essential dash of salesmanship” (italics ours). Of course, deans have always had to sell. They represent the agenda of the university to their faculty and persuade the university to provide requisite resources for the research and instruction needs of their College. Today’s deans, however, increasingly have to take on a new kind of selling — the activities of fund-raising and friend-raising previously reserved for presidents and development offices. This combination of friend- and fund-raising has become an essential component of deaning. As the Law School Dean at Virginia succinctly declared in the same article: “There’s a big difference today versus twenty years ago. [The dean’s role] now encompasses not only fund raising but [also] keeping faculty and students competitive and being accountable to the public.” Observing that the dean’s job often rides on his or her fund-raising record, Ralph Lowenstein, dean emeritus of the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida, has stated, “deans are really graded on their fund-raising ability. That wasn’t as true 18 years ago when I became a dean. But today, fund raising is an absolute necessity” (quoted in Mercer, 1).

In sum, the new obligations of fund-raising, friend-raising, and serving as a public ambassador have not merely added components to the already full plate of the dean, they have transformed the position. In the new academic world, the dean stands surrounded and buffeted by changes, often changes mandated in response to the pressures cited earlier. The dean works to meet the challenges to institutional and curricular traditions with faculty members who may not be overly fond of change. We posit a new model of the deanship: the deantrepreneur, who can function in the university much as the ideal manager described by Kanter operates in the corporate world. Kanter’s approach to success in the “global Olympics” involves three essential strategies: (1) reshape the organization to promote synergies; (2) create alliances within the organization and with external organizations; and (3) foster the development of “new-streams,” the new ideas and products that complement and extend the mainstream of the past (Giants, 344).

The implementation of these strategies requires both effective leadership and structural reorganization. The four characteristics of outmoded management that were cited earlier will hinder progress and could even cost victory. They must be replaced by the following integrated fabric of organizational characteristics: streamlined hierarchies, expeditious decision-making, and a collegial atmosphere that supports reasoned risk-taking (Giants, 344-351). The deantrepreneur must acquire the skills and receive training akin to that of his or her corporate counterpart to help bring about this environment in academic institutions.

What are the skills needed to serve effectively as a dean in the post-entrepreneurial academic world of the 21st century? We would argue that the position of dean has evolved, and the deanship now requires individuals adept at results-oriented communication with faculty, with potential supporters, and with the greater community. The dean must become a deantrepreneur and in that role must increasingly engage in activities related to translation.

We observe that academic administrators engage in activity that can best be described as cross-cultural communication a good deal of the time and that they can improve their effectiveness when they engage in these interactions in the spirit of translation. Clearly, the dean now must communicate with a greater array of constituencies than ever before. Once relatively secure, or at least insecure within generally familiar surroundings, the dean’s professional communication occurred primarily with other academics; the president and provost on one side, the faculty and students on the other. Now, deans find themselves explaining academic policies to members of the community and the business world who often are uneasy with intellectual, scientific, and artistic developments that seem to threaten “traditional” American values. Frequently, they must seek funding from these
same sectors. In sum, deans must find a language to bridge the gap, and occasionally the chasm, between academia and the world at large.

We take our inspiration to make the connection between these acts of communication and the process of translation from George Steiner’s seminal work After Babel, in which the author makes the compelling point that all communication that must transcend boundaries of time, place, and cultural assumption involves translation (28). If we think of the dean’s external constituents as culturally diverse nations, then we see that she or he must translate not only the specialized language of an academic discipline but also the attitudes of the scholar or artist.

Even internal communication involves translation. As Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal have shown, individuals in any organization bring different “frames” of understanding to any discussion. Bolman and Deal identify four major frames of reference, which they characterize as the structural, human resources, political, and symbolic frames. Although we find these categories enormously valuable in providing insight into organizational behavior, at the level of communication we also are struck by the realization that any question can be viewed through different frames and that any statement can provoke a wide range of interpretations and responses. In this regard, a policy question does not allow a definitive answer any more than a complex literary text allows a definitive translation. Within each of the frames, there can be responses that tend toward “literal” and those that tend toward “literary” readings.

Moreover, American universities, like many sectors of contemporary American society, are experiencing a time of constant, unsettling change. What to teach, how to teach, how to measure success: all are the subject of an intense, necessary, and often contentious debate. Leadership in such a time of change places additional demands on the dean. There is no longer a position of neutrality: one is either promoting or resisting directions of change. In either role, the dean will face opposition, and his or her ability to respond productively to such opposition will influence the momentum of change as well as the outcome of each specific encounter.

“Opposition response” has attracted much attention in the literature of leadership. Michael Fullan, for example, argues that educational initiatives often “misfire because we fail to learn from those who disagree with us” (159). In turbulent times, he continues, “the key task of leadership is not to arrive at early consensus, but to create opportunities for learning from dissonance” (159). One way to view the shifting membership of “the opposition” is to regard opposing groups as the equivalents of foreign nations, usually allies but currently engaged in a policy difference. Convincing them requires more than arguments that appeal to the dean. Convincing the “other” requires an understanding of both their positions and the underlying attitudes they reflect. In Beyond Machiavelli: Tools for Coping With Conflict, Robert Fisher emphasizes that “to be persuasive, we need to understand how others see the world, their motivations, emotions and aspirations” (21). The power to function as a leader, in Fisher’s words, “depends on our ability to put ourselves in other people’s shoes and to see the world from their point of view” (21). Fisher’s position is essentially that expressed by Bolman and Deal, who assert that confusion and conflict are the predictable results of any discussion that includes differing frames that are neither recognized nor reconciled. The leader who clings to one perspective, disregarding or disrespecting the others, is less likely to bring about the cohesion necessary to promote positive action.

Taken together, all these developments have made communication skills across barriers essential to effective academic administration. The deanentrepreneur must build coalitions within and beyond the confines of the academic unit and, therefore, must be able to communicate through a wide range of “frames” of understanding. Deans must translate visions into programs and then express them in language that convinces faculty, other administrators, and outside constituencies. These outside constituencies may include high-ranking business leaders and legislators.

Other aspects of decanal responsibility can be profitably viewed through the lens of translation. The curriculum, for example, represents an attempt to translate the ideal educational mission of the institution into an interrelated sequence of courses. Between the ideal and the curriculum lie challenges analogous to those faced by the literary translator. The translator must deal with the limitations imposed by the language into which she or he is making the translation; the dean must take into account the restrictions imposed by the nature of the particular university, its traditions, mission, and faculty. The truism that there can be no definitively correct translation applies equally to curricula. A faculty must make choices of emphasis, each of which precludes other possible emphases.

The training of deans and other academic administrators should take into consideration the new context of
academic leadership in the post-entrepreneurial world. Given the reality that deans and other administrators will constantly engage in cross-cultural communication of various kinds, we argue for the development of training programs designed to nurture such skills. The practice of literary translation provides an obvious model for such training, because translators have long recognized that “seeing the world from their author’s perspective” is essential to their art and craft.

Since translation is based on the fusion of theory with practice, its value as a model for the modern dean is suspect without specific examples of how to translate the insight into action. We envision translation-based workshops designed to help deans hone their interpretive skills and gain the ability to listen to the “others” among their faculties and other constituents within and outside the university. Numerous exercises associated with Translation Workshops can be adapted to this task. To illustrate the concept that communication across cultural or temporal gaps, even within the same apparent language, requires translation, participants in an “administration as translation” workshop might be asked to translate English texts from previous centuries into contemporary language. In part, this exercise would be designed to show how the changing language reflects changing frames through which issues are viewed. It is one thing to believe that one understands an issue from various frames, quite another to create arguments for and against a specific proposal from these perspectives.

Such exercises will also improve the ability of participants to improve their ability to “hear” opposing voices. Building on such exercises designed to demonstrate the value of regarding communication as translation, we then can engage participants in translating academic ideas or programs into language that expresses concepts understandable to various external constituents. Finally, we would join with the participants to recall instances from which case studies might be designed to illustrate the difficulties that can arise when participants in a discussion fail to recognize how radically different perspectives influence communication.

These are merely initial suggestions. The development and implementation of such workshops would serve, as befits translation, multiple purposes. It could improve the communication skills of administrators, thus improving higher education. It could also, by demonstrating to deans and others the importance of translation, gain more support for translators, translation-based courses, and research in the application of translation to other academic fields. Instead of waging war to protect turf, administrators could devote more energy to building bridges that promote the transfer of ideas across barriers of language, culture, and frames of reference.

Works Cited


Translation Review

Edited by Nicomedes Suárez-Araúz

“Literary Amazonia is unusual in its enlightened departure from a geopolitical organization of literary production. The quality of the works and their exceptional translations are fitting tributes to a bold new view of an important facet of Latin American literature, by and large unfamiliar to most readers.”—Leland Guyer, Macalester College, St. Paul

This remarkable selection of 20th-century Amazonian literature presents writing from the indigenous and mestizo people of the Amazon basin, recovering their forgotten voices for the Latin American literary canon. Most of these pieces—from 24 representative poets and 12 prose writers—are collected and translated into English here for the first time.

Amazonia typically has been regarded as a jungle environment—a source of folk tales and the concern of anthropologists. This pioneering collection illustrates the extraordinary multiculturalism of the region and its evolving contemporary culture. While turning notions of national literatures upside down, the book will contribute to the construction of a new Amazonian identity and will position the region’s creative writing firmly inside mainstream Latin American literary history. What’s more, it evokes the astonishing and marvelous beauty of one of the world’s most important river cultures.

MAY. Cloth $39.95

Order through full-service booksellers, our website at www.upf.com, or with VISA, American Express, or M/C toll free: 1-800-226-3822

COMING SOON—

**Literary Amazonia**

*Modern Writing by Amazonian Authors*

University Press of Florida

Gainesville, Tallahassee, Tampa, Boca Raton, Pensacola, Orlando, Miami, Jacksonville, Fort Myers
TRANSLATING DIVERSITY: THE DISTINCT AND VARIEGATED VOICE OF CLIFFORD GEERTZ

By Gregory Conti

You can’t judge a book by its title, to rephrase the old saying, but the title does tell you something. Especially when the same book has two of them. *Antropologia e filosofia* is the Italian title of the anthology of commentaries and critiques, ruminations and assessments by Clifford Geertz published in English as *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*. For once, the Italian is more economical, three words instead of seven, at the cost, however, of losing the metaphor borrowed by Geertz from the lexicon of photography. The term “available light” (*la luce disponibile*) has the same meaning and use, in the field of photography, in Italian as in English: the light normally present in any given place, not supplemented by lights or illumination designed especially for the realization of photographs. Why this choice to discard a metaphor whose connotations, though never made explicit by the author, are so (pardon the pun) illuminating of his method and approach?

In his preface, Geertz explains that the method of his brand of cultural anthropology — moving about among places and peoples trying to ferret out the singularities of their ways of life — necessarily leaves things a bit blurry. But then he finds consolation by citing his master, “or at least one of them,” the later Wittgenstein: “Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn’t the indistinct one exactly what we need?” Geertz’s reflections on the range of philosophical topics treated in his various chapters are, therefore, insights captured with the available light cast by his empirical research, by his field work amid the lived lives of people and peoples, and not by the light, perhaps more brilliant but because of that less adherent to reality, of a method that is only conceptual. The metaphor of the book’s original title thus provides an initial representation of the author’s particular way of positioning himself with respect to the two sister disciplines. The Italian title, shorter and generic, does not. Furthermore, the image expressed in the English title is a gesture of openness to readers outside of the academy, whereas the Italian title could never be mistaken for anything but an academic treatise. As I hope to demonstrate in the following pages, the two titles are emblematic of a divergence of style in the translation, or rather, of its frequent insensitivity to the nuances of style that characterize Geertz’s writing as well as the manner and substance of his intellectual reflections.

The question of style: of how, and even before that of whether or not, to reconstruct it, is a troublesome one for translation, in theory as well as practice. In translation studies, style is usually brought into play as a criterion for distinguishing literary texts from nonliterary or “technical-scientific” texts, in which translators presumably have a freer hand to deviate from the style of the source text. Just as usually, some heavy hitters, for instance, Walter Benjamin or Goethe, are called in to go to bat for the distinction. “The essay of literary criticism,” writes Valentina Poggi in a recent Italian manual on Italian-to-English translation, “sensibly reduces, if not eliminates, some of the most bothersome problems for those who translate narrative prose or theater: that is to say, those relative to the difficulty of reflecting, or at least suggesting, the style of the original. . . . In other words, the alternative that according to Goethe every translator is faced with, between the intention of ‘leading the text toward the reader’ or ‘leading the reader toward the text,’ should be resolved, in the case of a critical text, at least as a general matter, in the direction of privileging the first objective.” To put it a little less ornately, the more literary the text, the more style it will have and the more the translator will have to deal with it.

By this standard, it must be acknowledged, Clifford Geertz is a particularly challenging writer to translate because, as his reviewers have consistently recognized, his writing is full of style. The essays in *Available Light* are no exception. Lionel Shriver in *The Guardian*: “The book is impeccably written — droll, animated, and bright in both senses of the word… .” T.H. Luhrmann in the (London) Times Literary Supplement: “Rarely has there been a social scientist who has been so acute a writer; perhaps there has never been one so quotable.” Richard Schweder, writing in a more academic publication, *Science*, is even more emphatic: “Almost everyone initially gets side-tracked by the visibility and distinctiveness of Clifford Geertz’s writing style, which is like Cyrano de Bergerac’s nose. It is conspicuous, it is spectacular, but (especially for a reviewer) it is best just to ignore it, for the sake of getting on with a discussion of
his ideas.” Schweder’s closing comment is one we’ll have to come back to, for it recalls Poggi’s comment in raising the crucial issue for Geertz’s translators: is it best for the translator, like the reviewer, to ignore Geertz’s style in the interest of “getting on” with his ideas?

As a way of focusing my discussion of Geertz’s style and its translation into Italian, I will focus on chapter four of Available Light, entitled “The Uses of Diversity.” First presented in 1995 as a lecture at the University of Michigan, the essay is a critique of two contemporary spokesmen for ethnocentrism, Geertz’s fellow anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the American philosopher Richard Rorty. While acknowledging the differences in rhetorical style and intellectual stance of his two antagonists, Geertz argues that both are animated by a reaction to cultural relativism and by a shared view of cultural diversity that sees its main importance as offering alternatives to our own cultural tradition are increasingly celebrated in recent social thought. Unable to embrace either relativism or absolutism — the first because it disables judgement, the second because it removes it from history — our philosophers, historians, and social scientists turn toward the sort of we-are-we and they-are-they impermeabilité Levi-Strauss recommends. Whether one regards this as arrogance made easy, prejudice justified, or as the splendid, here-stand-I honesty of Flannery O’Connor’s “when in Rome do as you done in Millidgeville,” it clearly puts the question of Future of Ethnocentrism — and of cultural diversity — in a rather new light. Is drawing back, distancing elsewhere, the View from Afar, really the way to escape the desperate tolerance of UNESCO cosmopolitanism? Is the alternative to moral entropy moral narcissism?

Comunque si giudichino tali affermazioni, o per quanto sia sorprendente sentirle proferire da un antropologo, tutto questo tocca certamente un nervo scoperto della contemporaneità. Nel recente pensiero sociale le attrattive della “scordità altrichiamo di altri valori” e di un approccio rilassato e compiacente all’impregginamento nella propria tradizione culturale sono sempe più celebrate. Incapace di abbracciare o il relativismo o l’assolutismo — il primo perché non permette il giudizio, il secondo perché lo rimuove dalla storia — i nostri filosofi, storici e scienziati sociali si rivolgono verso il tipo di impermeabilité dell’identità che Levi-Strauss caldamente raccomanda. Sia che lo si consideri come segno di facile arroganza, di un pregiudizio giustificato, di irremovibilità Luterana, la splendida franchezzaespressa nel motto ‘quando sei a Roma fa come se fossi a Milledgeville’ di Flannery O’Connor, ciò pone chiaramente la questione del futuro dell’etnocentrismo (e della diversità culturale) in una luce alquanto nuova. Ritirarsi, distanziaerisi dall’altrove, scegliere “lo sguardo da lontano”, è realmente il modo per sfuggire alla disperata tolleranza del cosmopolitismo dell’UNESCO? Il narcissismo morale è davvero l’alternativa all’entropia morale?

A preliminary reading of the original paragraph reveals a style that is quite different than one would expect to find in an academic journal. It contains a mixture of informal and formal tonal registers, frequent use of idiomatic or even idiosyncratic expressions, literary allusion, and borrowing from the lexicon of high, low, and middle-brow American English. If we go through one by one the pairs of highlighted phrases in the origi-
nal and the translation, we get a better idea of the polyphonic nature of this style and of its only partially successful reconstruction in Italian.

The first two pairs show a change of register: the rather offhand and dismissive “all this” “coming from” an anthropologist (that is, issuing forth almost autonomously) becomes the more formal and respectful “tali affermazioni” that we hear “proffered” by their author. Then we have an idiomatization that gets turned on its head in the translation. Geertz uses “strikes a chord” to indicate that Lévi-Strauss is in harmony with the current intellectual climate, while “tocca un nervo scoperto” (hit a raw nerve) conjures up images of pain and consequent aggressive reaction. We’ve gone from the concert hall to the dentist’s office. Later on in the paragraph, there are some other instances of at least questionable interpretation and rendering, which, though not of major importance, tend to take the edge off of the original: “disables” judgment becomes “doesn’t allow” rather than “rende incapace” or “sopprime” il giudizio or something similar; the transitive verbal phrase “distanting elsewhere” is changed to the reflexive “distanziarsi”; the verb “scegliere” is introduced before “the View from Afar” which also loses, like “The Future of Ethnocentrism” its initial capital letters, reducing the specific reference to the Lévi-Strauss book title to an indication of a generic point of view.

The translation runs into some major stumbling blocks, however, in trying to handle Geertz’s newly coined adjectives and his deft manipulation of idiomatized expressions and allusion as he drives home his critique of Lévi-Strauss and shades it with moral overtones. He accuses Lévi-Strauss of adopting (and proposing) a “relax-and-enjoy-it” approach, making an adjective out of an imperitive borrowed from the lexicon of pop psychology, originally coined to bring emotional comfort to the already rich and comfortable and assure them that they need not feel guilty about their economic and social privilege — the nominal forms, roughly speaking, referred to by the pronoun “it.” The accusation is considerably softened in the Italian by the use of the more formal and standard phrase, “approccio rilassato e compiacente,” which certainly renders the substance but not the style. Much the same thing occurs in the transformation of “we-are-we and they-are-they impermeabilité” into “il tipo di impermeabilité di identità,” though here the translator was confronted with the added difficulty of trying to preserve the humor in Geertz’s heptameter sing-song rhyme of “we are we and they are they” with “impermeabilità.” But one wonders if a bit more of Geertz’s irony and lightness might have come across with “una specie di impermeabilité alla ‘noi siamo noi e loro sono loro’,” or something a little more innovative, at any rate, with respect to the generic “tipo di.”

A similar standardization of the idiomatic happens with the translation of “arrogance made easy” into “segno di facile arroganza.” Here again, the English expression is borrowed from low-brow commercial English, those advertising slogans for cook books or how-to-do-it manuals that make it easy to perform some ostensibly difficult task — a quick Google search, for example, came up with dozens of site names like “Prophecy Made Easy” and “Medieval Demographics Made Easy.” Of course, for American readers, Geertz’s insertion of this kind of language into an academic or at least serious essay will raise a smile, but there is more to it than entertainment. The choice of arrogance as the thing made easy and the instrumental meaning of the phrase itself sharpens Geertz’s attack by giving it a moral edge: the implication is that “The View From Afar” presents a thesis elaborated in the service of cultural arrogance; not so much a “sign” of “easy arrogance” but an instrument for justifying it.

Finally, we come to the literary allusion to the American novelist, Flannery O’Connor. Here, the translator does well to catch the double allusion to Martin Luther in Geertz’s characterization of O’Connor’s quip — her “irremovabilità luterana,” but Geertz adds at least one more twist to the allusion by maintaining and expanding on O’Connor’s deliberate grammatical distortion: “do as you done” is a parody of the ungrammatical proverb, “When in Rome do as the Romans do.” Geertz adds his own twist to O’Connor’s by referring to its dialect spoken in O’Connor’s hometown of Millidgeville, in southeastern Georgia; her own special version of the proverb, “When in Rome do as the Romans do.” Geertz adds his own twist to O’Connor’s by referring to its “here-stand-I” honesty, reversing the syntax of the English version of Luther’s “Here I stand, I can do no other” speech at the Diet of Worms. The Italian text makes explicit Geertz’s implicit reference to Luther and renders O’Connor’s quip in grammatically correct Italian (in the subjunctive no less). The association of Lévi-Strauss with O’Connor’s reference to her ignorant fellow townsmen, whether it be a send-up or a proud defense, is totally absent.

And now for a word of caution. A lengthy, detailed critique of the translation of a single paragraph in a 225-page text unavoidably gives the impression that the critic believes the translation is a disaster. Nothing could be more off the mark. On the whole, I think the Italian translation of Available Light is fairly well done, espe-
cially in light of the considerable challenges offered by Geertz’s complex writing style. The main ideas and theses presented in the text come across quite clearly; neither the author nor his Italian readers need be concerned about that. What they could legitimately be concerned about, however, is a loss of force in the target text, and more importantly, a partial loss of its identity, or perhaps more appropriately, of its diversity, effected by a paring back or a smoothing over of its special features into a more standard, genre-typical, academic prose. A loss, in other words, of style, which becomes quite visible, I think, when we translate the Italian text back into English.

However one judges such affirmations, or as surprising as it might be to hear them proffered by an anthropologist, all of this certainly touches a contemporary raw nerve. In recent social thought the attractions of a “deafness to the appeal of other values” and of a relaxed and complacent approach to imprisonment in one’s own cultural tradition, are more and more celebrated. Incapable of embracing either relativism or absolutism — the first because it doesn’t allow judgment, the second because it removes it from history — our philosophers, historians, and social scientists turn toward the kind of impermeabilité of identity that Lévi-Strauss warmly recommends. Whether one considers it as a sign of easy arrogance, of a justified prejudice, of “Lutheran irremovability,” the splendid frankness expressed in the motto “when you’re in Rome do as if you were in Millidgeville” of Flannery O’Connor, this clearly poses the question of the future of ethnocentrism (and of cultural diversity) in a rather new light. To withdraw, to distance oneself from the elsewhere, to choose the “view from afar,” is that really the way to escape from the desperate tolerance of the cosmopolitanism of UNESCO? Is moral narcissism really the alternative to moral entropy?

What is at issue here is not the overall success or failure of the translation (by and large it succeeds) but rather its tendency to homogenize Geertz’s complex and contrapuntal style into drab academic Italian. The translator seems to subscribe wholeheartedly to the literary/nonliterary distinction and to follow all too energetically Poggi’s advice to move the text toward the (Italian academic) reader. This strategy, as I will presently try to demonstrate, seems particularly inappropriate in the case of Available Light, and furthermore, its use here calls into question, I think, the very distinction on which it is based. Reading “The Uses of Diversity” makes me wonder if it is still useful, assuming it ever was, for translators to distinguish between literary and critical or “technical” texts, between texts in which style is important and those in which it is not. Perhaps the more useful distinction is not between text-types but style-types, between source text styles that are closer to standard target language styles and that consequently are easier to imitate, and styles that are more distant, more expressive of cultural diversity, and thus more difficult but also more important to reconstruct in the target language.

As we have already seen in our sample paragraph, Geertz’s chapter article on diversity and its discontents is peppered with allusion, invention, and manipulation of popular sayings or ways of speaking, and it is precisely these deviations from standard academic style that create problems for the translation. Over the course of the twenty-page text, there are about the same number of instances in which Geertz’s idiosyncratic style is not reflected in the Italian. Depending on the case, the translator seems to have adopted one of three tactics: standardization, elimination, or literal transposition (calquing) without compensation. What follows is a list of examples taken from throughout the chapter along with some brief analysis and some suggestions of how they might have been handled differently in order to provide Italian readers with better access to the style as well as the substance of Geertz’s arguments.

just to have something that sticks in the mind >
Tanto per avere un punto di riferimento

The translation changes the register from informal to formal, colloquial to academic, for no apparent reason. An alternative solution might have been “qualcosa che rimane in testa,” or “qualcosa che si appiccia in testa.”

The failure of Third World countries to live up to the thousand-flowers hopes for them > La maggior parte dei paesi del Terzo mondo non sono riusciti a tener fede alle speranze delle loro lotte per l’indipendenza

This time the “thousand flowers” have been eliminated and the hopes have been shifted from First World observers and sympathizers back to the Third world fighters for independence. In the process, the allusion to the language in which those hopes were expressed at the time — reminiscent of Chairman Mao’s 1957 declaration “Let a thousand flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend” — and to their consequent fragility has been lost.
Other ways of going at life > altri modi di condurre la vita

Here again, a colloquial expression is formalized and the tone is modified. “Conducting” life is a structured, purposeful, and measured performance; “going at” it, on the other hand, implies an activity that is much more tentative, unsure, and irregular. There must be any number of ways to say this in Italian, but “tirare avanti” and “tirare a campare” are two that immediately come to mind.

To-each-his-own morality > una moralità relativistica

This instance of standardization verges on misinterpretation, since Geertz charges Lévi-Strauss and Rorty with a misguided anti-relativism, whereas here the translation implies that they are guilty of relativism. A better rendering in Italian might be “una moralità a ciascuno la sua,” which would be both closer to the original and reminiscent of the title and spirit of Leonardo Sciascia’s Sicilian crime novel, A ciascuno il suo.

Punk is where it’s at > ormai siamo arrivati al punk

Here Geertz is quoting philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto, who in turn is quoting the slang of the contemporary popular music scene. Again, the standardization turns the idiom on its head, a celebration of punk becomes a begrudging acceptance. Current Italian slang offers the alternative of “il punk è fico.”

At what sort of angle...we stand to the world > in quale angolo del mondo...noi siamo

This is one of many deliberately imprecise expressions used by Geertz to refer to “ways of living” or “ways of being in the world.” The Italian misinterprets angle as angolo (corner instead of angolatura) and eliminates “sort of,” thus accentuating the misinterpretation by making it more precise than the original. A related example is the phrase “turn of mind,” which is translated on one occasion as the generic “modo di pensare” (way of thinking) and on another as the odd “giri di mente,” neither of which captures the allusion to a special shape or attitude as in “the turn of his chin” and similar expressions.

Like nostalgia, diversity is not what it used to be > al pari della nostalgia, la diversità non è ciò che soleva essere

Once again, Geertz dips into the language of popular culture, this time an old comic line sometimes attributed to the American “Mr. Malaprop,” former baseball player Yogi Berra, as a way of branding Rorty and Lévi-Strauss as nostalgics. But Geertz’s (or Yogi’s) oxymoron is lost in the Italian, which might have done better with “non è più quella di una volta.”

They don’t make Umwelt like they used to > non costituiscono Umwelt come succedeva una volta

Like the previous example, this is another play on the nostalgia theme through manipulation of an old saying by inserting the pretentious-sounding academic German expression into the form of the popular adage. In Italian, we get the standard language of the academy. The playfulness disappears and so does the barb.

It’s their ears and their funeral > gli orecchi sono i loro e sono affari loro

Another standardization of an American idiom, this time into a standard Italian idiom. But the expression “their funeral” is itself a play on the usual “their business,” which is all we get in the Italian, without the additional ironic twist. Admittedly, such twists are always difficult to translate, but one possibility might be to make a play on an Italian alternative to the standard Italian expression: gli orecchi sono i loro e anche i cavoli, per quanto amari.

Some bats are battier than others > alcuni pipistrelli sono più pipistrelli di altri

Geertz uses Danto’s reference to bats several times to create a kind of leitmotiv. This time he takes advantage of the metaphorical connotation of mental illness attached to the adjective “bats” or “batty” to make the point that even those we call different have differences among them. Since pipistrelli don’t carry the same connotation in Italian, it might have been better to change animals: alcuni cavalli sono più matti di altri.

The foregoing examples show Geertz playing with popular sayings, mixing registers, juxtaposing formal and informal tone to broaden the appeal of his argument and to sharpen his critique of his adversaries. Another strategy he employs for the same purposes is allusion, both literary and otherwise. Here are two examples of nonliter-
ary allusion, to slogans or key words from American history and jurisprudence, that don’t make a perfect transition into the Italian.

as someone has said of the writings of V.S. Naipaul … making the world safe for condescension > a fare del mondo un luogo tranquillamente adatto alla condiscendenza

Geertz, or the “someone” he cites, refers to Woodrow Wilson’s claim that World War I would “make the world safe for democracy,” often used as an example of naïveté or demagoguery and later spoofed during the Gulf War when some critics accused the United States of trying to “make the world safe for Emirs.” The allusion doesn’t come across at all in the translation, which does manage, nevertheless, to communicate the substance of the critique.

a clear and present danger > un pericolo chiaro ed attuale

The reference here is to Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes’ opinion in a case regarding the power of the government to limit free speech: “words that create a clear and present danger that they will bring about substantive evils” may be restricted. The Italian translation leaves nothing to be desired except perhaps a footnote with an explanation of the allusion. Left as is, it seems highly unlikely that Italian readers could appreciate or evaluate the aptness of the allusion to Geertz’s argument and the implication that it is the words of the ethnocentrists rather than those of the cultural relativists that need to be defended against.

Before he set out on his career as an ethnographer, Geertz’s dream was to become a novelist. His love of and knowledge of literature are evident in the many literary allusions in “The Uses of Diversity” and throughout Available Light. In most cases, as we have seen with Flannery O’Connor, Geertz is careful to cite the author and sometimes the title of the work. Such explicit allusions create few problems for the translator; things become more challenging, however, when the allusion is implicit and neither author nor work is identified, as in these two examples:

Their different hobby-horses notwithstanding > nonostante … le loro differenti fissazioni

As in the “clear and present danger” example, the translation again comes up with a perfectly adequate synonym for “hobby-horse”: fissazione. But, of course, Geertz’s choice to use “hobby-horse” rather than “fixation” carries with it an allusion to Laurence Sterne’s seminal novel Tristram Shandy, whose narrator’s sarcastic exposition of the use of “hobby-horses” by “the wisest men of all ages, not excepting Solomon himself,” has forever painted the poor little toy animal in tones of ridicule that “fixation” has yet to acquire. Replacing “fissazione” with the literal translation “cavalluccio di legno” would certainly be even less adequate, but an explanatory footnote would allow Italian readers access to the literary/philosophical background shared by many if not most of their Anglophone counterparts.

It [anthropology] has stressed particularity, idiosyncrasy, incommensurability, cabbages and kings > Ha sottolineato la particolarità, l’idiosincrasia, l’incommensurabilità, cavoli e re

This is also an implicit allusion to a classic work of English literature, Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking Glass, as well as a vintage Disney animated film, Alice in Wonderland. Carroll’s work is no doubt much better known in Italy than Sterne’s, and perhaps for this reason, the translator has decided to transpose Geertz’s allusion unchanged into Italian. But to appreciate Geertz’s use of this allusion and its communicative force with an English-speaking readership, we might imagine an Italian author making a reference to “il gatto e la volpe,” two characters from Pinocchio who have by now become almost synonymous with deception and underhanded trickery. The English translation of such an allusion as “the cat and the fox” would be correct but hardly satisfactory. Even readers, or movie-goers, familiar with Pinocchio would be unlikely to appreciate the resonance of the reference to Italian readers. In our case, an explanatory note would seem to be doubly useful insofar as Geertz’s allusion to Carroll’s poem appears to serve as a description of and a further allusion to his own approach to cultural anthropology, namely empirical study of the variety of human cultures rather than the search for underlying common structures:

‘ ‘The time has come’ the Walrus said, ‘to talk of many things:
Of shoes — and ships — and sealing wax —
Of cabbages — and kings
And why the sea is boiling hot –
And whether pigs have wings.’”
To put it in the words of another, more recent English author of clever nonsense rhyme, Geertz appears to want his readers to understand him as saying “I am the Walrus.”

By way of conclusion, I’d like to return to the question raised by Richard Schweder as to whether it is better for the translator, like the reviewer, to ignore style, or in Goethe’s terms, whether translators of nonliterary texts should attempt to move the text toward the reader.

Perhaps the first thing to say about this is that the text that is moved closer to the target-language reader becomes a very different text from that read by the source-language reader. In essence, translation consists in the interpretation and reconstruction of signs, and “style” is best understood as the way in which the signs to be interpreted are arranged. As such, style is itself a sign, and even the most important one, because it is style that puts the other signs in relation to one another and thus communicates to the reader impressions and indications about the “turn of mind” of their author.

Our analysis of Geertz’s style has concentrated on his mixing of tone and register, his manipulation of idiomatic expression and allusion. One might also examine more closely his syntax, rhythm, and diction, but even this brief analysis of one chapter from Available Light has been sufficient, I think, to demonstrate the contribution of style to the communication of his thesis. A translation that ignores style may well succeed in getting across the gist of the argument, but the argument will be much less forceful and convincing than the original version. Rather than neglect style or downplay it in the interests of better serving the target-language reader, translators of nonliterary texts would do better to attempt, wherever possible, to reconstruct the style of the source text. Where reconstruction is not possible, as in the case of implicit literary allusion, or where it risks creating obstacles to readability, as with the literal translation of idiomatic expressions, explanatory notes can be introduced to provide target-language readers with background information shared by their source-language counterparts. Academic texts, in which footnotes are a customary feature of the genre, will certainly suffer much less than fiction from the intrusion of additional notes from the translator.

Finally, translators should remember that they, like anthropologists, are laborers in the vineyard of cultural diversity. Indeed, language, and especially language composed into texts, as Geertz and his colleagues have taught us, is the primary instrument with which culture is forged and expressed. In his preface to Available Light, Clifford Geertz provides this seemingly off-hand definition of cultural anthropology: “going about the world trying to discover how in the midst of talk people — groups of people, individual people, people as a whole — put a distinct and variegated voice together.” Translators generally travel less than anthropologists, but other than that, they are engaged in a similar kind of activity. It is true that translators are concerned primarily with the voice of a single author, but even single voices speak of their roots in the culture in which they were formed, and the special features of each written voice, otherwise known as style, give its readers a way of interpreting where and how that voice stands with respect to others both inside and outside of its own group. This kind of “background” information, implicitly shared by the author’s readers, is essential to a translation if its readers are to be given equal or nearly equal access to the distinctive voice of the text and to the cultural diversity of which, however indirectly, it speaks.
The great 19th-century German poet Novalis distinguished between three modes of translation: grammatical, paraphrastic, and mythical. Paraphrastic translation requires the translator himself to become a “poet of the poet,” which leads directly to the translation from the French by the poets Doreen and John Weightman of Claude Lévi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques*, published in 1973. None but the translator cum poet can do justice to an ethnographer who writes in poetic prose.

The Weightmans have since translated a substantial part of Lévi-Strauss’ books, and *Tristes Tropiques*, nearing its silver anniversary, continues to grace today’s bookshelves.

The first translation of *Tristes Tropiques*, by John Russell, appeared in 1961. Its title, *A World on the Wane*, conveys decline, whereas *Tristes Tropiques* does not: A key sentence in this context reads: “The tropics are less exotic than out of date.” (W, 87)

Russell was hasty in translating this title. Only from the text can a process of decline can be inferred. The alliteration in *Tristes Tropiques* and the author’s suggestion to preserve the French title prompted the Weightmans to conserve the original title. Quite possibly, John Russell thought of compensating for the alliteration in French and opted for *A World on the Wane*.

Pensée Sauvage: Une autre casse-tête

*Pensée Sauvage*, the title of Lévi-Strauss’ book published in 1962, another impasse, has a binary meaning: French pensé signifies thought as well as wild pansy — in Lévi-Strauss’ language, culture versus nature. In the English translation, *Savage Mind*, French pensé had to forfeit one of its meanings, and only “culture” survived. Should the French title have been preserved?

Further translation problems into English from *Tristes Tropiques* are labeled: (LS=Lévi-Strauss; R=John Russell; W=Weightmans).

Title of Part One

- Fin des Voyages (LS)
- Destinations (R)
- End of Journeying (W)

A patchy trio. The English gerund “journeying” best conveys the conclusion of Lévi-Strauss’ odyssey that he would eventually consign to writing. Russell opted for “destinations,” which may also signify the opposite.

**Title, Chapter VI**

Comment on devient ethnographe (LS,54)
How I became an anthropologist (R, 54)
The Making of an Anthropologist (W,51)

Lévi-Strauss opens his linguistic cabinet and opts for the French indefinite pronoun “on” (lat. Homo, homme), designating one or more persons, feminine or masculine. “On” also indicates a course of action shared with one or more participants, not reflected in Russell’s translation. The Weightmans solved the problem with “the making of,” an ongoing process, hence closer to French “on.” There is of course, the English “one,” which sounds awkward. Does the English gerund replace the French on? Not so, but a correspondence exists.

Next emerges the thorny problem of Claude Lévi-Strauss calling himself an ethnographer, while both translators use “anthropologist” in a rare moment of mutual accord. In this instance, should not the translator move closer to the author rather than the reader?

Russell’s translation was published in 1961, a mere six years after *Tristes Tropiques*, a time span close enough for the translator to opt for “ethnographer.” Shouldn’t the Weightmans have done likewise, even in 1973?

Lévi-Strauss writes that anthropology and ethnography are basically two sides of the same coin, and the research is in essence a matter of choice.

Etymologically, anthropo/logist=man+study; while ethno/grapher =people+writer. The most important aspect of Lévi-Strauss’ work saw the light in his writings some twenty years subsequent to his field work. Hence, many call him an “armchair anthropologist” to whom le mot juste is a dictum, in the good old French tradition.

**Where did the favellas go?**

Les miséreux vivaient perchés sur les mornes, dans les favellas où une population de noirs vêtus de...
loques bien lessivées inventaient sur la guitare ces mélodies alertes, qui, au temps du carnaval, descendraient des hauteurs et envahiraient la ville avec eux (97).

Poverty perched on the hill-tops, where the black population lived in rags; only at carnival-time would they come swarming down into the city proper with the tunes they had picked (R, 62).

The poor were perched high up on the hillsides, in favelas, where a population of Negroes clad in well-washed rags composed lively guitar-melodies which, at carnival time, came down from the hills and invaded the town, together with their inventors (W, 87/88).

To John Russell: One would assume that Lévi-Strauss never knew of the blatant omission of favellas, Rio’s renowned shantytowns. The poor Russell depicts a formless mass living in rags (an image of dirt), unable to invent their own music. The Weightmans, in turn, describe “Negroes clad in well-washed rags” (population de noirs vêtus de loques bien lessivées, and faithfully translate while creatively interpreting Lévi-Strauss, with one alliteration credit going to Lévi-Strauss and a second to the Weightmans. I have one problem: why did the Weightmans opt for “Negroes” in the early 70s instead of “Blacks,” which would have been more in tune with the times?

Chapter XI

Un esprit malicieux a défini l’Amérique comme un pays qui a passé de la barbarie à la décadence sans connaître la civilisation. On pourrait, avec plus de justice, appliquer la formule aux villes du nouveau monde (LS, 106).

The cities of the New World have one characteristic in common: that they pass from first youth to decrepitude with no intermediary stage. (R, 100).

Some mischievous spirit has defined America as a country which has moved from barbarism to decadence without enjoying any intermediary phase of civilization. The formula could be directly applied to the towns of the new world. . . (W, 95).

Here, Russell omits L.S.’s “mischievous spirit,” which adds a touch of biting wit to a far-reaching hypothesis. And why “first youth” instead of barbarism? And if the word civilization has an element of abstraction for Lévi-Strauss, why do both translators pinpoint this hypothesis by inserting an intermediary stage, thereby expressing an unsolicited point of view?

Race et Histoire

C’est une étrange chose que l’écriture. Il semblerait que son apparition n’eut pu manquer de déterminer des changements profonds dans les conditions d’existence de l’humanité (LS, 342).

Le monde a commencé sans l’homme et il s’achèvera sans lui (LS, 478).

Writing is a strange thing. It would seem as if its appearance could not have failed to wreak profound changes in the living conditions of our race (R, 291).

The world began without the human race and it will end without it (R, 397).

Writing is a strange invention. One might suppose that its emergence could not fail to bring about profound changes in the conditions of human existence (W, 298).

The world began without man and will end without him (W, 413).

In 1952, Lévi-Strauss published Race et histoire, dealing, among others, with the diversity of cultures, the fallacy of ethnocentrism, i.e., considering one’s own culture as being superior to all others. Race had long been an issue, and events such as the founding of the Société d’anthropologie de Paris in 1859 was a mirror image of an ongoing debate. Russell’s use of “race” has an exclusionary overtone, no doubt anathema to Lévi-Strauss. The term has become free-floating. And the translator? As George Steiner expressed it so well, “On the personal level, immersion in translation, the voyage out and back, can leave the translator unhoused.”

On the Term “Anthropologizing”

A São Paulo, on pouvait s’adonner a l’ethnographie du dimanche (LS, 101).

There was a certain amount of Sunday-anthropologizing to be done in São Paulo (R, 111).
In São Paulo, it was possible to be a Sunday anthropologist (W, 109).

To Lévi-Strauss: Is Sunday ethnography to be considered less significant than during the six remaining weekdays? Aren’t field notes field notes per se, notwithstanding the day of the week?

John Russell: Sunday anthropologizing is a bit tongue in cheek. If the term is legitimate, he might as well use the British spelling, whereby zing becomes sing. Wenn schon, Denn schon (might as well), as the German saying goes.

Weightmans: Their rendition is faithful to the original French.

Lévi-Strauss, Geologist

J’avais traversé un continent. Mais le terme, tout proche de mon voyage, m’était d’abord rendu sensible par cette remontée du fond des temps (LS, 430).

I had crossed a whole continent. But the now-imminent end of my travels was first made manifest in this return-journey from the depths of time (R, 369).

I had crossed a continent. But the rapidly approaching end of my journey was being brought home to me in the first place by this ascent through layers of time (W, 372).

Eh voilà! The Weightmans, translators, have outdone author Lévi-Strauss, whose keen interest in geology predated his vocation in anthropology. The Weightmans used “layers,” a crucial term in geology, whereas French “fond” means depth.

P.S. For some reason, John Russell omitted four chapters in his translation, while the Weightmans translated the unabridged French original.

The Weightmans emerge as poetic translators virtually in the author’s shoes, while preserving their Anglo linguistic heritage. John Russell emerges as just another translator, lackluster, at times bound by diehard views.

J’y suis, j’y reste. Here I am, and here I stay.

Bibliography


Footnotes


RENDITIONS: 30 YEARS OF BRINGING CHINESE LITERATURE TO ENGLISH READERS

By Audrey Heijns

Renditions, published by the Research Centre of Translation at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and commonly recognized as the leading journal of Chinese literature in English translation, celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2003. Its sixty issues cover more than 2000 years of Chinese literature, from classical works of poetry, prose, and fiction to their contemporary counterparts, as well as articles on art, Chinese studies, and translation studies.

In the commemorative booklet The Renditions Experience 1973-2003 (June 2003), editor Eva Hung says: “The long view tells us that to publish a journal is easy — particularly in these days of desktop publishing — but to sustain one of recognized quality requires a lot more than technology and funding. It calls for a dedicated staff as well as the long-term support of translators, writers, readers, teachers, well-wishers and critics.” The essays in this booklet are written by authors, scholars, translators, and readers of Renditions, who express in different ways their relationship with the journal and what they perceive to be its value and contribution. They and many others have been part of the success of Renditions over the past thirty years. To understand the background of this journal, we have to go back to the early 1970s.

The Hong Kong of the 1970s witnessed an emerging cultural consciousness that demanded recognition for the population’s Chinese roots. Hitherto, English was the only official language in Hong Kong. It was not until 1973 that the Chinese language was finally given an official status comparable to English. It is therefore understandable that many in Hong Kong felt the need to strengthen the position of Chinese language and culture. At the same time, Chinese people outside of the People’s Republic of China were concerned about the destruction of Chinese culture resulting from the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Many writers in Mainland China were persecuted for what they wrote, accused of being “antirevolutionary” and sent away to live in harsh circumstances in the countryside. Because hardly any literary writing was published during this period and classical literature was part of the “four olds” that had to be swept away, one could say that there was a literary void.

Hence, in bicultural and bilingual Hong Kong, a haven from the frenzy of the Chinese mainland, a keen sense of mission developed: on the one hand, to preserve China’s cultural heritage, and on the other, to introduce it to the world. In this climate, Renditions was created. George Kao, who joined the newly established Translation Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1972, came up with the idea to publish a periodical devoted to English translations of Chinese literary writings. Kao and Stephen Soong, the person behind the founding of the Centre, commenced editorial work for
the first issue in autumn 1972. A year later, the inaugural issue was launched.

One of the first Chinese newspaper articles that greeted the new journal was headed: “Breaking the Cultural Imbalance.” Until then, there had been many Chinese-language translations from the English, and this new magazine was hailed as a vehicle for “exporting Chinese culture,” one that might do much to “redress the imbalance” in the existing East-West cultural interflow.1 A perhaps even more heartening reception was the review in China Quarterly: “A most attractive feature is its catering both to those who are highly proficient in literary Chinese, and to those who are only slightly so or know no Chinese at all … How pleasant to be reminded that Chinese can be fun.” To reach beyond the limits of academia and to make knowledge “fun” is one of Renditions’ guiding principles.

As David Pollard, currently advisory editor of Renditions and a subscriber since the first issue, recalls: … the magazine exceeded expectations when it arrived. George Kao and Stephen Soong had gone to some trouble to line up a lot of big guns in Chinese studies to give it a good send-off. … Given first billing in No. 1, for example, was “Yen Fu on Translation,” and that was followed by Burton Watson’s “Two Imperial Ladies of Han,” which cunningly anticipated the interest in what became known … as Gender Studies.2

According to George Kao, that first issue included much in-house writing, with two pieces translated by himself, an amusing Chinese-language radio script by Y.R. Chao, and the short story “The Men Who Smelt Gold” by Chu Hsi-Ning (Zhu Xining), a Taiwan writer. Coeditor Stephen Soong wrote an article titled “Notes on Translating Poetry,” discussing that “translation, in the strict sense of the term, is impossible.” Other interesting works in that first issue include a story by Lu Xun, commonly recognized as the greatest Chinese writer of the 20th century, and classical poetry translated by Jesuit scholar-poet Rev. John Turner. From its inception, Renditions has always published a wide variety of works from the modern and classical traditions.

Kao’s journalistic background and predilection for humor show in the amusing anecdotes and quotes used as fillers in the journal and the special section devoted to Chinese humor in Renditions No. 9, in which Kao shares some retold jokes from a Chinese Thesaurus of Laughs. An example of one of the fillers Kao chose for Renditions No. 1 is:

There is an anecdote, possibly apocryphal, about a woman at a cocktail party in Paris telling James Thurber how much she had enjoyed his “delightful sketches” in French translation. “Thank you,” said Thurber. “It is undoubtedly true that my writing loses a good deal in the original.”

Thurber’s humor, here as elsewhere, obliquely points to a truth: this time to the truth that a translation may be better literature than the work which inspired it.

John A. Kouwenhoven, “The Trouble with Translation”

Soong’s personal interest is reflected in special issues on classical poetry and articles on the famous 18th-century novel The Story of the Stone. Together, Kao and Soong created special issues on fiction and drama and published in 1976 the beautifully illustrated issue on art that was later reprinted in book form. An example of Renditions’ “true and truly remarkable collaborative effort,” as Howard Goldblatt recalls, is the translation of the Cultural Revolution memoir by Yang Jiang, “Six Chapters from My Life ‘Downunder’,” published in Renditions No. 16 (1981). This translation, which Goldblatt was asked to undertake by Stephen Soong, a close friend of Yang Jiang and her husband, Qian Zhongshu, involved not only the author, Soong, and Goldblatt but also Kao, who supplied the title. Howard Goldblatt recounts:

My folder of correspondence is an inch and a half thick, and a source of pride, embarrassment, and, from time to time, bewilderment. The meticulous editing, for which the magazine has always been known, produced a finished translation that has pleased many and infuriated others, but which has made available, even a quarter of a century later, one of the literary masterpieces of modern Chinese belles-lettres.3

In 1976, George Kao returned to the United States but kept an active role as Editor-at-Large until 1982. When Soong retired in 1984, Briton John Minford took over as editor. Minford, who had read Chinese at Oxford University and had been in China in the early 1980s, had developed an interest in contemporary and emerging writers who were then the cynosures of the rejuvenated Chinese literary scene. This led to the creation of a special issue on “Chinese Literature Today” (Renditions Nos. 19 & 20, 1983), which is one of the earliest collections of Chinese writing from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and
the Chinese mainland. Writers featured include all major poets of the “Today” group, as well as Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian, then unknown outside China. The mood of that young generation emerging from the Cultural Revolution is reflected in a famous poem by Gu Cheng:

One Generation

The dark night has given me dark eyes,
Yet I use them to search for light.

(Tr. Seán Golden and Chu Chiyu)

A new era began with Eva Hung, who took up the editorship in December 1986. Hung’s bilingual education in Chinese at home and English in school nurtured her interests in both the classical and modern traditions. She envisioned *Renditions* as a continuing literary anthology offering both depth and variety. This is one of the reasons why under her guidance, the largest number of special issues covering the widest variety of themes has been published. Furthermore, Hung’s active collaboration with experts in other institutions worldwide also generated new ideas and material for the special issues.

Known as a promoter of women writers and Hong Kong literature, Hung came up with special issues on Contemporary Women Writers (*Renditions* Nos. 27 & 28) and on Hong Kong (*Renditions* Nos. 29 & 30) soon after she took up the editorship. These won *Renditions* much recognition for answering a crying need that had existed for some time. The issue on Contemporary Women Writers presents stories and poems by writers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China. In a book review, Li Ruru writes:

There is an old Chinese saying that “Three women together make for a performance.” What more women might achieve is not measured in proverbs but this fine collection of women’s writing from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong demonstrates that the assembled talents of twenty-eight women can create a whole world. This fictitious yet real world is full of figures of every hue representing the changing face of Chinese society over the past several decades. … The women writers have not only observed the world with their own eyes and through their insight, but have also felt other human beings with their own bodies, their own hearts and souls. Traditional approaches to writing are no longer enough and they are seeking new forms of expression to convey what they really want to say. The language, the literary form and the technique in this special issue therefore represent some of the pioneer literature in China today, especially in the writing of Can Xue, Liu Suola, Wang Anyi, Shu Ting and Li Ang.

The special issue on Hong Kong published in 1988 was the first anthology of Hong Kong literature in any language. This collection makes it clear that the idea of Hong Kong as a cultural desert is a fallacy and that cultural life in Hong Kong is alive and well. Calling it “A wide spectrum of works by a people torn between Chinese totalitarianism and British colonialism,” Maurice L. Hoo writes about this special issue:

Translated Hong Kong works will not only provide Western readers with pleasurable reading, but will also help dispel the myth that there is always a junk boat or sampan in the middle of the harbor taking Suzie Wong to meet James Bond. The breadth and depth of the Hong Kong works collected in this volume show that the barren rock has become a gem, and that the “Hong Kong Genre” has achieved a distinct voice of its own: a voice that, while using Chinese or English, is Hong Kong in essence.

A good example of Hung’s active collaboration with experts in other institutions is *Renditions* No. 50 (1998), Special Issue “There and Back Again: The Chinese ‘Urban Youth’ Generation,” with guest editor Richard King. In his essay in *The Renditions Experience 1973-2003*, King recalls the submission of his proposal in 1996 for this special issue: “The response from Eva Hung was swift and enthusiastic; with her help, I was able to complete the selection of writings, locate translators on four continents, complete the English versions, and see the *zhiqing* special issue in print before the end of 1998.” The result is a fine selection of fiction, poetry, memoirs and other writing dated from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s, recording the experiences of a generation of educated youth sent to China’s poverty-stricken countryside to be re-educated by peasants. Representing the mood of this generation is a poem by Xing Qi:

Where are these young people now?
Scattered asunder like rain and stars,
All have gone their separate ways.
Gone is the past into the grave,
This collection of poems stands as a monument,
That marks the grave.

(Tr. Xong Xianling and Gary Sigley)
During the period 1989–1997 when David Pollard was coeditor, the journal had the strongest editorial line-up in its history. The two editors were backed up by two experienced colleagues — Janice Wickeri and Chu Chiyu — who brought with them impressive linguistic and cultural knowledge. Pollard, with a background in Chinese Studies, joining Hung in Translation Studies formed a unique editorial team. This combination of two perspectives generated new ideas for special issues and interesting debates on a variety of subjects ranging from the contents of the journal to different editorial comments about translation approaches and styles. A showcase of a special issue by this unique editorial team is *Renditions* Nos. 53 & 54 (2000), “Chinese Impressions of the West,” which presents the experience and observations of those who had journeyed to the West in the 19th century, as well as the impressions and opinions of those who had never been outside of China.

In addition to the journal, *Renditions* also publishes a hard-cover and a paperback series. The hard-cover series was introduced in 1976 by Kao and Soong, primarily for the library market, which shows that the discipline of Chinese Studies in the west was recognized as a core readership for *Renditions*. In 1986, a paperback series aimed at making high-quality translations available to a wider market was introduced. This series, with an emphasis on contemporary writers, is often used as classroom material by teachers of Chinese and Asian survey courses in the West, but it also attracts a general readership. Titles in the hard-cover and paperback series have accumulated to seventeen and twenty-six, respectively. A special new product introduced in 2002 is the *Renditions* PDA series, sold directly on-line, featuring poetry selections and city stories, especially chosen for readers interested in China or traveling to Asia. It offers them a taste of Greater China through her literature.

“Whatever we have achieved in the last few years and may achieve in the future is a reflection of the inspiration we draw from George Kao and Stephen Soong, the founding editors. The torches they held high still light the way for us who follow in their footsteps,” wrote Eva Hung in 1990. Building on the legacy, the different editors have each brought in their share of innovation to *Renditions* while maintaining its cultural mission. In the present electronic days, *Renditions* publications have also been made available on CD-Rom and in PDA format, new developments that would not have been part of the early dream.

**References**


Research Centre for Translation, Annual Reports 1986–present.

**Footnotes**

1 Book review by Si Qian in *The China Times*, Taipei, 20 February 1975, referred to by Kao in his article “Editing a Chinese-English Translation Magazine.”


WHISPERED URGENCY: TRANSLATING SOUND AND MOMENTUM IN RAFFAELLO BALDINI’S “E’ MALÀN”

By Adria Bernardi

When I first had the opportunity to hear Raffaello Baldini read his poetry aloud, I heard something I had not heard in my own reading of them, a whispered urgency, and because of this I had slowed the pace of his poems too much. When I had a second opportunity to hear him read, including the poem “E’ malàn,” I again heard this whispered urgency. What I also heard was how phrases and images accumulated, one after the other, with no respite; there was seemingly no pause for breath as he read, which gave the poem simultaneously both nearly unbearable weight and incredible headlong movement.

“E’ malàn” (1) is made up of just such an accumulation, and what accumulates is noise. For the narrator, this accumulation of sounds is a barrage, an overwhelming din, which becomes transformed at the end of the poem. It is Baldini’s layering, together with a poetic language that mimics spoken conversation, which give this poem both weight and momentum. You arrive at the end having heard or spoken words with edges and gnarls and spikes; you arrive at the end of the poem out of breath.

In the introduction to Baldini’s collection, Ad nòta (Nighttime), Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo begins: “Were it not for the lazy prejudices still alive that relegate a poet writing in dialect as ‘minor,’ even when he’s major, Raffaello Baldini would be considered . . . one of the three or four most important poets in Italy.” (2)

This salvo raises what tends to be the first question in any discussion of the poet’s work, as it is in discussing the works of those who write in a dialect: Why dialect? “But who’s going to understand your dialect?” he is asked in a collegeal interview by critic Franco Brevini. “What are the motivations for this choice?” (3) he is asked in another interview.

“It’s probably an inevitable question,” Baldini concedes. “To which there can be more than one answer, including, ‘I don’t know,’ which seems like a non-response, but it isn’t.” (4)

Like poetry written in other regional dialects, Baldini’s poetic language is fundamentally oral. In the same interview, he says, “Well, for me the essence of the dialect, at least for me, is orality, . . . it’s an oral animal.” (5)

In reading the poem, “E’. malàn,” (Noise) one can begin to see and hear some of the differences between the sounds of Baldini’s romagnolo and standard Italian. In romagnola, as in in other dialects, words end in a consonant with great frequency. The effect of this dominance of consonant-ending words is evident from the beginning with the title. E’ malàn has a clipped, rushed sound. Il rumore is softer and slightly more elongated. E’ malàn is spoken with impatience, while il rumore, to my ear, is a word that cannot be rushed in quite the same way.

From the beginning of the poem:

E’ malàn

U i à da ès un pòst
dvó ch’e’ va réss tòtt e’ malàn de mònd,
pr’aria, d’in èlt, chi sa, o alazò in fònd,
mo dalòngh, ch’u n’i pò rivé niseun,
una gònga, cmè un gòurgh, mo svérs, un mèr,
che da ’d fura u n s vaid gnént, però avsinés,
s’u s putéss,
te prém u s sintirébb un sbraitlament
cmè quant i bumbardéva vérs maréina,
pu a fès piò sòtta, sl’òural,
mè a dhegg ch’l à d’avi fura un batibói,
un diavuléri, che par no inzurléis
éun u s chin mètt al dàidi tagli urècci, . . (p. 118, ll. 1-13)

This is the Italian, which the poet himself translated:

Ci dev’esser un posto / dove va a finire tutto il
rumore del mondo, / per aria, in alto, chi sa, o laggiù
in fondo, / ma lontano, che non ci può arrivare nessuno, /
una conca, come una gora, ma immensa, un mare, / che
da fuori non si vede niente, però ad avvicinarsi, / se si potesse, / dapprincipio si sentirebbe un brontolamento / come quando bombardavano verso marina, / poi, a farsi più sotto, sull’orlo, / io dico che deve venir fuori un fracasso, / un diavolerio, che per non assordarsi / uno è costretto a mettersi le dita nelle orecchie,

There’s got to be a place
where all the noises in the world end up,
in the sky, way up, who knows, or down towards
the bottom,
but it’s got to be far, so far no one can get there,
a basin, or a pond, but immense, a sea,
which from far off you can’t see a thing, but
getting closer,
the first thing you’d hear would be rumbling
like when they were bombing near the coast,
then it shifting down lower, right at the shore,
I’m saying, there’s got to be a crashing,
a din, so that in order not to go deaf,
you’ve got to stick your fingers, tight, into your
ears,

Many of the words in E’ malàn characterize or name
kinds of noises: hubbub, ruckus, din, racket. In the original these words have a jagged sound, which even the poet’s own Italian translation does not replicate. Aurally, some of these words have become smoothed out in the Italian and are somehow more generic. The words in dialect are somehow noisier. In the Italian, they are less nasal, less gutteral, and to be pronounced, they demand less of the body — the mouth, throat, windpipe and lips: batibói (crashing) becomes fracasso (pg. 118, l. 11); gluìrun (hubbub) becomes putiferio (p. 118, l.16); boba (ruckus) becomes baccano (p. 118, l. 20); bulìruòn (pandemonium) becomes pandimonio (page 119, l. 5); battasò (brouhaha) becomes baraonda (p. 118, l. 6 ); santéssum (curses) becomes imprecazioni (p. 120, l. 18).

In translating I tried to capture some of the dialect’s jaggedness. So for gluìrun, I opted for “hubub,” which seemed to have a similar muttering quality where the sound is swallowed at the end. For battasò, I opted for “brouhaha,” which seemed to retrieve some of the jaggedness of the original, as opposed to baraonda, which seemed more rolling.

The accumulation of clipped sounds in Baldini’s dialect helps give this poem a quickness, as if words are not being wasted. These lines from the end of the poem suggest how the words compare to the standard Italian:

“u t vén in amént, t si tè, cla vólta” (p. 122, l. 5) becomes in Italian: “ti viene in mente, sei tu, quella volta.”

In the original, there is an abundance of “s” and “z” sounds, which reinforces the sense of the noisy and cacophonous. There is barely a line that does not contain the buzzing or whispering sounds of an “s” or “z” at least once. This adds to the sense of an insistent dissonance and a sense of agitation. Consider a line that has six of these sounds: “zchéurs in piazza, saràc, sbadài, biastéimi, (p. 120, l. 5) (all that discoursing in the piazza, the spitting, yawning, cursing.) Proper names in the poem have “s” and “z” sounds: Luisín, Tosi, Tisbe, Vizénz, Teresa, Gero dla Zopa. Wherever possible I tried to reinforce these sounds.

Even as the narrator finds this din unbearable, he can bear the silence less. He cannot keep his ears plugged up for long; the absence of sound makes him jittery. He is drawn to this noise and he begins to recognize familiar sounds:

you’ve got to stay calm, keep following it, and then you realize it’s not just a ruckus, it’s like in sleep, when you’re feverish in the bed upstairs,
you’re hearing those women downstairs chatting away,
you don’t understand a thing, but you recognize the voices,
it’s the same thing there,
it’s pandemonium, it seems like they’re all mixed up in it,
a brouhaha, a street-bazaar,
but then instead you start to hear something, a door that’s slamming, an outburst of laughter, a flock of pigeons taking off, a woman in house-shoes who’s running down a staircase, it seems like nothing at all, but being right there gives you goose bumps, and you start enjoying it, you close your eyes, you play with the finger in each ear, it’s like an instrument, (pp. 118-119; ll. 19-21, ll. 1-15)

With the next line begins a listing of noises, and it is here where we can see an astounding example of Baldini’s images accumulating:

you start hearing everything,
keys being fumbled into the keyhole,
Santina’s gate
that creaks whenever Luisín visits,
someone who’s winding the clock sitting on a bed, Malvina
who’s fiddling with the rosary in her pocket,
and Giulia who’s furiously knitting away,
and then whatever’s going to happen, happens,
a stone in a well, the water’s deep, splashing,
the music of the carousel with its signal
just before it starts to turn,
the bus at Borghi
wheezing under the Arch like a human being,
all that discoursing in the piazza, the spitting,
yawning, cursing,
the hogs from Caléccia when they’re being slaughtered
who screech like a tool being sharpened on the grinding stone,
and underneath the bucket for blood,
the filth that comes out of Minerva’s mouth,
which afterwards she’s ashamed of,
when she makes love to Doctor Tosi,
a doorbell that rings and no one’s there,
two who are running, one right after the other,
they’re here, they’re past, they’re far away,
the thud Tisbe heard
that night passing by the fishmarket,
it was Vincenzo who had thrown himself off the town wall,
the holy-hell Ruggero from Zoppa let loose when he lost his van playing cocincina,
the guns at the time of the Front in the field for the fair
and way up as far as Poggio, it was like a string of rosary beads
which when they were hitting us, we’d, out of fright
start laughing,
someone chomping on a celery stalk
with his front teeth, Baghego’s finch whistling
that sounds like an aria,
a woman’s voice:
“not there, the mark’ll show there,”
the money Primo threw out the window when he went bankrupt,
and his wife in the hallway, sobbing,
it was all just loose change, bouncing,
altogether there was five thousand lire,
the lightening crack that Sunday on the town hall which set the archives on fire,
people arguing, the insults,
the name-calling,
and others talking in low voices, spying on everyone else,
a boy kicking a can,
a ripe watermelon being cut, the crunch,
the words she said that you couldn’t understand,
Teresa, in the hospital before she died,
her people all around her,
with those hands and veins in her neck,
er her breathing slowing down,

Critic Dante Isella, to whom “E’ malàn” is dedicated, describes this accumulation as “a metric equivalent in the accumulating of verses that speed up as they come one after the other.”

Brevini argues that in “E’ malàn,” as well as in the poems, “La cucagna,” “La firma,” “L’amour,” and “La naïva,” this listing characteristic, “(l’)elencazione caro a Baldini.” (this listing dear to Baldini) has actually shifted, and the listing has become instead an expansion of the images into terrible dimensions. (8)

This accumulation is found in other Baldini poems as well. In “La chéursa” (La corsa, Running), a terrified boy flees other boys who are chasing him; as he runs panicked through town, he names all the places he passes, and these named landmarks, added layer by layer, give the poem its urgency. In “La naïva,” (La neve, Snow) the narrator watches the town’s landmarks disappear one by one in a terrible, apocalyptic snowfall; the naming and description of places accumulating, as the snow does.

In Baldini’s poetry and in his theatrical works there is the overriding sense of monologue. In his introductory essay, Mengaldo refers to them as “monologues you lose your breath with.” (9) Isella argues that Baldini’s various narrative and descriptive techniques, “result in every way in achieving a spoknness that barely floats above the continuum of the prose, a monologal voice in which what is at stake is no longer the ‘I’ of the writer but of each and every component of his own community.”(10)

In this language that mimics spoken conversation, there is no pause or break, and it is often a series of qualifications, of adjustments and asides. As in his theatrical monologue Carta canta (Page Proof), or in other poems such as “E’ solitèri” (Solitaire), “E’ malàn” uses a language that mimics one particular kind of spoken conversation, that of an extended self-argument, whereby the speaker sets up a hypothesis, projects it to someone else,
only to then qualify, rebut, or expand upon it. This gives the effect of overhearing someone argue with himself, or rather, argue with some absent other.

In “E’ malàn,” it is as though the speaker is trying to circle around the subject in an attempt to make it more precise. The hypothetical, “There must a place where all the noises of the world end up,” is followed by expressions of uncertainty at this proposition, (c)hi sa”, (who knows), and by qualifications,”mo dàlongh” (but it’s got to be far). In an attempt to be more precise, the narrator continues to clarify: una gònga, cmè un gòurgh, mo svérs, un mèr, (a basin, or a pond, but immense, a sea). (l. 5 ) There is a series of qualifications: “but getting closer, if you could,” and “I’m saying, there’s got to be a crashing.” There is an assertion, followed by a rejection of the assertion: “it (the hubbub) seems like it could just carry it all away/ but nothing happens, it’s a big racket, without any substance.”

In Baldini’s work, thoughts start up, stop, pick up where they left off several exchanges back. Subjects appear, disappear, and reappear later. With dialect, Baldini has said, there is a certain kind of plasticity and malleability that distinguishes it from standard Italian.

One aspect of the dialect’s plasticity is an insistence upon the right to reiterate. Baldini explains: “whoever speaks in dialect doesn’t feel bothered by a word that is repeated several times and then loops back again later. Italian, on the other hand, is hypersensitive about repetition; it will not tolerate it.” (11)

In Baldini’s poems, the train of thought is broken; there are qualifications, repetitions, reiterations, digressions, exclamations and interrogatives. Certain poems are a series of non sequiturs, of shifts in subject, of false starts and abrupt interruptions. This gives a strong sense of a conversation, but because the person to whom the thoughts are being addressed is not there or is elusive, the lingering sense is not one of having been addressed or having overheard a conversation, but rather one of having been inside and heard the rumblings of an anxious soul.

At the end of this accumulation of noises, the narrator recognizes what these sounds are: they are the voices of people standing in line in front of him, each of whom is confessing sins. The noises have become transformed into a listing of human frailties and failings.

and this one is Emilia, there’s no mistaking her, confessing for Carlone too, poor guy, who’s not all there upstairs, and now listen to Don Gaetano behind the screen giving her penance,

At the end of this poem, it is as if release comes by having endured the weight, the barrage and the accumulation, as if enduring it permits the cathartic transformation of the noises. In the final lines of the poem, the narrator literally calls out, “listen”: sìnt che robi (listen to this stuff). The release which at the end of the poem takes the form of a series of questions, which are really pleas:

e pu un’èlta cunsìòun, mo chi sarà?
pu dagli èlti ancòura, cs’èll, l’è sno cunsìòun?
cmè ch’i avrà fat a ’rdéus-si tòtt insén?
i zcòrr, i zcòrr, i fa una baganèra,
e l’è che quê dabón u n va pérs gnént,
l’è tòtt i pchë de mònd,
e i va ’vëntà a cunsès, quant ch’i n n’à fat?
sínt che robi, mo un basta? u n gne n’è d’ilt?
e i n’è bón da stè zëtt, u n s nu n pó piò,
qualcadéun ch’u i pardòuna, u n gn’è níséun?
(p. 122, ll.15-23)

and then another confession, who can it be?
then some others, you get tired out waiting behind all of them, still others, what is it? are they just confessions? how could it have all come down to this?

they talk, they talk, they’re making a din, and it’s that, right here, nothing gets lost, it’s all the sins of the world, and they step forward to make a confession how many do they have?
listen to this stuff, that’s enough isn’t it?
there are more of them?
and they just can’t keep quiet, isn’t there someone who can do it anymore, someone who can forgive them, isn’t there any one?

Notes


2. Raffaello Baldini, Ad nòta: versi in dialetto romagnolo; presentazione di Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, Arnoldo Mondadori Editor, 1995; p. ix “Se non restasse ancora
vivo il pregiudizio pigro per il quale un poeta in dialetto è un ‘minore’, anche quando è maggiore, Raffaello Baldini sarebbe considerato da tutti quello che è, uno dei tre o quattro poeti più importanti d’Italia.”


4. ibid. “È una domanda forse inevitabile. Alla quale ci può essere più di una risposta, compreso, ‘Non lo so,’ che sembra una non risposta, mon non lo è.” p. 68

5. ibid. “Beh, l’essenza del dialetto, almeno per me, è l’oralità. Per me il dialetto, ho già avuto occasione di dirlo, è un animale orale.” p. 69

6. ibid. p. 69

7. La nàiva (Einaudi, 1982); Furistír (Einaudi, 1988), Ad Nòta (Mondadori, 1995); La nàiva, Furastír, Ciacri (Einaudi, 2000). Baldini has written three theatrical monologues: Carta canta, Zitti tutti! and In fondo a destra (Einaudi, 1998). His collection Furistír was awarded the Viareggio Prize and Ad nòta was awarded the Bagutta Prize. His first poetry collection, E’ solitèri, was originally published in 1976 by Galeati di Imola; it was included in the 1982 Einaudi collection, La nàiva.


10. Isella. p. VI “... risulterà per ogni via manifesta l’intenzione di realizzare un parlato appena al di sopra del continuum della prosa, una voce monologante in cui si oggettiva non piú l’‘io’ dello scrittore che ciascun componente della sua stessa comunità.”

ON THE CATHAY TOUR WITH ELIOT WEINBERGER’S NEW DIRECTIONS ANTHOLOGY OF CLASSICAL CHINESE POETRY

By Steve Bradbury

In April 1915, when fourteen translations by Ezra Pound, for the most part from the Chinese of Li Po, appeared in a one-shilling chapbook in heavy tan paper wrappers with the title Cathay, they set in motion a vogue for Chinese poetry in free verse translation that soon swept away the rickety cottage industry of Victorian translators of this verse tradition like a “Schumpeterian gale.”1 Pound’s inspired abandonment of rhyme and meter in favor of free verse or, as he preferred to call it, vers libre, proved so appealing to readers and expedient for subsequent translators, literary and academic alike, that the vogue eventually turned into a tradition that is, today, as firmly established as a four-lane highway.2 However one may feel about the “inventor of Chinese poetry for our time,” as T.S. Eliot once famously remarked of the author of Cathay, it is difficult to deny that the modern turn to free verse led to some of the best translations of the last century and that they in turn have lured thousands of readers to tour one of the world’s great classical verse traditions.

As with any tour, however, one is well advised to be cautious before racing to the conclusion that the sites one sees are necessarily reflective of the cultural tradition they represent. Of course, many translations on the “Cathay Highway” do provide a faithful representation of what their source poems say by way of assertion — and well they should, for only the prose poem affords the translator greater freedom as a medium of poetic expression. But even the best free verse translations give little sense of the prosodic nature or auditory effects of their sources — nor could they, for the forms of the classical Chinese verse tradition define themselves by the very conventions that free verse defines itself against: fixed rhyme and meter.3 Virtually all classical Chinese poetry rhymes, usually on the even lines, and although meter is a somewhat problematic term to use in the context of a predominantly monosyllabic tonal language like Chinese, as the late James J.Y. Liu perceptively observed,

variation in tone involves not only modulation in pitch but contrast between long and short syllables. In the latter respect, Chinese verse resembles Latin quantitative verse, while the modulation in pitch plays a role in Chinese verse comparable to that of

variation in stress in English verse.4

Despite its ideographic reputation, classical Chinese poetry, like the poetry of virtually every verse tradition whose roots extend into a preliterate era, “demands to be recited, heard, even memorized for its true appreciation. Shaping the words in one’s mouth is as much a part of the pleasure as hearing the sounds in the air.”5 While no one knows exactly how the classical verse sounded when it was written, the same can be said of Elizabethan verse. Changes in the Chinese language have not been so great as to destroy the pleasure of reciting or hearing the poems of Li Po, for example, any more than changes in the English language have destroyed the auditory pleasures of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Even in the relatively remote dialect of Mandarin, most of the T’ang poems still rhyme, and their tonal cadences are so engaging that Chinese children memorize them with an enthusiasm that Western children tend to reserve for nursery rhymes and playground songs.6

Sinologists have often pointed out that the sound and shape of the classic poems are half their meaning, but they have never managed to drive this point home in the one place it really matters for the general reader: the pleasure of the reading moment. And since none of the great formalist poets or poet-scholars ever rose to the occasion — What might a shilling chapbook of Li Po pentasyllabic octaves rendered in ottava rima by W.B. Yeats or Daryl Hine, for example, have done to enlarge our appreciation of this verse tradition? — there is really nothing in English translation that even suggests that classical Chinese poetry was written within and against a formalist tradition apart from the deservedly forgotten versions of the Victorian translators, none of whom were poets, and a handful of more recent efforts that show so little feeling for form or are so feeble or obnoxious in other regards as to leave one with the impression that, if Chinese poets didn’t actually write in free verse, well, American translators have probably been doing them a favor.
I.

Pluck, pluck, pluck, the thick plantain;
Pluck, pick, pluck, then pluck again.

Oh pick, pluck the thick plantain,
Here be seeds for sturdy men.

Pluck the leaf and fill the flap,
Skirts were made to hide the lap.

II.

Don’t chop that pear tree,
Don’t spoil that shade;

Thaar’s where ole Marse Shao used to sit,
Lord how I wish he was judgin’ yet.

No, these are not the handwork of some nineteenth
century rhymester working in the “dialect tradition” of
Joel Chandler Harris; they are the creations of the inven-
tor of Chinese poetry for our time, Ezra Loomis Pound.
Both are from The Classic Anthology Defined by
Confucius (1954), the full-length version of the Shih-
ching or “Book of Poetry” the aging poet hammered out
during his long incarceration at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital,
where he served sentence for his disastrous career move
from high modernist to political pundit on the “American
Hour” of Radio Rome during World War Two.7 Had
Pound been able to read classical Chinese with the fluen-
cy and sensitivity for metrical form that he had once
brought to the Anglo-Saxon of “The Seafarer” (one of
the translations he included in Cathay) or the Provençal
of Arnaut Daniel’s “Alba” (“When the nightingale to his
mate/ Sings day-long and night late . . .”), he might well
have re-invented Chinese poetry for our time.
Unfortunately, he had no more than a smattering of
Chinese, most of it gleaned from that relic of the China
Inland Mission, Mathews’ Chinese-English Dictionary;
and his poetic faculties had become so impaired by his
reactionary politics that his eleventh-hour venture into
formalism is both doting in its execution and laced with
the prejudices he had cultivated during his long romance
with the fascist regime of a dictator, Benito Mussolini,
whom he had idealized as a modern Thomas Jefferson.8
If this seems a harsh judgment, take a moment to com-
pare the poet’s versions with his primary sources, the
English translations of the Victorian Sinologist James
Legge, and observe the nature of the changes he made4:

Fu Yi

We gather and gather the plantains;
Now we may gather them.
We gather and gather the plantains;
Now we have got them.

We gather and gather the plantains;
Now we pluck the ears.
We gather and gather the plantains;
Now we rub out the seeds.

We gather and gather the plantains;
Now we place the seeds in our
skirts.
We gather and gather the plantains;
Now we tuck our skirts under our

girdles.

Kan T’ang

[This] umbrageous sweet pear-tree;
Clip it not, hew it not down.
Under it the chief of Zhou lodged.

[This] umbrageous sweet pear-tree;
Clip it not, break not a twig of it.
Under it the chief of Zhou rested.

[This] umbrageous sweet pear-tree;
Clip it not, bend not a twig of it.
Under it the chief of Zhou halted. 10

As we can see from Legge’s translations, which have
the virtue of being faithful if little else to recommend
them, there is nothing in the first poem suggesting that
its author sought to impose rules of decorum upon
women in the work place; nor anything in the second
implying that its speaker longed, as Pound then did, for
some masterful authority of the remembered past who
could set the judgments of the world aright. It is not sim-
ply that Pound misunderstood his sources: he has delib-
erately rewritten them in order to project his desires upon
that “imaginative geography” he called “ancient China”;
this is not translation but Orientalism, and one that would
no doubt have embarrassed many a Victorian.11 For if
Pound’s rewriting of the women’s harvest song reflects
an antebellum interest in “keeping ’em down on the
farm,” the voice, vocabulary, and spelling conventions of
“Thaar’s where ole Marse Shao used to sit,/ Lord how I wish he was judgin’ yet” are straight out of *Uncle Remus and His Legends of the Old Plantation*, whose mock-black dialect Pound, writing to T.S. Eliot in the late thirties from his cottage in Rapallo, Italy, would put on like some epistolary version of black-face to amuse and embarrass the Southern poet: “Waaal Possum, my fine ole Marse Supial . . ..”\(^1\)

That Pound would seize upon Chinese poetry as an occasion for an Orientalist rewriting is not entirely surprising in light of his politics. What is surprising is that an editor of Eliot Weinberger’s progressive views would reprint such work in an anthology he hoped would find service “as a collection of poems worth reading, as an introductory survey of classical Chinese poetry and a celebration of it by American poets” (xxvii). How either of these relics of Pound’s St. Elizabeths years serves any of these aims is a mystery to me, but then I have similar reservations about the volume in which they appear, *The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry*. This is a dreadfully disappointing book, all the more so for the expectations elicited by its subtitle, the Chinese counterpart to Pound’s injunction to the modernists of his generation, “MAKE IT NEW” (“hsin jih jih hsin” 新日日新), and by its impressive list of contributors: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder, and the much-laureled translator David Hinton.

Readers who purchase this anthology in the expectation of getting an introductory anthology of classical Chinese poetry are bound to be sorely disappointed. In limiting his selection to a handful of poets and translators on the New Directions backlist, Weinberger leaves immense expanses of the verse tradition entirely unrepresented or dominated by the questionable work of a single translator. Pound is allowed to lord over the five centuries of the *Shih-ching*, the very fountainhead of Chinese poetry, with a score of his dubious “Confucian Odes” and one translation from *Cathay*. He also has the lion’s share of the mere eleven translations representing the next thousand years of the verse tradition, and three of these are not even translations but rather Imagist poems, among them, this haiku-like *chinoiserie* the poet “extracted” from Herbert Giles’s late Victorian version of a ten-line poem by the Han Dynasty concubine Pan Chieh-Yü:

---

**Fan-Piece, For Her Imperial Lord**

O fan of white silk,  
Clear as frost on the grass-blade,  
You also are laid aside. (20)

A nice example of Pound’s contribution to the Imagist movement, but what can it possibly tell us about the Chinese poem Weinberger allows it to represent except that it, too, has been laid aside?

Of the next seven centuries of Chinese verse, only the poetry of the T’ang Dynasty is sufficiently well represented to serve the needs of an introductory survey, but from then on the tradition once again falls under the imperious dominion of a single translator: Kenneth Rexroth. All but three of the forty-nine translations representing the three hundred years of the Sung are by this poet, whose “Poems from the Chinese” even Weinberger concedes “are almost impossible to separate … from his own poetry; they tend to speak as one” (xxiv). While many of these translations are impressive individually, it is distressing to witness poet after poet — Confucian gentry, bureaucratic functionaries, generals, and widows alike — transformed into the semblance of a middle-aged Midwesterner “speaking in a plain, natural-breathing, neutral American idiom” (xxiv). Curiously, despite their generic similarities, some of Rexroth’s translations are actually the product of a collaborative effort, although Weinberger is so stinting in his acknowledgments that it is likely to escape most readers. I refer to the seventeen Li Ch’ing-chao and Chu Shu-chen translations, most of which were either co-translated or extensively revised by Ling Chung, a Taiwanese poet and scholar with whom Rexroth collaborated on two volumes of translation: *The Orchid Boat: Woman Poets of China* and *Li Ch’ing-chao: Complete Poems*. Rexroth always shared the byline with Chung on the work they did together. Weinberger does not even mention her except in a passing reference to their collaboration in a sentence that begins with a description of Marichiko, a Japanese female persona Rexroth invented for a series of erotic poems he wrote in his sunset years, and ends with an assertion that shows an appalling indifference to the distinctions between real people and Orientalist fictions: “Like Whitman, Rexroth was containing multitudes, but they were all East Asian women” (xxiv).

Weinberger’s anthology includes a number of short essays and commentaries “On Chinese Poetry,” but they add little to his anthology’s value as an introductory survey. Surprisingly, only one of these has a Chinese source,
Lu Chi’s “Rhymeprose on Literature,” a third-century *ars poetica*, so nicely translated by Achilles Fang that it should have been included in the survey rather than its appendix. The rest of Weinberger’s “collage of commentaries” are by the American contributors, not all of whom were well versed in the classical verse tradition. Snyder’s three brief essays on hills and mountains in Chinese poetry are as beautifully composed and firmly grounded as the topics on which he writes, but Pound’s contribution, an excerpt from the Ernest Fenollosa essay he edited and published under the title “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,” is notoriously unreliable. Although it provided the basis for the “ideogrammic method” Pound began to bruix a few years after *Cathay*, its central thesis, that the Chinese characters are ideographic, had been soundly discredited by sinologists more than half a century before Fenollosa took up the desultory study of Chinese poetry under Japanese tutors.13 William Carlos Williams’s contribution to the collage, a review of Rexroth’s *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese*, has nothing to say about Chinese poetry and offers few insights on the translations: “Mr. Rexroth is a genius in his own right, inventing a modern language, or following a vocal tradition which he raises here to great distinction” (197). Rexroth’s contributions, a short essay on Tu Fu and a statement of “Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination” from a published symposium, are more informative, but the details tend to get lost in the welter of his bewildering comparisons:

... almost none of Tu Fu’s verse is lyric in the sense in which the songs of Shakespeare, Thomas Campion, Goethe, or Sappho are lyric. Rather, his is a poetry of reverie, comparable to Leopardi’s “L’Infinito,” which might well be a translation from the Chinese, or the better sonnets of Wordsworth. (198)

So Chinese poetry has come to influence the West as a special form of Chinese verse — which annoys some of the more pedantic Sinologists of Chinese ancestry. It is a special kind of free verse and its appearance happened to converge with the movement toward Objectivism, Imagism, and even the Cubist poetry of Gertrude Stein and Pierre Reverdy — “no ideas but in things,” as Williams says rather naively. (209)

Rexroth’s statements on the influence of Chinese verse on American poetry were often bent to the service of promoting free verse, but at least he had the probity to mention that “Chinese poetry, in fact, bears no resemblance” to the free verse translations of the American poets (209). Weinberger never even points this out, much less provide an actual description of the poetry his survey represents. On the contrary, he begins his introduction with the extraordinary thesis that “American poetry is inextricable from classical Chinese poetry and the Chinese language itself” (xix). One is tempted to think that he is speaking in jest, especially in light of his observation, a few pages later, that the wellspring of this “inextricable” relationship — “the new, plain-speaking, laconic, image-driven free verse” exemplified by the *Cathay* translations — was “written by an American who knew no Chinese, working from the notes of an American who knew no Chinese, who was taking dictation from Japanese simultaneous interpreters who were translating the comments of Japanese professors” (xix–xx). It is soon clear, however, that Weinberger is in earnest, for he devotes much of his introduction to a rambling account of the influence of the Chinese language and classical verse tradition upon American poetry, one so bereft of supporting evidence and riddled with contradictions that even he is forced to conclude:

How classical Chinese entered into American poetry is a simple story, but its effect may never be fully unraveled, for it is often impossible to determine whether the Americans found in it a revelation or merely the confirmation of what they had already discovered. (xxv-xxvi).

Literary influence is often difficult to determine, but this much is certain: none of the free verse poets in the formative years of the American romance with Chinese poetry — not Pound, Amy Lowell, Witter Bynner, nor even Rexroth a generation later — could read the classical poems they translated. But all of them could read the English translations in the sources they actually worked from. In Pound’s case, his sources, the notes of Ernest Fenollosa, did not even include the Chinese, only a romanized transcription and a word-for-word gloss he appears to have largely ignored, judging from his version of this excerpt (reprinted in Weinberger’s introduction) of the “first line of what was to become . . . ‘The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter’ (‘While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead’)

\[\begin{array}{cccc}
 Sho & hatsu & sho & fuku & gaku \\
 Mistress & hair & first & cover & brow \\
\end{array}\]

42
Comparing the two versions, we can see that Pound extensively revised Fenollosa’s prose, but none of the changes have any basis in Fenollosa’s glosses. Of his principal changes, the introduction of trochaic meter and the substitution of “covering my brow” with the more concrete “cut straight across my forehead,” the former is as old as the English verse tradition and the second was something he arrived at with the help of his English wife, Dorothy Shakespeare. Pound was certainly cognizant of what the Chinese source poem says, thanks to Fenollosa’s glosses, but it is clear that he was far less interested in representing its verse technique than in using it as an occasion for a poetic rewriting to bolster his effort to “set up a critical standard” for free verse. This was something he had no doubt learned from his French precursors, notably the prose poems of Judith Gautier, whose “variations on Chinese themes,” collected in her Le Livre de jade (1867), had invented Chinese poetry for her era as Pound’s Cathay translations have for ours. Gautier’s prose poems were not only formatted in a manner that anticipates vers libre; one of them is a version of the same Li Po quatrain (chüeh-chü) Pound translated as “The Jewel Stairs’ Grievance.”

For his verse technique, however, Pound looked less to French vers libre than to the free verse poems of Edgar Lee Masters. Pound had been experimenting with free verse since his 1913 “Pact” with Walt Whitman to “carve the new wood” the great bard had broken from blank verse, but his few efforts in this direction had been so self-consciously mannered in their revolt against meter, no doubt to mark his distance from Whitman, as to draw more attention to his meter than to his revolt. Masters’ free verse, which was modeled on English prose translations of the Greek Anthology, demonstrated that a more prosaic line could draw attention to the subject within the poem in a way that left one with the impression of being “confronted with life, with the objective fact,” which are precisely the qualities of the dramatic monologues in Cathay. Pound never directly acknowledged Masters’ influence, but it may, in fact, have provided the impetus for him to do Cathay, for he had been sitting on the Fenollosa notebooks for nearly a year before he set to work on the Chinese translations, and this was shortly after he had gotten his first glimpse of “Spoon River.” In any case, it is clear that Masters’ free verse was very much on Pound’s mind during the months he worked on the Cathay translations, for in one review of the period, he compared Masters’ “straight writing, language unaffected” to lines from his version of the second half of Li Po’s “South-Folk in Cold Country,” and in another, reprinted several “Spoon River” poems that bear comparison to “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter.”

Most are quite long, as is Pound’s version of the Li Po poem, but one not only is short enough to quote in full but also confronts us with a dramatic persona who, like the river-merchant’s wife, recounts the painful ironies of her marriage and speaks of dust, desire, and eternity:

Amanda Barker

Henry got me with child,
Knowing that I could not bring forth life
Without losing my own.
In my youth therefore I entered the portals of dust.
Traveler, it is believed in the village where I lived
That Henry loved me with a husband’s love,
But I proclaim from the dust
That he slew me to gratify his hatred.

Masters’ poem and Pound’s translation have different plots and poetic genres, but they share the same verse technique. Although none of the Cathay translations deploy the convention of a gravestone epigraph, he did make a significant generic change to both “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter” and the other great Li Po dramatic monologue in Cathay, “Exile’s Letter.” The former is actually a literary ballad (hsing) and the latter a “poem in the old style” (ku-shih), but having seen the “Spoon River” poems, Pound must have realized that adopting the prosaic convention of a “letter” would give his translations more of the “confronting” quality he had admired in Masters’ work. The change has served them well, for they are among the three or four most admired and anthologized Chinese translations in English.

Neither Gautier’s prose poems nor Masters’ free verse is quite as “laconic” or “image-driven” as the Cathay translations, but even these aspects of Pound’s verse technique were something confirmed, rather than discovered, in the Fenollosa notebooks, for they were simply an extension of the guiding principles of the Imagist movement, whose birth he had presided over, when, in October 1912, in his role as foreign editor for Poetry Magazine, he had taken a blue pencil to Hilda Doolittle’s “Hermes of the Ways” and christened her...
“H.D. Imagiste”; he even used the word “laconic” in his cover letter to Harriet Monroe. In his genealogy of the “new, laconic, image-driven free verse” exemplified by Pound’s Cathay translations, Weinberger makes a rather feeble effort to show that Chinese poetry had a formative influence on the Imagist movement by pointing out that most of Pound’s early Imagist poems were “extracted” from the “weed-choked verbiage” of Herbert Giles’s versions. But this only shows that Chinese poetry was not a source for the Imagist principles but merely material upon which to exercise them. His real sources were the poems and fragments of the Greek Anthology that he and other poets in the Imagist circle had been reading and, as we saw earlier, English translations of Japanese haiku, which provided the specific formal model for “Fan-Piece, for Her Imperial Lord” and this classic expression of the Imagist aesthetic Pound claimed to have whittled down from a 30-line poem:

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

And so we move on to the other editorial hopes of The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry. Had Weinberger made a broader but more discriminating selection of poems and translations influenced by Pound’s “invention of China” and arranged them in the order in which they were made, interlarded with brief introductory comments, his anthology could have found service as both “a collection of poems worth reading” and “a celebration of Chinese poetry by American poets” (27). Unfortunately, many of the selections in his anthology have no more merit as poetry than as translations. To his credit, Weinberger has included a fair share of the better Cathay translations, but it is not easy to find them among the thickets of Cathay outtakes and uncollected work like this version of a drinking poem attributed to Li Po that is so befuddled I am unable to identify its source, and there is no list of Chinese sources to make the search any easier:

Wine

Dew, clear as gilt jewels, hangs under the garden grass-blades.
Swift is the year, swift is the coming cold season,
Life swift as the dart of a bird:

Wine, wine, wine for a hundred autumns,
And then no wine, no wine, and no wine.

Pound left such work uncollected precisely to avoid having Cathay turn into a “democratic beer-garden,” as he oft complained of Amy Lowell’s appropriation of the term Imagist to refer to anything written in free verse but especially her own “looser work.” Now, with the entrepreneurial fervor of an Amy Lowell, Weinberger has served up some of the poet’s best vers libre with the pickings from his dustbin.

Nor has William Carlos Williams been well served by having fifteen of his unpublished Chinese translations included in The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry. Vide this bizarre version of a different Li Po drinking poem Williams, then in his mid-seventies, made with the help of an obscure first-generation Chinese-American named David Rafael Wang, who wrote, we are informed, “in the Greco-Sino-Samurai-African tradition” (xxiv-xxv):

Drinking Together

Surely there’s a typo or two in the first line. Li Po wasn’t in the mountain but among the flowers growing on it; and, despite his reputation for being “rapt with wine,” he imbibed by a cup not much larger than a shot glass. Not all of their translations are as unworthy of reading as this one, but most amply justify the good doctor’s lack of interest in seeing them published. Of the few exceptions, only one seems equal to Williams’s reputation as a poet: an untitled version of Li Yü’s “To the Tune ‘At the Joy of Our Meeting,’” a tz’u, or poem set to one of the popular tunes of the metropolitan pleasure quarters:

Silently I ascend the western pavilion.
The moon hangs like a hairpin.
In the deep autumn garden
The wu-t’ung stands alone.

Involute,
Entangled,
The feeling of departure
Clings like a wet leaf to my heart.
It is not a bad translation, but their rendering of the last line (in Chinese: 別是一般滋味在心头 “Outlandish as a flavor on the heart”) is extremely reminiscent of the closing lines in Pound’s “In a Station at the Metro” and this Imagist “extract” from one of Giles’s translations:

Liu Ch’è

The rustling of the silk is discontinued,
Dust drifts over the courtyard,
There is no sound of foot-fall, and the leaves
Scurry into heaps and lie still,
And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:

A wet leaf that clings to the threshold. (18)

The textual similarities lead me to suspect the work was a tribute to Pound, especially in light of the fact that Li Yü, who was the last emperor of the Southern T’ang Dynasty and one of the founders of the tz’u, which came to dominate the poetry of the conquering Sung Dynasty, spent his final years, like Pound, as a political prisoner writing poems about the vanished glories of the past. Williams and his Chinese-American co-translator had visited Pound at St. Elizabeths, where they may have been struck by the similarities between these two imperious poets, and decided to turn their version into a tribute to the modernist whose Imagist principles had played such a formative role in Williams’s own development as a poet. Unfortunately, we’ll never know, at least from this anthology, as Weinberger has nothing to say about this particular work or, for that matter, many others that would well benefit from some editorial commentary. Even when he does bother to distinguish a paraphrase from a translation or place a text within a context that might enable us to illuminate its virtues and appreciate its liberties, he often skews or undermines the effort by some bizarre liberty of his own. For example, in his notes to Pound’s Imagist chinoiserie, he repeatedly refers to them as “translations” even though the poet clearly intended them to be read as poems. The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry was not designed to be a reference book, but better no notes than ones that lead readers so far astray. Equally bizarre is his treatment of this signature translation from Cathay:

Jade-Staircase Grievance

Night long on the jade staircase, white
Dew appears, soaks through gauze stockings.
She lets down crystalline blinds, gazes out
Through jewel lacework at the autumn moon. (77)

Pound always presented his translation and prose note together. This was not just to apprise his readers of the indirect reproach for which Li Po’s elegant take on the stock formula of the neglected courtesan is deservedly admired. He is using the note to voice his own indirect reproach to the “potential Medicis” of his era for failing to provide the patronage that would release him (and other deserving poets) from the alienation and pedestrian rivalry of the marketplace, which he believed was all that stood between him and the “American risorgimento,” or “new arising,” he had been calling for since 1910. It is the same grievance that finds more overt expression in several other translations in Cathay, such as Li Po’s “Exile’s Letter,” which Pound sent to the art patron John Quinn, whom he was then courting as the last, best hope for an American renaissance, with the note “I rather like the ‘Exile’s Letter’. Yrs. E.P.”; and that most curious of Cathay inclusions, “The Seafarer,” whose speaker is, like Pound, an Anglo-Saxon poet who has crossed the sea and is wont to complain that “There come now no kings nor Caesars/ Nor gold-giving lords like those gone.”

Instead of Pound’s note, Weinberger gives us this rather indifferent version of the same poem by David Hinton:

Jade-Staircase Grievance

Night long on the jade staircase, white
Dew appears, soaks through gauze stockings.
She lets down crystalline blinds, gazes out
Through jewel lacework at the autumn moon. (77)

Translation Review
Hinton has a huge presence in The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry. This is partly because Weinberger, believing him to be “a reliable Sinologist,” has coupled many of his translations with the Cathay poems so that “Readers may judge for themselves Pound’s reputation for ‘infidelity,’ that watchword of translation’s morality police” (xx). Ironically, in this instance (and others as well), Hinton actually takes more liberties with his Chinese source than the poet whose faithfulness lies in question. Notwithstanding Pound’s reputation for playing fast and loose with his sources, his version of this Chinese poem is surprisingly faithful to both the letter of the text and its rhetorical development. Like so much T’ang poetry, Li Po’s quatrain conveys its sense and sentiments through a poetics of oblique portrayal: first setting the scene (the evocative trompe l’oeil of the “jewelled stairs” glazed with dew) before commenting upon its significance (“It is late . . .”); then amplifying the theme by abruptly altering our point of view and/or advancing the “plot” (“And I let down the crystal curtain”); and ending with a closing response that again enlarges our perspective on the situation (the evocative claire de lune of “And watch the moon through the clear autumn”). Hinton is less faithful to both the letter of the text and its poetics. His transposition of “Night long” from the second line to the beginning of the first reverses Li Po’s rhetorical development by having the poem comment upon the scene before it has been presented. In the fourth line, his rendering of ling-lung trades away the phrase’s primary interpretation (“clear and bright”) for an elaborate gloss (“jewel lacework”) that not only seems redundant after “crystalline blinds” but tends to deflect our attention from the courtesan’s grievance to the splendor of her furnishings. His last line rolls nicely off the tongue, but the rest of his version is as prosaic as a telegram and his eccentric line breaks, which have no basis in his source text, give his English an awkwardness that could hardly have less in common with the elegant symmetry of his source.

Rexroth made wonderful use of enjambment in many of his “Poems from the Chinese,” as we can see from this version of a much-translated Tu Fu lü-shih, or regulated octave, that is among the better offerings in Weinberger’s anthology:

Snow Storm

Tumult, weeping, many new ghosts. 
Heartbroken, aging, alone, I sing

To myself. Ragged mist settles 
In the spreading dusk. Snow skurries 
In the coiling wind. The wineglass 
Is spilled. The bottle is empty. 
The fire has gone out in the stove. 
Everywhere men speak in whispers. 
I brood on the uselessness of letters. (98)

Rexroth took liberties with the Tu Fu poem, but this is hardly surprising in light of the fact that it originated as a paraphrase, one of several he published in the closing years of World War Two to express his despair over the insolvency of his vocation as a poet on the Left. These were hard times for any writer on the Left, but Rexroth had not been able to find a venue for his poetry or political views after America’s entry into the war, and his strong pacifist convictions alienated him from the remnants of a once vigorous American Left for which he had, in the heyday of the Popular Front, harbored Whitmanic expectations of his role in society: “I do not think there exists anything resembling a political problem in adjusting the work of our native ‘avant garde’ to the culture of the workingclass movement.” Moreover, his insolvency and isolation were aggravated by the disintegration of his marriage and the discovery that former WPA “comrats” had informed against him during the FBI investigation of his application for draft exemption as a conscientious objector. Read in this context, his Whitmanic “I sing/To myself” no longer seems an obtrusive anachronism, and we can see how the line break reinforces the irony in the allusion by literalizing Rexroth’s break from the Whitmanic belief that he could sing the self and speak for the nation. The next enjambment is no less meaningful, for it underscores his own powerlessness even as it sweeps us up, like “the snow skurries [sic],” to the next couplet, whose grammatical breaks and end-stopped lines compel us to reflect upon the spilt “wine-glass” and other symbols of his diminished resources before carrying us to the final couplet, whose end-stopped lines fall upon our ears like an apocalyptic judgment: “Everywhere men speak in whispers./I brood on the uselessness of letters.” It is not exactly Tu Fu, but it is wonderful poetry, and one of the best poems Rexroth ever wrote.

Now look at Hinton’s version, which Weinberger has conveniently paired with Rexroth’s, much to Hinton’s loss:
Facing Snow

Enough new ghosts to mourn any war.
And a lone old grief-sung man. Clouds at
Twilight’s ragged edge foundering, wind
Buffets a dance of headlong snow. A ladle

Lies beside this jar drained of emerald
Wine. The stove’s flame-red mirage lingers.
News comes from nowhere. I sit here,
Spirit-wounded, tracing words onto air. (98)

Hinton’s enjambment is no less aggressive than
Rexroth’s but seems to have little rhyme or reason. His
first break, after “Clouds at,” followed by the syntactically
convoluted “Twilight’s ragged edge foundering,” predisposes us to misread the enjambed word “wind” as a verb rather than the noun it is. But once we have realized our mistake and reread the line, the awkwardness and inconsistency of the comma leaves us pausing in wonder at his “style-sheet.” Why not a period as with all the other sentences? And why bump “A ladle” back to the fourth line instead of leaving it where it belongs? This violates the structural symmetry of the couplets. Although it does give him a slanted end-rhyme with “emerald” in the next stanza, stacking four weak end-rhymes in succession (“at,” “wind,” “ladle,” and “emerald”) draws far more attention to the effort than to the euphony. Ironically, if it was, in fact, rhyme Hinton was after, he would have been better off had he foregone enjambment altogether, for this alone would have yielded him a nice half rhyme (“man” and “wine”) to link the first and third couplets and a far more satisfying full rhyme (“nowhere” and “air”) for his closing couplet than the half rhyme he gets from bumping “I sit here” up to the end of the seventh line.

But Hinton’s version does not stand up well against Rexroth’s even at the level of content, for his liberties with the sense and syntax of his source text tend to obscure rather than illuminate the poem. Perhaps in anticipation of this complaint, Weinberger argues that “Hinton has attempted to recreate some of the density of classical Chinese, without resorting, as some others have done, to a pidgin English”; this as a challenge to the reigning style — forged by Rexroth, Snyder, and [Burton] Watson — which assumes that the Chinese direct apprehension of the real world must be presented in direct, conversational speech” (xxv). Although the Chinese poems are not conversational, Hinton’s “density” bears little resemblance to that of his Chinese sources and, despite Weinberger’s reassurances to the contrary, some of the translator’s versions do verge at times on a sort of elevated pidgin, as we can see from the closing couplet of his translation of this Li Po poem:

Wandering Ch’ing-ling Stream in Nan-yang

I hoard the sky a setting sun leaves
and love this cold stream’s clarity:
western light follows water away,
rippled current a wanderer’s heart.

To be sure, classical Chinese poetry has an enviable concision, in part because the Chinese language has no case, number, or gender, but also because the classical poets often dispensed with pronouns, prepositions, and other function words required in modern English. Nonetheless, most of the T’ang poems translated by Hinton, even those by Tu Fu, who has a reputation for density, are surprisingly easy to understand because of the simplicity of the poetic lexicon and the structural symmetry of their forms. Their density is experienced not as a semantic or syntactical complexity that resists interpretation but as a gradual thickening of significance as relatively simple lines open up to complementary readings or enlarge the implications of what came before. But rather than take this on faith, let us look at the Chinese source for the Tu Fu poem that Hinton and Rexroth translated via a word-for-word translation. I should point out, however, that many Chinese words can serve equally well as nouns, verbs, or other parts of speech, depending on their relationship to other words in the sentence, and, in the absence of inflection and many function words essential in English, have a grammatical mobility that is impossible to convey in English, which tends to fix words into specific grammatical categories. Fortunately, the strict rules of the lü-shih form, which require every line of the poem to be end-stopped, with a caesura or grammatical break after the second character, and each pair of lines in every couplet to be syntactically parallel and semantically antithetical, make the grammatical relationships fairly obvious even when the lines are inverted. Nonetheless, a few of the phrases, such as the first, are open to more than one reading, wherein lies some of the poem’s semantic complexity. In such cases, I

Translation Review 47
will represent the first reading in the literal translation and present the complementary reading in my discussion:

 Facing Snow

Battle cries, many new ghosts;
[In] sorrow chants [poetry], [a] lone old man.
Chaotic clouds founder [in the] thinning twilight;
Urgent snow dances [in the] swirling wind.
[The] ladle [lies] discarded, [the] wine-jar without green;
[The] brazier remains, [but the] fire [only] seems red.
[From] many provinces, news [is] cut off;
[In his] sorrowful seat, just writing [in the] air.

The poem opens as if in the middle of a battle, but by the end of the line, it is clear that the opening phrase forms the predicate of an inverted sentence, and thus the cries are not those of the combatants but their ghosts haunting the battlefields. Adjusting the translation according, we can see that the two lines of the couplet not only are syntactically parallel but also form a nearly perfect row of binary oppositions.

[Over] battle- [fields] cry many new ghosts;
[In] sorrow recites [poetry, a] lone old man.

But here we can also see that we need not abandon our initial impression of the opening phrase, for both the cries of the combatants and those of the ghosts are alive in the memory or imagination of the solitary man chanting poetry in the room that, only now, we realize is the real setting of “Facing Snow.” The next couplet follows a similar pattern, for it too begins with a view of the world outside, followed by a line that abruptly constricts our visual perspective even as it enlarges our understanding of what we have seen. But here the “thickening of significance” is symbolic, for as Stephen Owen has pointed out, the couplet’s opening phrases can be read in political terms: i.e., “clouds of rebellion” and “snow of war’s alarums.” The third couplet, which returns us to the tableau vivant of the “lone old man,” also enlarges our understanding of the situation by focusing our attention, much as Rexroth’s version did, to the signs and symbols of the man’s insolvent state. The closing couplet gives us our final view of the conditions outside, returning us to the constricted world of the “lone old man,” who is now “writing [in the] air.” This phrase requires a gloss, for it is a literary allusion meaning “idly writing in air” but it also contains a pun. The character “to write” (shu) was commonly used in the T’ang dynasty as a word for “mail,” and the character meaning “air” (k’ung) also means “empty,” which suggests that what the old man is writing in the air are the letters he is unable to write because of the disruptions in communication mentioned in the previous line. This complementary reading (“now letters [are] empty”) brings the line into conformity with both the rules of the lü-shih form and Tu Fu scholarship, which has long assigned this poem to the late autumn or early winter of 756, when the poet was trapped in the capital city of Ch’ang-an after it had fallen in the An Lu-shan Rebellion and was understandably anxious to hear word of the imperial court, which had fled into exile, and to write to his family, which was then living in an adjoining province. Something like “tracing empty letters in the air” would suggest this interpretive possibility.

Returning to Hinton’s version of this poem, we can see that, once again, Weinberger’s “reliable scholar” has chosen to disregard the rhetorical development of his source by commenting on the significance of the scene before he has fully presented it. His rendering of the first couplet completely dismantles the battlefield setting and reduces the vivid cries of the “new ghosts” to a mere potential for mourning and the recitations of “the grief-sung man” to a nominal modifier that leaves him with (literally) nothing to do even as it leaves us needlessly confused about what was “sung” and who was doing the singing. His rendering of the next couplet scrambles the words so that the metaphoric significance of the panorama is all but lost. While “A Ladle/ Lies besides this jar drained of emerald/ Wine” is nicely melodic, it has a sumptuousness that seems far removed from the anxious impoverishment conveyed by his source. The reference to “green” may be to an exotic wine, but it is far more
likely a tea the speaker had been drinking in lieu of the
wine he could not obtain or afford because of the priva-
tions resulting from the conditions around him. But it is
Hinton’s rendering of the final couplet that take us far-
thest from Tu Fu’s Chinese, for “News comes from
nowhere” is open to the erroneous interpretation that the
speaker has actually received some news, albeit from an
unidentifiable source, and the phrasing is so reminiscent
of William Morris’s News from Nowhere as to suggest
the Hinton was making an incongruous allusion to this
late Victorian socialist fantasy. Ironically, his rendering
of Tu Fu’s allusion (“tracing words onto air”) loses the
pun on “letters” (shu) and, with it, the line’s complemen-
tary reading. Moreover, the preposition “onto” not only
throws off the rhythm of his line but is also illogical and
unidiomatic, suggesting that China’s greatest poet was
not quite in command of either his medium or faculties.
In this regard, Rexroth is far more faithful than Hinton,
for, despite his liberties with the form and content of Tu
Fu’s poem, he does a superb job of conveying the rela-
tionship between the two, wherein lies so much of the
meaning of the poem: the poignant irony of being a poet
whose mastery of form can do nothing to master the
chaos around him.

We expect a Pound or Rexroth or even Snyder to
depart from their sources. After all, they clearly belong
to that tradition of writers who “seem to ask us,” as
Nietzsche observed of the French poets of the age of
Corneille and of the Revolution: “Should we not make
new for ourselves what is old and find ourselves in it?”
Few of us expect a “reliable sinologist” to “MAKE IT
NEW,” yet this is precisely what many of Hinton’s trans-
lations do (albeit with far less art and apparent purpose
than the free verse poets who came before him) and pre-
cisely how he views his role as a translator, judging from
this “author’s statement” he wrote at the invitation of the
Academy of American Poets after being awarded the
1997 Harold Morton Landon Translation Award:

Ancient Chinese poetry has been a major part of
modern American poetry, providing an ancient tra-
dition much more useful to the avant-garde than
the traditions of the West, for they are rooted in a
completely discredited worldview. I approach the
ancestors from this perspective, following Pound,
Rexroth and Snyder. My intent is to translate the
major poets of ancient China, and thereby create a
new tradition of contemporary American poetry, a
tradition with a coherent “voice” within which the
distinct voices of individual poets are clear and
consistent.33

There is a specter haunting the contradictions in
this statement and the tradition it invokes, and his name
is Walt Whitman. The author of “I Sing America” sought
to create a contemporary American poetry with a coher-
ent voice within which the distinct voices of “the most
poetic of nations” would be clear and consistent and
wound up with an imperious chorus of one, as, of course,
did Rexroth. With seven volumes of classical Chinese
verse already behind him, Hinton appears well on his
way to reducing the entire panoply of major poets to a
Whitmanic chorus. Although he has made more effort
than Rexroth to suggest differences in voice and style,
one of the many poets he has translated stand distinctly
apart from any of the others with the exception of his
Hsieh Ling-yün. This may have less to do with the poet
than the prosaic nature of the selection, “Dwelling in the
Mountains,” a long fu, or “rhymeprose,” describing the
scenery surrounding the poet’s immense estate in south-
ern China. In any case, Hinton has abandoned his cus-
tomary “density” in favor of a more fluent and conversa-
tional verse technique. Some passages have the power
and grace of a Rexroth or Snyder. Notable among these
is his rendering of the poem’s thesis, for here the
enjambment not only makes all the sense in the world
but also speaks volumes on the topic at hand:

All these things —

it’s their singularity that makes them noble
together, each at ease in its own seasons. (46)

True for Chinese poetry in translation as well as
the flora, fauna, and features of a Chinese landscape. But
it is one thing for a chorus of China’s greatest poets, each
at ease in his or her own “season,” to preserve a noble
singularity within their own poetic tradition and quite
another for a single translator intent on making their
work new for himself and finding himself in it. Having
pressed his imprint upon so much Chinese poetry
already, perhaps Hinton should venture some poetry of
his own. Pound often recommended translation as a poet-
ic exercise, but he also knew how readily it could
devolve into an excuse to avoid the risks of original
composition.34 Without these, however, how can anyone
expect to “create a new tradition of contemporary
American poetry,” much less one “useful to the avant-
garde”?

In one way or another, all of the free verse poets
represented in Weinberger’s anthology turned to Chinese
poetry in an attempt to refine or extend the Whitmanic tradition in American poetry. Pound was the first to make “A Pact” with Whitman, but, having read his Remy DeGourmont, he knew that a poet “is valued by the abundance or the scarcity of his copy” and had the wisdom, at least when he still had his wits about him, to choose the latter.35 Thus, by default if not intention, the fourteen Cathay translations, for the most part from the Chinese of Li Po, create the impression of a distinct poetic voice even though they are part and parcel of an avant-garde effort to “set a critical standard” for free verse. Williams, who had made his own pact with Whitman, avoided the dilemma of the Whitmanic translator by simply avoiding publication. Snyder, who knew his Pound, also had the wisdom to take the high road of scarcity and confined his “conquest of the East,” by and large, to the “Cold Mountain Poems” of the early T’ang poet Han-Shan.36 Thus, again, by default if not intention, his Chinese translations create the impression of a distinct and coherent poetic voice. Moreover, they have a clarity and lapidary cadence — the “rip-rap” of Snyder’s own early verse — that suggest the density of his Chinese sources without the awkwardness that mars so many of Hinton’s translations:

In the mountains it’s cold.
Always been cold, not just this year.
Jagged scarps forever snowed in
Woods in the dark ravines spitting mist.
Grass is still sprouting at the end of June,
Leaves begin to fall in early August.
And here am I, high on mountains,
Peering and peering, but I can’t even see the sky.
(53)

This is but one of fifteen fine “Cold Mountain Poems” included in Weinberger’s anthology. These, together with Pound’s Cathay translations and Rexroth’s “Poems from the Chinese,” not only are worth reading as poems but also have considerable merits as translations. But I would still not recommend The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry, for why spend twenty-six dollars on this lamentable sampler of the New Directions backlist when virtually everything in it worth reading is so readily and cheaply available online? For the same price, you can obtain second-hand copies, in good to excellent condition, of Pound’s Selected Poems, Snyder’s Rip-Rap and Cold Mountain Poems, Rexroth’s One Hundred Poems from the Chinese and Love and the Turning Year: More Poems from the Chinese, plus the two volumes of Chinese women’s poetry Rexroth translated with Ling Chung, and have most of the poems and translations in Weinberger’s anthology worth reading (and many more besides) without having to put up with page after dreary page of Pound and Williams in their dotage or Hinton’s belated efforts on behalf of the avant-garde or the prejudices of an editor who rather takes the luster off of New Directions’ reputation as the “primary American publisher of international modernism.”37

Footnotes

1 I borrow “Schumpeterian Gale” from David Harvey’s metaphor for Baron Haussmann’s massive reconstruction of the streets of Paris during the Second Empire modernization, discussed in The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 16. Harvey coined the metaphor in honor of Joseph A. Schumpeter, who was one of the first economists to observe the role of entrepreneurial initiative and technological innovation in sweeping away the past to clear space for new waves of investment and production.

2 Although translations from the Chinese in fixed rhyme and meter continued to appear after 1915, most were either reprints of older work or new work by older translators, such as L. Cranmer-Byng and W.J.B. Fletcher.

3 The classical verse poets did not even employ that fundamental defining convention of lineation, which was not widely adopted until the modern era. Prior to the introduction of free verse, there was simply no need for Chinese poets to make line breaks because the metrical regularity and rhyme schemes of the classical forms made it so easy to parcel out the verse lines.


6 I am, of course, speaking of children in Taiwan and other corners of the Chinese-speaking world where the classical canon continues to maintain a toehold in the elementary school curriculum. Ironically, in Taiwan, with the decision to make English a mandatory subject in the elementary school curriculum, more and more children are being asked to memorize English nursery rhymes and playground songs instead of the classical Chinese poems.

7 Pound was forcefully returned to the United States in
1945 to face trial for treason for the 125 radio broadcasts he made in the closing years of Mussolini’s regime. At a preliminary competency hearing, however, he was judged to be “of unsound mind; unfit for trial” and committed to St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, a Federal asylum, where he remained until 1958, when the case against him was dismissed and he was released. For a concise discussion of the complexities of the poet’s “treason,” “trial,” and incarceration, see Conrad L. Rushing’s “‘Mere Words’: The Trial of Ezra Pound,” and William M. Chace’s “Ezra Pound: Insanity, ‘Treason,’ and Care,” both in Critical Inquiry 14 (August 1987): respectively, 111-133 and 134-141.

8 Most notably, in Jefferson and/or Mussolini: L’Idea Statale: Fascism as I Have Seen It (New York: Liveright, 1970), Pound suffered a physical collapse during his imprisonment in Pisa, which permanently impaired his concentration and the continuity of his conversation.

9 Legge’s 1898 bilingual version of the four major Confucian classics held an especially honored place on Pound’s shelf: “This little book has been my Bible for years. It was the only thing I could hang onto during those hellish days at Pisa . . . Had it not been for this book, from which I drew my strength, I would have gone insane . . . so you see I am really indebted to China” (quoted in Angela Chih-Ying Jung’s “Ezra Pound and China,” Ph.D. diss. University of Washington, 1955) 8.

10 Legge’s translations are available online.

11 The phrase “imaginative geography” is borrowed from Edward Said’s seminal study, Orientalism (New York: Viking, 1978) 71.


13 John DeFrancis’s The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984) provides a fascinating genealogy of the ideographic myth (133-148). The myth apparently originated with the erroneous reports of the early Jesuit missionaries to China. Ironically, the term “ideograph” was coined from the French of Jean-François Champollion, who succeeded in deciphering the Egyptian “hieroglyphics” on the Rosetta Stone precisely because he recognized that they were not ideographic symbols but a primitive phonetic script (136).

14 Gautier’s volume was published in 1867 by Alphonse Lemerre, publisher and bookseller for the poets of the Parnassian movement. For a discussion of Le Livre de jade, see Joanna Richardson’s Judith Gautier: A Biography (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987) 56-59, and in Muriel Détrie’s “Le Livre de Jade de Judith Gautier: un livre pionnier” (Revue de littérature comparée 63.3 [1989]): 301-324. I borrow the term “variations sur des thèmes chinois” from the title under which Gautier’s prose poems appeared when samples were published in the coterie journal L’Artiste (1er Juin 1865): 261. Rexroth cites Le Livre de jade among the French precursors to Cathay in the excerpt from his statement on “Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination” reprinted in Weinberger’s anthology, but he erroneously describes Gautier’s Chinese “informant” as “a Thai who didn’t read Chinese” (209). Tin-Tun-ling (Ting Tun-ling 丁墩齡) was, in fact, a learned Chinese who had been brought to France by the French missionary and interpreter Joseph-Marie Callery to assist in the compilation of a French-Chinese dictionary. Callery, incidentally, was one of the first to debunk the ideographic myth.

15 The classic example is “The Return,” which opens like an allegory on the diminished power of the metrical foot: “See, they return; ah, see the tentative Movements, and the slow feet./ The trouble in the pace and the uncertain Waver ing!” Ezra Pound, Selected Poems (New York: New Directions, 1957) 24.

16 The translations Masters read were most likely those in J.W. Mackail’s Selected Epigrams from the Greek, which had appeared in 1906. For an informative discussion of Masters’ “Spoon River” poems, see Willis Barnstone’s “Edgar Lee Masters: Fury of an American Poet on Greek Tombstones,” in his The Poetics of Ecstasy: Varieties of

17 See his October 1914 letter to Harriet Moore, editor of the now legendary Poetry Magazine for which he had long served as foreign editor, reprinted in Letters of Ezra Pound 84.


21 Selected Poems 35.

22 Weinberger 83. I have not been able to identify the source of this translation and suspect it may be wrongly attributed.

23 The Letters of Ezra Pound 48.

24 I borrow the phrase “rapt with wine” from Liu’s discussion of this literary trope, in The Art of Chinese Poetry 59.

25 Selected Poems 55.

26 For an incisive discussion of Pound’s search for patronage among the “potential Medicis” of his era, see Frank Lentricchia’s perceptive Modernist Quartet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

27 Quinn was a New York lawyer and art patron who organized and financed the Armory Show of 1913. As Timothy Materer points out in his informative introduction to The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound to John Quinn, 1915-1924 (Durham: Duke UP, 1991), their correspondence began in March 1915, about a month before Cathay went to print, when Quinn wrote to Pound about the possibility of purchasing some of the Henri Gaudier-Brzeska works the poet had listed in an article on the sculptor, to which Pound replied: “If there were more like you we should get on with our renaissance” (19-20). Quinn soon proved to be a literary patron of near-Renaissance proportions, for he oversaw the editing and design of the American edition of Lustra (1917), subsidized Margaret Andersen’s Little Review, bought up modernist manuscripts en masse, and provided numerous personal “loans” to Pound, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and other modernists who gravitated to the pages of The Little Review. The note to Quinn regarding the “Exile’s Letter” is quoted in Peter Brooker, A Student’s Guide to the Selected Poems of Ezra Pound (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) 140-141.

28 “Snow Storm” was originally published in the April 1945 issue of The Briarcliff Quarterly under the title “The War is Permanent.” Rexroth’s source for this version was not Tu Fu’s Chinese but Florence Ayscough’s English, in Tu Fu: The Autobiography of a Chinese Poet, A.D. 712-770 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1929) 228-229.

29 The Coast 1 (Spring 1937): 36.

30 For a revealing discussion of this personal background, see Linda Hamalian’s A Life of Kenneth Rexroth (New York: Norton, 1991) 129-133.


33 http://arts.endow.gov/explore/Writers/hinton.html

34 See Pound’s remarks on the value and distractions of translation in his “Note” to a brief excerpt from a piece by Jules Romains, reprinted in EPPP III: 84.

35 Pound’s “Pact” with Walt Whitman is announced in a 1913 poem of this name, reprinted in Selected Poems 27.

36 Apart from his translation of the “Cold Mountain Poems,” which are not complete, Snyder has about a dozen translations and imitations from the Chinese, most of which are reproduced in Weinberger’s anthology.

37 The words in quotation marks are Weinberger’s, from his introduction (xxvii).
These two books start by asking the same question and then go on to answer it in ways that seem diametrically opposed. “Can translation be taught?” ask the mostly British authors of Thinking Italian Translation, and they have no doubt that the answer is yes: “anyone who has taught the subject knows that a structured course will help most students to become significantly better at translation …. This book offers just such a course.” “With the demise of all prescriptive illusions,” respond the Italian editors of the other volume, “the editors of manuals and didactic texts for translators can declare themselves definitively free from the necessity of adding a ‘scientific’ patina to their descriptions or from making their suggestions systematic… And this because translation, as von Clausewitz said of war, cannot be taught but can only be shown by examples.”

Were it not politically incorrect, a reader might consider these two statements as solid evidence for the continuing validity of cultural stereotypes: the British, backs straight in their pressed khaki uniforms, whistling in unison, rigorously building the bridge over the river Kwai; the Italians, draped in the multi-colored garb of Raphael’s “The School of Athens,” each staring off in a different direction. But as is often the case with oppositional approaches, here too they have more in common than appears at first glance, and they end up arriving in just about the same place. What is truly interesting for the outside observer is what happens along the way.

As indicated by the ing participle in the title, Thinking Italian Translation aims both to indicate a process and to describe a product. The objective here is to train translators in a method that will guide them in making self-conscious, well-reasoned choices among fully analyzed alternatives on the way to creating a unified and coherent final product. The presentation is organized progressively and moves from consideration of four underlying issues — translation as process, translation as product, cultural transposition, and compensation — to examination of the formal properties of texts, semantics and pragmatics, varieties of language, and varieties of genre. Finally, the authors complement this progressive elaboration of their method with four chapters on topics in “contrastive linguistics,” highlighting differences between English and Italian (nominalization, determiners, adverbials, condition, and future in the past).

At each stage in their presentation, the authors arrange the material in an ascending spiral, moving progressively from the most specific to the most general or from the narrowest to the broadest view. The three chapters on the formal properties of texts, for example, begin with phonic/graphic and prosodic issues, move into grammatical and sentential questions, and end with discourse and intertextual analysis. Similarly, semantic questions are examined first with regard to literal and then connotative meaning, which is in turn broken down into various subcategories: attitudinal, associative, allusive, reflected, collocative, and affective. Each chapter includes one or more practical exercises, which are given more in-depth treatment and discussion in a companion volume, the Tutor’s Handbook. The main volume’s treatment of genre issues concludes with three chapters dedicated to scientific and technical texts, legal and business documents, and consumer-oriented texts. Literary translation is not given specific treatment, but literary texts are used throughout the book as examples and practical exercises.

Although detailed and extremely analytical in its presentation, Thinking Italian Translation’s most valuable contribution as a teaching/learning tool is its succinct statement of the two fundamental bases of the method it proposes: (1) that the translation process consists in the simultaneous interpretation of the source text (ST) and the formulation of a target text (TT); and (2) that this simultaneous process is initiated and driven by the systematic asking and answering of questions: What is the purpose of the text? What are its salient formal, semantic, cultural, and stylistic features? How do those features serve the purpose? The emphasis on simultaneity is crucial because the constant confrontation of the ST and various potential TTs motivates and sharpens the
textual analysis that underlies the interpretive phase of the process. Indeed, as indicated by the chapter outline above, much of the “method” proposed here is composed of the textual analysis generally associated with traditional courses in monolingual or comparative literature. The application of those skills in a translation context, however, gives them a practical purpose in the formulation of a new text and thus lends direction and urgency to the interpretive process; one good reason why English and Foreign Language departments would be well advised to include translation in the curriculum.

The translation context also adds a new element to traditional monolingual literary textual analysis: comparative linguistic analysis of the source (SL) and target (TL) languages. At issue here are the structural differences between the SL and the TL, in this case Italian and English. How do they differ in their typical ways of expressing objective or subjective content?

Thinking Italian Translation offers a chapter on each of four such examples of contrasting structures or modes of expression between English and Italian. The first of these chapters, on nominalization, starts with a simple observation: “Italian often uses nominal expressions where English does not,” and then proceeds to examine the implications of this difference for genre, register, and idiomaticity. The challenge for the Italian/English translator is clear: an idiomatic Italian text will likely contain a much higher incidence of nouns and noun phrases than an idiomatic English text in the same genre. An English ST, on the other hand, will likely have a higher incidence of verbs and verb phrases. This language-level comparison offers translators a rule of thumb for dealing with Italian nominal phrases; “in the many cases where nominalization does turn out to require grammatical transposition, the translator is statistically more likely to transpose from a noun in translating into English, and to a noun in translating into Italian.”

More importantly, however, the observation of this structural discrepancy identifies an issue about which the translator must ask the usual basic questions: what is the function of this structural feature in this particular Italian ST? If it is possible to duplicate the nominal structure in English, would such a structure be the best way to serve the same function? Would a grammatical transposition of the nominal structure to a verb phrase better serve the purposes of the ST or the TT? On the basis of the answers to these and related questions, the translator will be able to make conscious choices about how to handle nominal structures in specific cases. So while linguistic comparison adds a new element to traditional textual analysis, the heart of the method expounded in Thinking Italian Translation is the systematic questioning, the interrogation if you will, of both the SL and the developing TL texts. The answers to the questions will not always be the same, and some, depending on the genre and the context, will be better than others, but it is the questions that drive the process. “Chapter by chapter . . . the student is trained to ask, and to answer, a series of questions that apply to any text given for translation.”

As this last statement indicates, Thinking Italian Translation takes what could be called a horizontal approach, elaborating a methodology that cuts across the field of translation regardless of genre. From this perspective, the approach of the Italian Manuale is not so much opposite as complementary: where Thinking Italian Translation is horizontal, the Manuale is vertical, offering a series of essays by professional translators, each of which treats a different genre. Moreover, the choice of genres treated in the essays is indicative of a narrower though perhaps sharper focus compared to the British book: with the exception of a brief discussion of medical translation as part of a chapter on translation from English to Italian, the genres chosen here are either literary or para-literary: the short story, poetry, theater, cinema, fairy tales and science fiction, profanity, comic strips, journalism, and literary criticism.

More than a question of focus, however, the choice to organize the manual in this way is rooted in the conviction that translation, inasmuch as it is a craft, cannot be learned by studying and applying a method but must be learned in apprenticeship, by observing a maestro and imitating his technique, which, rather than following generally applicable rules or processes, is the product of individual talent and experience. Each of the authors, the editors point out, “thanks to his experience in the field, has matured his own convictions, honed his own weapons, developed his own procedures: . . . only the practice of translation can lead gradually to the full awareness of the various issues involved and to a sort of personal poetics of translation.”

In practice, the consequences of these opposing points of departure turn out to be less dramatic than one might expect. In fact, as one reads through the various essays in the Manuale, one sees the authors applying many if not all of the same kinds of textual analysis and processes of interpretation and compensation as those outlined in Thinking Italian Translation. With respect to many aspects of textual analysis and interpretation, as well as judgments regarding the prerequisites for or limitations on successful translation, one finds much more
agreement than dissent. The authors of both books agree, for example, that translation is a form of interpretation that starts with a solid knowledge of both languages and both cultures; that there is no one right way to translate a text; that translation requires both creativity and method (research, self-awareness, and consistency); that method and theory must be based in practice; that the elements to be weighed in making choices include genre, purpose, intended audience, and structural and expressive features of the text; that translation always involves loss; and so on.

The essential difference is not absolute but a question of emphasis. Whereas Thinking Italian Translation stresses a methodology for translation choices ensuring the conservation of as much as possible of the “salient features” of the original text, which features are presumably objectively recognizable, the Manuale stresses the individual talent of the translator in identifying these features and replicating or transforming them. This statement from Marco Fazzini’s essay on translating poetry is a typical example: “And yet, a clear and unifying strategy for translation does not exist … [T]ranslation often means inventing one’s own strategies, extracting them from the features of the text that one chooses to translate, including its linguistic particularities (syntactical, lexical, etc.) which that text contains necessarily in varying degrees, and to which the translator would be well-advised to pay more than a little attention.” (emphasis added)

But even if these two approaches to translation are not quite so different as they first might seem, the books do have different strengths and weaknesses as instruments for teaching and/or learning the art of translation. Thinking Italian Translation provides an extensive and standard terminology that can be used to analyze texts from all genres. It follows from this that students and translators working in different fields can use the terminology and the methodological techniques to share insights and experiences and learn from each other as they identify the common aspects of texts across different genres. Students and translators can use this book to learn and improve a variety of interpretive skills that can then be applied to all kinds of texts. It can provide them, in other words, with basic skills that can be transferred from one specialized field to another. It is worth noting here a subtle difference in phrasing between the two books: Thinking Italian Translation states that its method applies “to any text given for translation,” whereas the Manuale tends to speak of texts “the translator chooses” to translate. The first formulation envisions a trained professional with a flexible set of skills able to serve a varied clientele, the second an artisan whose clientele is determined by his choice of material and projects to work on.

In a certain sense, the strengths of one approach are highlighted by the weaknesses of the other, and vice versa. The individual essays of the Manuale consistently fail to note and examine the common features between genres, even where the insights of the individual authors would seem to call for it. The authors of the essays on cinema, theater, and comic strips, for example, all make the interesting observation that their genre differs from most text-to-text translation because the translator must take account of the relationship between text and image. None of them, however, examine the similarities and differences between stage and cinema, say, or between the moving image (cinema and TV) and a sequence of still images (comic strips) and the implications of those similarities and differences for translation. Another missed opportunity for comparative discussion involves the comparison of translations of poetry and prose. Several of the authors in the Manuale mention that in non-literary prose translation (literary criticism, medical texts), the translator has more liberty with respect to form, more freedom to, in Goethe’s formulation, “move the text toward the reader.” With regard to poetry, on the other hand, Massimilano Morini contrasts the translation of content-based poetry, “The Temple of Nature” by Erasmus Darwin, and form-based poetry, “The Hunting of the Snark” by Lewis Carroll, to conclude that the translator can take more formal liberties in translating the latter. So the content/form distinction would seem to have inverse consequences for translation, depending on whether the original text is in poetry or prose, but the genre-enclosed format of the Manuale does not allow this question to be raised and addressed.

But more than anything else, what undermines the Manuale’s usefulness as a teaching tool is its choice of the apprenticeship model. Having rejected the feasibility of developing and teaching a systematic and generally applicable methodology, the editors and readers of the Manuale are left with the strengths and weaknesses of the performances of the individual maestri. Fortunately, many of the presentations included here are very well done and instructive. Maurizio Ascarì’s article on the short story makes excellent use of comparisons of his translations of Katherine Mansfield and William Faulkner with previous translations to demonstrate the importance of analyzing and interpreting the semantic, prosodic, and cultural aspects of the text in making
choices of how to render those features in the TL. Marco Fazzini’s article on translating Scottish and South African poetry provides a superb example of sensitive analysis of the visual as well as the phonic and rhythmic aspects of poetry and the careful preservation or reconstruction in the TT of dialectical diversions from standard SL. (Perhaps not coincidentally, Fazzini’s translation of Edwin Morgan’s “Opening the Cage” is also discussed in Thinking Italian Translation.) Alessandro Serpieri’s examination of the “peculiarities of dramatic texts” illuminates the complex relationship between spoken language, visual images, and the language of mime and gesture.

But the strength of these and other individual performances only confirms the limitations of teaching or rather of “showing” how to translate exclusively by examples. For what distinguishes the best articles in the collection is their authors’ ability to articulate, illustrate, and apply a systematic, albeit avowedly personal, methodology. Ascari expresses this quite well by way of this ironic twist on the Italian adage “traduttore/traditore”: “it seems to me that the translator shows himself to be a ‘traitor,’ as the old adage goes, only when the lack of correspondence between the source text and the translated text are the product of neglect and indifference, but there is no betrayal when the distance is the result of careful choices, subject to precise formal rules. In other words, one must ‘betray with art.’” Ascari’s observation implies, of course, that “art” necessarily depends on method, and the fundamental weakness of the maestro approach to teaching translation is that it inhibits the systematic articulation and transfer of method across genre divisions and beyond the individual maestro’s range of operation.

Finally, there is one issue that both books raise, each in its own way, but in my opinion fail to answer satisfactorily with regard to literary translation, and that is the question of what should be the translator’s objective. Thinking Italian Translation frames the issue in a useful way by defining “translation loss” as the incomplete replication of the ST in the TT and pointing out that, in any translation, loss is inevitable. The goal for the translator then, in any genre, becomes not to maximize sameness or equivalence but to minimize difference: “the challenge to the translator is not to eliminate [loss] but to control it and channel it by deciding which features, in a given ST, it is most important to respect, and which can most legitimately be sacrificed in respecting them.” In keeping with their horizontal, cross-genre approach, the authors then conclude that there is no universal criterion for making these decisions and that “everything depends on the purpose of the translation and on what the role of the textual feature is in the text.” True enough, but as helpful as it is to frame the question in terms of accepting and minimizing loss, this formulation still leaves translators without much guidance in deciding what losses to accept in any specific situation. The literary translator is still caught in the traditional bind between fidelity to the ST and fidelity to the TL and the TL reader.

As mentioned earlier, most of the essays in the Manuale concern literary genres, but each author either defines his objective in individual terms or, in those cases in which the author proposes a more general answer, tends to overstate the case for a single standard. In her article on translating for the cinema, for example, Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli quotes Gianni Galassi, one of the most famous Italian dubbing directors, and then endorses his prescriptions as a model for all translation: “The accomplishment of a dialogue writer is measured by his ability to forget how the original line was constructed, to distill the proposition, any subtexts, allusions, intentions and reformulate it in Italian as if he were the writer of the script.” It seems to us that this is what every good translator must do with whatever kind of text, with the only difference being that the reformulation, in the case of dubbing, must take into account the relationship between image and word.” This unquestioning endorsement of domesticating translation seems to be an overstatement even if restricted to cinema — there are many genres of film, some of which would undoubtedly be better served by a more foreignizing approach — but it is certainly unacceptable as an evaluative tool for literary translation.

Another author in the Manuale, Sylvia Notini, proposes that literary translators should be guided by Matthew Arnold’s appeal to what Eugene Nida has called “dynamic equivalence.” In literary translation, Notini states, one must “put oneself in the mind of the author and confront the text as if s/he were present. I agree with Matthew Arnold when he holds that the objective of the translator should be that of ‘producing on his readers an effect as much as possible analogous to that which the original presumably produces on the audience for which it was intended.’” That is a very high-sounding goal, but as the authors of Thinking Italian Translation point out, it is impossible to know what effect the original produced on its readers, while it is certain that it did not produce the same effect on all of them. As a practical matter then, Arnold’s advice is not all that helpful.

At the same time, however, Arnold’s and Notini’s
analogy between author and SL readers and translator and TL readers is useful, I think, precisely because it alludes by omission to a third reader who, if kept in mind, could help orient the literary translator in making decisions about which textual features to save and which can be less harmfully lost. The third reader is, of course, the translator or perhaps, to expand the category, those readers who are able to read and interpret both the ST and the TT and who can thus appreciate what has been lost and retained in the passage from one to the other. In other words, in making the inevitable decisions about what to keep and what to lose, the translator as writer must keep in mind the translator as reader. This idea has been expressed much more clearly and succinctly by the writer Wendy Lesser in her recent article “The Mysteries of Translation”: “This is not to say that a Margaret Jull Costa translation of the Portuguese novelist Josè Saramago sounds like a Margaret Jull Costa translation of the Spanish novelist Javier Marías — not at all. If it did, Costa would have failed in her primary aim, to let us hear the writer’s voice as she herself hears it in the original language.”1 Obviously, thinking of their objective in this way will not provide literary translators with uniform answers to the questions they must ask along the way, but it does provide a guidepost to orient the decision-making process.

TRANSLATING INDIA: ENABLING TAMIL AND SANSKRIT POEMS TO BE HEARD IN ENGLISH

By R. Parthasarathy

Translating India

How does one translate India? One way of doing it would be to translate from the language that is most completely possessed by the spirit of India, and that language is Sanskrit. Through Sanskrit the spirit of India has been passed on to other Indian languages. Through Sanskrit India continues to speak to the world.

Translating from one Indian language to another is less of a problem than translating from an Indian language into a non-Indian language such as English. English has been in India for more than 200 years. Like Sanskrit and Hindi, it is an Indo-European language. Its continued use in India as the language of intellectual discourse has empowered it to become familiar, if not intimate, with the spirit of India. It was in English that the first complete translation of a Sanskrit text appeared. This was Charles Wilkins’s (1749–1836) translation of the Bhagavad-gita, published in 1784 in Calcutta by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. This was followed in 1789 and 1794 by William Jones’s translations of Kalidasa’s Abhijnana-sakuntalam (Sakuntala and the Ring of Recollection, 5th c.) and the Manava-dharmasastra (The Laws of Manu, 2nd c. BCE–2nd c. CE), respectively. Thus, Wilkins and Jones were the first to translate India for the benefit of Europe. Raymond Schwab sums up best the impact that these translations had on Europe: “As a complete world that can be placed alongside the Greco-Roman heritage, there is none other... For the first time the image of India regally entered the configuration of the universe.”

We must not forget that politics was the moving force behind these earliest translations of Sanskrit texts in the 18th century. Warren Hastings (1732–1818), the governor-general of Bengal, encouraged Wilkins and Jones in their translations, since a firsthand knowledge of Indian traditions would be invaluable in governing India. The relationship between England and India was a relationship of power and domination. Translation was an instrument of policy that helped in orientalizing India so that it became a province of European thought. It is therefore not surprising that Indian literature in English translation has usually been read in terms of Western poetics, an inappropriate approach originating in the political aims of pax Britannica. I consider the Eurocentric view of Indian literature as essentially hegemonic. Today, we need to correct the imbalance by reading Indian literature in terms of Indian poetics and in the context of the Indian worldview.

Over the next 200 years, all the major Sanskrit texts became available in English, and the enterprise continues unabated to this day. Sanskrit has the distinction of being the Indian language most widely translated into English. It is upon this foundation that we must build by encouraging translations from the other Indian languages into English. Translated into English, a Tamil, Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, or Bengali text will have new readers, both at home and abroad. Only then can we say that India has truly been translated.

It is ironic that fifty years after Independence, English and not Hindi is the dominant language in India. Indian languages orbit around this behemoth not unlike the invisible moons around Jupiter. This is true of all Third-World languages. There is thus an imbalance of power between English and the Indian languages, which the translator has to address. He must resist the temptation to anglicize the Tamil or Sanskrit text by respecting the integrity of these languages. Nor must he suppress or iron out the linguistic idiosyncracies that are native to the languages. Both Tamil and Sanskrit are older than English by several hundred years and have a literary tradition that is in no way inferior to that of English. In this business of translation, there is no room for shortchanging or counterfeiting. Only the genuine article will do. Unfortunately, a Gresham’s law of sorts has been in operation for so long that bad translations continue to remain in circulation.

Indian literature is generally a closed book to the West. The scholarly translations from Sanskrit by the late 18th-, 19th-, and early 20th-century Indologists are far removed from the spoken idiom of today. They afford little or no pleasure. The masterpieces of Indian literature need to be retranslated in the idiom of our time. Scholars should consider collaborating with writers to produce translations that are both accurate and a pleasure to read. In selecting works for translation, we might want to keep in mind three simple criteria:

1. The significance of the work within the literary tradition. The translator has a moral responsibility to pro-
vide the reader with the finest literatures in the best of translations.

2. The excellence of the translation in English. The translations ought to be authoritative, alive to the resonance of the original, and expressed in an English idiom that brings home that resonance to its readers.

3. The work should interest educated Indian and Western readers alike.

These simple criteria ought to guide our evaluation of translations from Indian literature. In enabling dead Indian poets to be heard in English, I am guided by Ezra Pound’s (1885–1972) wise counsel: “...we test a translation by the feel, and particularly by the feel of being in contact with the force of a great original ...”

Since Wilkins’s translation of the Bhagavad-gita in 1784, European scholars have been engaged in translating from Sanskrit to the exclusion of other Indian languages, with some notable exceptions. The mother tongues ought not to remain tongue-tied for ever in the presence of an overbearing father tongue, Sanskrit. This linguistic oppression of one language by another must stop. Alone among the peoples of India, the Tamils have resisted the intervention of Sanskrit and more recently the intervention of Hindi. The Tamil language bears witness to this resistance by successfully retaining, for instance, its phonology.

In the last fifty years or so, there has been an increasing attempt to translate from other languages, notably Tamil and Hindi, the two Indian languages most widely taught in the West after Sanskrit, thereby creating a demand for translations for use in the classroom. This is true of Chinese and Japanese as well. Asian Studies is no longer the odd bird it once was, an exotica to be savored by only the most discriminating palates. It is now a legitimate academic discipline in major universities throughout the world. The presence of a sizable number of educated Asians in Europe and the United States has also contributed to the interest in translations from the Asian languages. This interest is reflected in such major series as the “Penguin Classics” of Penguin Books, “World’s Classics” of Oxford University Press, “Harvard Oriental Series” of Harvard University Press, and “Translations from the Asian Classics” of Columbia University Press. The success of the expanded seventh edition of The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces (1995) in two volumes bears this out. Out of a total of 5970 pages, it devotes 517 pages (8.66%) to Indian literature in eight languages: Sanskrit (231 pages), English (156 pages), Bengali (39 pages), Hindi (32 pages), Tamil (28 pages), Kannada (14 pages), Pali (9 pages), and Urdu (8 pages). The selections, with one exception, are impeccable, but the translations are not. Kalidasa’s Abhijnanashakuntalam is included in its entirety and so is Anita Desai’s (b. 1937) novel, Clear Light of Day (1980), which alone takes up 156 pages. Only excerpts are included from the other selections: the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad-gita, the Pancatantra, Bhartrhari, Amaru, the Kathasaritsagara, Vidyapati, Govindadasa, Candidasa, Tagore, Mahasweta Devi, Mirbai, the Ramcaritmanas, Premchand, the Kuruntokai, the Puranamur, the Cilappatikaram, Basavanna, Mahadeviyakka, the Jataka, and Ghalib. The Norton Anthology comes with a “Guide for Instructors” that provides background information, classroom strategies, comparative perspectives, and further reading and viewing. The “Guide” is a useful pedagogic tool. Out of a total of 928 pages, it devotes 73 pages (7.87%) to Indian literature. There is nothing comparable to the Norton selections from Indian literature currently available in India for use in the classroom. The only comprehensive anthology of Indian literature in translation to date are the eleven volumes published by or forthcoming from the Sahitya Akademi (Indian National Academy of Letters): Ancient Indian Literature (3 volumes), Medieval Indian Literature (4 volumes), Modern Indian Literature (3 volumes), and an Index (1 volume). This is an extraordinary accomplishment. When completed, it could be used as a resource for compiling a two-volume anthology, “The Sahitya Akademi Anthology of Indian Literature,” for use in the classroom like The Norton Anthology.

These translations have created a new audience for the Indian classics. As I see it, there are two types of readers for the translations:

1. Indians within and outside India who are unable to read the works in their original languages but who can read them if they are in English.

2. A small number of English-speaking people abroad with an interest in India.

Because India is the third largest publisher of books in English after the United States and Britain, the largest readership for the translations is obviously within India itself. With the exception of the Sahitya Akademi, no publisher in India is actively engaged in publishing translations either from one Indian language into another or from an Indian language into English. Since 1954, the Sahitya Akademi has almost single-handedly sponsored and published translations from every one of the twenty-two Indian languages, including English, that it recognizes. Considering the scope of its operations, its
achievement is truly monumental. While university presses in the United States and Britain are playing a seminal role in the enterprise of translation, regrettably, Indian universities have allowed themselves to fall behind those in the West in this important enterprise. Again, the Sahitya Akademi has established four Translation Centers in Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Shantiniketan to publish translations of Indian literature in foreign languages. This initiative is to be welcomed, as it is a step in the right direction. Besides English, the classics of Indian literature ought to be made available at least in French, German, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and Chinese. Besides the Sahitya Akademi, the Institut Français d’Indologie in Pondicherry has an impressive list of publications in French from Sanskrit and Tamil.

A Word or Two About Translation
Language is by nature arbitrary and imprecise. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the word (“the signifier”) and the object (“the thing signified”). English, Tamil, Sanskrit, and Hindi use different words to denote the same object, for example, “tree,” “maram,” “taru,” and “per.” No one of these words is more appropriate than the other. Further, the word always falls short of the object. It is out of such unstable material that a poem is made. Whether a poem is in Tamil or is reborn in English, the fact of the matter is that both poems are incomplete representations of experience. Poets have long struggled with this problem. Paul Valéry (1871–1945) famously observed: “A work is never complete but abandoned.” What are the implications for translation, then? Given the arbitrary nature of language, the concept of faithfulness to the original is no more than an illusion. A successful translation recreates, not reproduces, as many aspects or elements of the original as possible without doing violence to its sense of wholeness.

No two languages are as foreign and distant from one another as Tamil and English. How does the translator carry over into English the foreignness of a Tamil poem that perhaps embodies what is most original and distinctive about it? Translators often take the easy way out and eliminate the foreignness altogether. In such instances, the translated poem fails to take root in the soil of English and simply withers away. We are all too familiar with the phenomenon. To prevent this from happening, the translator must prepare the soil of English carefully to receive the seed of Tamil so that it will take root and grow. The coupling of languages is what translation is all about. The translated poem will then share the characteristics of both languages.

What a translation carries across from one language into another is not merely information but the very breath of the original, what animates it. The poet, perhaps more than anyone else, is best suited to undertake this delicate task because “words obey [his] call.” A translated poem comes into being in much the same way as an original poem. Poets know intuitively how to make a poem, and this makes all the difference. Ezra Pound’s translations from the Chinese are poems in their own right; they are unsurpassed to this day.

All texts are translatable. One may be more resistant to translation than another. Since human beings speak with one voice, translation is what binds one language to another. A translation cannot and therefore should not try to duplicate the original, which by definition is unique, one of a kind without a second. It should continue the life of the original in another language. A translation may succeed in carrying across many elements of the original as possible. In the end, there will always remain some elements that have resisted translation. The sound of a language is one such element. It invariably slips through the net of translation. Idioms are another element that resist translation. They are a translator’s nightmare. Poetry is especially rich in idioms that can only be translated by equivalent idioms in the second language. The translation functions then as one interpretation among many. Again, a translation invariably ends up having more words than the original. In his attempt to make clear the intention (viveksa) of the poet, the translator often uses many more words, thereby diffusing the poem’s “center of intensity.” The clarification that the translator had sought results only in muddying the waters.

Translation defamiliarizes a language of its apparent foreignness by stressing the commonality of all languages rather than their singularity. Of all the elements common to languages, it is meaning (artha) that is at the heart of the matter. A translation may be measured by its success in carrying across meaning from one language into another. Almost unchanged, inviolate, the meaning steps out of one language and into another without any loss of face. The meaning is not inherent in the language. It is offered by the poet to the language for safekeeping and may be equally offered to any other language for safekeeping through the intervention of the translator. Thus, the translator shares with the poet the responsibility of being the custodian of meaning.

Because speech is the common denominator of all
languages, every language is potentially capable of being translated into every other language. What translation reveals is the essential unity of all languages. It allows one language to so completely possess another language that both are changed in the process. Languages need one another for their survival. For all languages ultimately aspire to the one true language in which the distance between the word and the object is abolished, so that the word becomes the object. The Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro (1893–1948) put it well in “Ars Poetica”:

Por qué cantáis la rosa, ¡oh Poetas!
Hacedla florecer en el poema.⁷

Oh Poets, why sing of roses!
Let them flower in your poems.⁸

This is the miracle that a translator no less than a poet devoutly wishes for: the word as mantra (< Skt man, to think + tray, to save; mananat trayate ity mantrah, by whose thinking one is saved, that is mantra), divine revelation that was not written down and read but only spoken and heard.

Poetic language is by nature polysemic. Words resonate with echoes and associations gathered in the course of their travels in a language — echoes and associations imprinted upon them by generations of poets. Such words simply resist translation, leaving the translator with some difficult choices:

1. Using a word that lacks the resonance of the original.
2. Replacing it with an entirely new word that bears no resemblance to the original.
3. Omitting the word altogether.

All three choices are unsatisfactory, but they are often made. In translating a poem, a translator must aim at translating nothing less than an entire tradition in which that poem lives and breathes with all the vitality and unexpectedness of the spoken language.

“Translating India” is only one side of the coin. The other side is of course “Untranslatable India.” In every culture, gray areas exist that are untranslatable. Some realities of everyday life in one culture simply have no correspondences in another culture. These realities fall through the cracks in translation. It is their intransigence to translation that often makes the translator throw up his pen in despair. Allow me to offer an illustration from Tamil that speaks to this problem, the underside that is hidden from the sight of the language of translation and is therefore not carried across. It exists unobtrusively and inseparably in the original. There is an unresolved tension between the language of translation (English) and the cultural elements hidden in the Tamil poem, “Men in Love,” by Pereyin Muruvalar from the Kuruntokai (An Anthology of Short Poems, 2nd c. BCE–3rd c. CE). Not all the elements in Tamil can be carried across successfully into English.

mavena matalu murpa puvenuk
kuvimuki lerukkan kanniyun cutupa
maruki narkkavum patupa
piritu makupa kamankal koline.⁹

When love rises to fever pitch
men will trot on palmyra stems for horses,
wear the unopened buds of the erukkam round their heads like a chaplet of flowers,
endure the bad mouth of the street,
even give up their lives.

In the Tamil poem, culturally resonant motifs such as “matalurtal” and “erukkam” (Calotropis gigantea) resist being Englished. “Matalurtal” refers to the socially accepted practice of a man riding on a horse made of the stems of palmyra leaves to declare his love for a woman. The erukkam (Skt. arka) or yercum belongs to a genus of tropical fiber-producing plants of the milkweed family. It grows in the wild, and its flowers give out a foul smell. In the Satarudriya sacrifice, the erukkam plant is ritually offered as food to Siva. Again, a dancing Siva wears a garland of erukkam flowers when he destroys the three worlds. Erukkam is also associated with the cremation ground. To the Tamils, it symbolizes illness and disgrace. I have translated “matalurtal” as “trot[ting] on palmyra stems for horses” and left “erukkam” untranslated. “Matalurtal” and “erukkam” refuse to speak in a voice other than Tamil. Because they cannot be successfully Englished, they have to be annotated. Only then can something of the resonance of the original Tamil be experienced.

The tension between the two languages is a real challenge to a translator. It can spur him or her to be creative, to rewrite the poem from scratch in a second language that is for the most part a mirror image of the poem in the first language. Translations are miracles of apopoesis. Instead of being caged in one language for eternity, the poem when translated soars, a free bird, under another sky. No one language can pin it down and appropriate it as its own. Translation is thus the ultimate test of a poem’s immortality. If it survives translation, it will live...
forever. Weak poems fall apart in translation. Strong poems survive intact in translation. For a poem, original or translation, lives in its language or not at all. The Song of Songs is as much an English poem as it is a Hebrew poem. The resonance of the original survives miraculously in English in the King James Version. Translation thus abolishes the boundaries that separate languages. It confirms the truism that all languages are ultimately one language — the language of humanity.

**Translating From an Indian Language Into English**

Drawing upon my translations from the Tamil and Sanskrit, I would like to talk about my experience of “Translating India.” In the process, I will be talking briefly about these languages and about the problems I encountered in enabling poets from these languages to be heard in English.

Translation is the most intense form of reading. To interpret his text to his audience, the translator must study the culture that has produced the text and study it diligently and for a long time, so that he knows what the Sanskrit word *moksa* means (the word lacks an English equivalent), or what a bo tree (*Ficus religiosa*), under which the Buddha attained enlightenment, looks like.

Translation samples that I will discuss are taken from the Tamil *Kuruntokai* (An Anthology of Short Poems, 2nd c. BCE–3rd c. CE) and *Purananuru* (Four Hundred Heroic Songs, 1st–3rd c. CE), and the Sanskrit *Amarusataka* (Amaru’s One Hundred Poems, 7th c. CE) and *Subhasitaratnakosa* (The Classic Anthology of Fine Verses, ca. 1100). I will examine some problems of idiom, syntax, imagery, meter, and tone encountered in the course of making English poems from the Indian languages. I will also talk about the differences in the poetics of the Indian languages on the one hand and of English on the other and examine the implications those differences have for the translations.

**Tamil**

Tamil is the oldest of the four major Dravidian languages, and it is spoken primarily in Tamil Nadu in southeastern India. The language was regularized around 250 BCE. Tamil is an agglutinative language like Finnish, Japanese, Magyar, and Turkish. Such languages form their derivatives by a process of fusion. Suffixes, themselves meaningful elements, are added to a noun or verb to inflect its meaning.

Turning to syntax, we find that the normal order of words in an English sentence is SVO (subject + verb + object). In Tamil and other Dravidian languages, the word order is SOV (subject + object + verb): *nan put-takan patitten* (“I a book read” instead of “I read a book”). Of course, such a construction is not unusual in English; it occurs in poetry as an inversion: “For thy sweet love rememb’red such wealth brings” (Shakespeare, “Sonnet 29”). The inversion of the normal order of words (anastrophe) is a rhetorical device used for dramatic effect. The verb in Tamil is usually in the final position. What are the implications, then, for translation into a non-OV language such as English? The inverted word order has to be normalized in English.

Let us look at a poem, “A Trail of Foam,” by Kalporu Cirunuraiyar from the *Kuruntokai* (An Anthology of Short Poems, 2nd c. BCE–3rd c. CE), comprising 401 short poems of four to nine lines each and compiled by one Purikko. Tamil poets are often known by their metaphors. We know this poet only by his pseudonym: “The Poet of the Trail of Foam on the Rocks.”

```
kaman tankumati yenpor tamak
tariyalar kollo vanaimatu kaiyarkol
yamen katalark kane mayir
cerituni perukiya nencamotu perunirk
kalporu cirunurai pola
mella mella villa kutume
```

What do they know about love —
the folks that tell me to endure its torments?
Is it their strength makes them speak so?
It would break my heart
not to be able to lay eyes upon my lover.
Like floodwaters leaving behind a trail of foam
as they spend themselves on the rocks,
minute by minute I too waste away.

A woman pines for her lover, who is away. When her folks try to console her, she is furious. She alone knows what it is to be lovesick, and it breaks her heart. Unable to explain her condition fully, she lapses into a traditional image of floodwaters spending themselves on the rocks, leaving behind only a trail of foam. The image says it all. Her life too slows down to a trickle, though once it had overflowed with love. The alliteration of “m” and “l” sounds in the last line of the Tamil poem hints at elemental passions beyond the reach of language. The image takes the poem to a new level of expressiveness unavailable earlier by concretizing the speaker’s feelings. It functions as a parallel text. The image comes naturally to the poet as the ancient Tamils tried to live in harmony with their surroundings. An anonymous Japanese poem...
Translation Review

(10th c.) is remarkably similar to the Tamil.

Like a wave that when the keen wind blows
Dashes itself against the rocks —
It is my own heart only
That I shatter in the torments of love.\textsuperscript{12}

“Floodwaters” and “waves” spending themselves on the rocks represent, on the one hand, the violent aspect of water that devours everything in its path and, on the other, uncontrolled powers. Tormented by love, the speakers in both poems have lost control of themselves; their lives hang by a thread. Desolation is writ large on the faces of both poems.

Classical Tamil prosody developed independently of Sanskrit and is based on totally different principles, the most important of which is the \textit{acai} (\textit{\textasciitilde{a}c\textasciitilde{a}tal\textasciitilde{a}}, “to move, stir”), a metrical unit that comprises one or more syllables (\textit{niracai} (CVCV[C] or CVCV[C]). It therefore follows that the \textit{nirai} or of one short syllable followed by a long syllable is a compound metrical unit of two short syllables, \textit{acai} (\textit{\textasciitilde{a}c\textasciitilde{a}tal\textasciitilde{a}}) is a compound metrical unit of two short syllables, or of one short syllable followed by a long syllable (CVC\textasciitilde{V}C[\textasciitilde{C}] or C\textasciitilde{V}C\textasciitilde{V}[\textasciitilde{C}]). It therefore follows that the \textit{niracai} may be long or short and that the first of the two syllables of the \textit{niraiacai} is always short. However, a short syllable is considered long if it occurs alone, or if it is the final syllable in a foot. Also, if the first syllable in a foot is short, the one following it is considered short, even if it has a long vowel. A \textit{ner} is represented here by the symbol (=) and a \textit{nirai}, by the symbol (\textasciitilde{=}).

A combination of two or more metrical units gives us the \textit{cir}, “foot.” Usually, four feet make up a line (\textit{ati}) of poetry. A foot, as a rule, comprises only one word or words that are closely related. Thus, word boundary and prosodic boundary tend to coincide. It is the line of four feet that predominates in three of the four standard meters: \textit{aciriyam}, \textit{venpa}, and \textit{kali}. Thus, a line in the \textit{aciriyam} meter has four feet or eight \textit{acais}. A fourth meter, the \textit{vanci}, differs from the other three in that its foot comprises three \textit{acais} instead of two. The normal \textit{vanci} line has two feet, or six \textit{acais}.

Besides \textit{acai}, the other important principle of Tamil prosody is \textit{totai}, the stringing together of metrical units into feet and lines. The devices commonly used for the purpose are \textit{etukai}, initial rhyme; \textit{iyaipu}, final rhyme; \textit{akavanmakal}, \textit{monai}, alliteration. Rhyme in Tamil is at the beginning of the line: the second syllables in each of two or more lines are identical. Final rhyme is the exception in classical Tamil poetry. As regards alliteration, the letter that begins each line should begin at least one other foot in the same line. It is enough, however, if one of its class begins one of the other feet. For vowels, the classes are (1) \textit{a\textasciitilde{a}, ai, au}; (2) \textit{i,i, e, e}; and (3) \textit{u, o, ð}. \textit{Totai} is thus the art of knitting together lines to compose a song (\textit{pattutotuttal}). \textit{Totuttal} and \textit{yattal} are other words used in this connection. They are similar to the Greek word \textit{rhapsoides}, “to rhapsodize,” that is, “to stitch songs together.”

While the number of \textit{acais} in a foot is fixed at two, three, or four, the number of syllables in a foot varies. This is because the \textit{acai} varies from one to two syllables. The rhythm (\textit{ocai}) of Tamil poetry arises from the succession of \textit{acais}, unlike that of English poetry, which is determined by the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. There is, nevertheless, a strong impression of stress despite the uneven number of syllables in a line. The ear recognizes four beats per line that usually fall in the first \textit{acai} of each foot.

Each of the four Tamil meters has its own distinctive rhythm: \textit{akaval}, “calling,” for \textit{aciriyam}; \textit{ceppal}, “saying,” for \textit{venpa}; \textit{tulkal}, “swinging,” for \textit{vanci}; and \textit{kali}, “tripping,” for \textit{kali}. These terms describe how the verses in the four meters sound to the ear when recited. \textit{Akaval}, as the \textit{aciriyam} meter was known earlier, is the oldest Tamil meter. It originated with the \textit{akavanans} and \textit{akavanmakals}, men and women of a specific clan who told the future. Thus, \textit{akaval} is a “prophetic utterance.” As in the case of the Greek hexameter, the connection between meter and ritual existed in Tamil society as well. \textit{Aciriyam}, with its strong impression of stress, was the meter of bardic poetry. It was recited to the accompaniment of a lute (\textit{val}), and this is clearly suggested by the term \textit{akaval} to indicate the rhythm that is characteristic of this meter.

\textit{Talai}, “linking,” indicates the mode by which the end of one foot is linked to the beginning of another to form a line. Lines are bound together to form a stanza or verse-form (\textit{pa}) of which there are four types: \textit{aciriyappapp}, \textit{venpa}, \textit{vancippa}, and \textit{kalippa}. \textit{Aciriyappa}, the verse-form in the \textit{aciriyam} meter, is the staple of classical Tamil poetry. Each line comprises four feet of the type known as \textit{iyarcir}, “natural foot,” which is of four kinds: \textit{ner ner (=)}, \textit{nirai ner (=)}, \textit{nirai nirai (=)}, and \textit{ner nirai (=)}. Each of these feet has a mnemonic (\textit{vaypatu}) named after a tree: \textit{tema, sweet mango (=)}; \textit{pulima, sour mango (=)}; \textit{karuvilam, wood apple (=)}; and \textit{kuvilam, bael (=)}. A scansion of the poem “A Trail of Foam” would look like this.
Here is a poem, “The Tiger,” by Kavarpentu, one of the few women poets represented in the Purananuru (Four Hundred Heroic Songs, 1st–3rd c. CE), comprising 400 poems of five to twenty-five lines each on heroic themes such as war and kingship.

Where is your son? you ask,
leaning against the fine pillar of my house.
I don’t really know where he is.
This womb that bore him is now a desolate cave
a tiger once prowled about.
Go, look for him on the battlefield.

We overhear a woman talking with pride about her son. The poem is built on a series of binary oppositions. Elements from the inner and outer worlds are sharply contrasted: son/tiger, womb/cave, house/battlefield. The first pair is the most striking component of this montage. Her son is a tiger in his fierceness and courage. His natural habitat, like that of the predatory beast, is the open air. In fact, the battlefield is where he is most at home. He is a warrior. Her pride in this fact shines through every word she utters. There is also the poignancy of her separation from him felt in the very core of her being — her womb. The pillars support her house. But her only pillar of strength is her son, who is no longer with her. Her reticence belies her pain. But then social conventions oblige her to restrain her feelings. Nevertheless, the poem bursts at the seams with eloquence. Notice how unobtrusively the outside world enters her home and turns it upside down, erasing the difference, at least for her, between the two. Her only home is wherever her son is. And, for the present, it happens to be the battlefield. The original poems do not have titles. I have provided the titles for the translations.
eight distinct cases, whereas English has case only marginally. Inflection allows the word order to be varied endlessly. Unaccented function words in English, such as “a,” “the,” “of,” and “from,” are denoted in Sanskrit by a change in the inflectional syllable. Thus, for the three English words, “of the book,” Sanskrit has only one, “pustakasya,” in which the genitive singular marker “asya” represents “of the.” Thus, inflection allows an unusually concise structure.

Sanskrit poetics emphasizes imagery and tone. Nothing is stated explicitly; it is always suggested. Indirect suggestion (dhvani) is a fundamental aesthetic principle. The poems are impersonal. No names are mentioned, as any public acknowledgment would be socially disapproved and in bad taste. The form of the poem is an independent stanza of two or four lines (muktaka), expressing a single mood (rasa). Often the stanza consists of a single sentence.

Sanskrit erotic poetry is best appreciated if the reader has some familiarity with the conventions of the erotic mood spelled out in such texts as Vatsayana’s Kamasutra (A Manual on the Art of Love, 3rd c.) or Kalyanamalla’s Anangaranga (The Stage of the Love God, 16th c.). It has few equals, with the possible exception of the erotic poems in The Greek Anthology (10th c.) compiled by the Byzantine scholar Konstantinus Kephalas. Sanskrit poetry was the product of a sophisticated urban civilization.

Let us look at an anonymous poem, “The Sheets,” from the Amarasataka (Amaru’s One Hundred Poems, 7th c.), an influential anthology of erotic verse.


\[
\text{kvacittambulaktah kvacidagarupankankamalinah kvaccicurnodgari kvaccidapi ca salakttakapadah | valibhangabhogairalakapatitaih sirnakusumaith striya nanavastham prathayati ratam prachadapatah}||^{14}
\]

Smudged here with betel juice, burnished there with aloe paste, a splash of powder in one corner, and lacquer from footprints embroidered in another, with flowers from her hair strewn all over its winding crumpled folds, the sheets celebrate the joy of making love to a woman in every position.

The word “sheets” has long been part of the euphemisms for lovemaking. Expressions include “shaking of the sheets,” “between the sheets,” and “possess a woman’s sheets.” Social conventions, however, prohibit the poet from describing the various positions. He gets around the prohibition by describing the traces left by the woman, who is probably a courtesan, on the bedsheets during lovemaking. The telltale marks on the bedsheets — “betel juice,” “aloe paste,” “splash of powder,” “lacquer from footprints,” and “flowers from her hair” — bear witness to a night of wild lovemaking by the couple. By concentrating almost entirely on the background, the poet forces the reader’s attention on the foreground — the couple’s lovemaking in “every position.” In his Srngaradipika (The Interpretation of Love, ca. 1400), one of four commentaries on the Amarasataka, Vemabhupala identifies each of the telltale marks with a specific position: the “betel juice” with the “position of the cow”; the “aloe paste” with the “position of the elephant”; the “splash of powder” with the “position of the cow”; and “lacquer from footprints” with the unorthodox position, muliere superior, the woman on top of the man. The Kamasutra (part 2, chapters 6 and 8) offers the classic description of these positions. The poem is a textbook example of the Sanskrit poet’s use of indirect suggestion (dhvani). Each reader, however, completes the poem in his or her own mind. Often in life what we cannot see is far more powerful than what we can actually see.

The poem is a feast of olfactory delights. It recognizes the erotic possibilities of scents such as aromatic herbs and perfumes in lovemaking. Other cultures are equally explicit on this matter. Proverbs 7:17–18 says: “I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning; let us solace ourselves with loves.” The Anangaranga calls attention to the importance of a fine environment for lovemaking: “the sheets should be sprinkled with flowers and the coverlet scented by burning incense such as aloes and other fragrant woods. In such a place, let the man ascending the throne of love, enjoy the woman at ease and comfort, gratifying his and her every wish and whim.”

The sense of total abandon with which the couple make love all over the bed is brought home by the insistent repetition of the adverb “here” (“kvacit”). The entire poem is one sentence, in which the subject, “the sheets” (prachadapatah), is deliberately withheld till the very end to add to the suspense. The poem is an erotic masterpiece.

Sanskrit prosody is quantitative like the prosodies of Greek and Latin; it is based on a succession of short and long syllables and not, as in English, on stress. A short syllable consists of a short vowel (a, i, u, ū, ū) fol-
lowed by a consonant. A long syllable consists of a long vowel (a, i, u, ō, e, ai, o, or au) or a short vowel followed by two or more consonants. A short vowel becomes long when it is followed by an anusvara ("after-sound": a vowel nasality indicated by a superscript dot), a visarga ("giving up": voiceless aspiration indicated by two dots, one below the other, after the syllable), or a conjunct consonant.

The stanza form (padya) most common in classical Sanskrit poetry comprises four identical metrical lines or "quarters" (padya). The quarter is determined by the number of syllables (aksaras) or by the number of syllabic instants (matras). Each quarter has from eight to twenty-one or more syllables. A syllabic instant denotes the time taken to utter a short vowel. A short vowel equals one matra; a long vowel or diphthong equals two matras. Each quarter is arranged in units of three syllables called syllabic feet (ganas). The order of short and long syllables in each unit varies. There are eight syllabic feet, each represented by a letter of the Sanskrit alphabet:

1. na: ुुु (tribrach)
2. ya: ु - (bacchiac)
3. ra: - - (cretic)
4. ta: - - ु (palimbacchiac)
5. ma: - - (molossus)
6. bha: - ु ु (dactyl)
7. ja: ु ु - (amphibrach)
8. sa: ु ु - (anapest).

There are two other syllabic feet: the first comprises a single long syllable, represented by the letter ga (ृ), and the second, a single short syllable, represented by the letter la (ॿ).

Each of the four lines of the poem "The Sheets" has seventeen syllables that have an identical metrical pattern, with a caesura (yati), represented by a vertical bar (।), after the sixth syllable:

ya ma na sa bha la ga
u - - - - | uuuuu - u - -
kvacittambulaktah kvacidagarupankamalainah

ya ma na sa bha la ga
u - - - - | uuuuu - u - -
kvaciccurnodgari kvaccidapi ca salakttakapadah ।

ya ma na sa bha la ga
u - - - - | uuuuu - u - -
valibhangabhogiralakapatitaih sirnakusumaih

where the macron (⁻) stands for a long syllable and the breve (¨) for a short syllable.

Sanskrit meters have fanciful names such as "The Tiger’s Sport" (sardulavikridita) and "Indra’s Thunderbolt" (indravajra). Often the name of a meter tells us something about its flow, for example, mansakranta ("slow moving"). The long syllables of this meter suggest pathos. Kalidasa’s poem The Cloud Messenger (Meghadutam) offers some fine examples. In "The Tiger’s Sport," the meter mimics the leap of a tiger. A long leap is followed by a caesura after the twelfth syllable, and the quarter ends on a short leap. The meter of our poem is "The Excellent Lady" (sikharini), comprising seventeen syllables in each quarter. The second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, twelfth, thirteenth, and seventeenth syllables are long; the rest are short. There is a caesura after the sixth syllable. Each quarter consists of the following syllabic feet: ya, ma, na, sa, bha, la, and ga (ृ - - - - uuuuu - u - -).

In the translation, the four lines of Sanskrit have expanded to seven lines in English that vary in length from nine to fourteen syllables. The classical meter is replaced by free verse. The rhythms are those of speech, not song. This is no doubt an impoverishment, but it is almost impossible to reproduce the quantitative meters of Sanskrit in a stress-timed language such as English. Though my translation is no more than a faint echo of the original, I think it is an English poem in its own right. Its rhythmic flow is unmistakable and so is its uninhibited celebration of erotic love between a man and a woman in the true spirit of the Kamasutra. English does not have a tradition of erotic poetry comparable to that of Sanskrit or Greek. Therefore tone becomes of utmost importance in communicating the erotic mood of the Sanskrit poem. It has to be carefully modulated to sound right to an English ear without being offensive. In translating from Sanskrit into English, one translates not just the text but an entire worldview which remains hidden like so many roots beneath the text.

Here is another anonymous poem, “The Pledge,” from the Subhasitaratnakosa (The Classic Anthology of Fine Verses, ca. 1100):

`gate premabandhe hridayabahumane vigalite
nivrte sadbhave jana iva jane gacchati purah |`
The woman’s lover has not kept faith with her. He has gone back on his word and abandoned her. She is heartbroken by his betrayal. Passing her in the street, he fails to acknowledge her as if she were a stranger. He is on her mind night and day. Devastated, she does not know what to do. In her loneliness, she confides to a friend and wonders why she is not dead from a broken heart. In less than thirty words in the original Sanskrit, the poem tells us all that there is to know about unrequited love. It is a man’s world; he does what he pleases. The woman is usually helpless. The Sanskrit poem begins on an ominous note, “gate premabandhe” (literally, “the bond of love is broken”), that is heartrending. The word “gate” falls on the ear with the force of a sledgehammer. It is all over between them. There is nothing more to be said. The rest of the poem is just a gloss on this phrase.

Given the nature of Indian patriarchy, it is not unusual for a woman writer to hide her name and gender. Anonymity offered her a “refuge” from the prying eyes of men. Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) was probably right when she said: “Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.” It is not improbable that a woman wrote “The Pledge.” The female persona speaks in her own voice; she is not manipulated by a male author. Women, as a rule, were not taught Sanskrit. By writing in Sanskrit freely and openly about her own situation, Anon interrogates patriarchy’s attitudes toward women, especially its politicization of a woman’s personal life leading to humiliation and abuse.

Love is usually depicted in Sanskrit poetry in its two major aspects: love-in-enjoyment (sambhoga-sringara) and love-in-separation (vipralamba-sringara). “The Sheets” is a good example of the former and “The Pledge” of the latter.

Translation as Empowerment
Translation remains the most accessible marketplace for linguistic exchanges to take place. A nation renews itself through translation. If it is indifferent to it, it is in danger of “falling off the globe.” The United Nations Development Program’s Arab Human Development Report 2002, prepared by a group of Arab intellectuals, offers some telling data on translation and nation-building. The entire Arab world, comprising twenty-two states with a population of 280 million, translates “about 300 books annually,” which is “one fifth the number that Greece alone,” with a population of ten million, “translates.” Furthermore, “The cumulative total of translated books since the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma’mun’s (r. 813–33) time is about 100,000, which is almost the number that Spain translates in one year.” Translation is the oxygen that keeps a language alive. Without it, the language would become stale, and its air, unbreatheable.

Translation has offered the poems in the two languages — Tamil and Sanskrit — an afterlife in another language, English. It has enabled the Indian poets to be heard across the centuries in a contemporary global language that has made them known throughout the world. Such is the power of translation.

Works Cited
All translations in the text are my own.
Diacritical marks are omitted except on pages 63 and 66.

15 Devadhar 80.
THE MEXICAN POET HOMERO ARIDJIS

By Rainer Schulte


Eyes To See Otherwise is the first comprehensive bilingual collection of Homero Aridjis’ poetic oeuvre. Represented are selections from the books of poems Aridjis has written over a period of forty years. Today, Aridjis is one of Mexico’s most important living poets. He has published more than twenty books of poetry and prose, and his works have been translated into a dozen languages.


The list of distinguished translators who have rendered the poems of Aridjis into English reads as follows: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Martha Black Jordan, Philip Lamantia, W.S. Merwin, John Frederick Nims, Kenneth Rexroth, Jerome Rothenberg, Brian Swann, Barbara Szerlip, Nathaniel Tarn, Eliot Weinberger, and the two editors of this book.

The majority of the earlier poems through the 1977 collection Living to See (Vivir para ver) have been translated by Eliot Weinberger. The later poems, from Construir la morte, 1982 (The Building of Death) to The Eye of the Whale, 2001 (El ojo de la ballena), were translated by George McWhirter. The translations by W.S. Merwin are particularly numerous in the section titled Blue Spaces, 1969, (Los espacios azules). Most of the other ten translators are represented mainly in the earlier works of Aridjis.

The landscape of Aridjis’ poetic universe embraces the splendor and misery of human existence. Above all, he is concerned about the present and future of the planet earth. In his words, “the task of poets and of holy men is to tell this planet’s stories and to articulate ecological cosmology that does not separate nature from humanity.” And his poems speak of a deep humanity that is linked to the flowers, trees, and streams of his Mexican country. His inspiration comes from Nahualt chants and Huichol initiation songs to San Juan de la Cruz and the 16th-century Spanish poet Luis de Gongora y Argote. The earth speaks through his poems.

“I remember … inexpressibly the old tongue that speaks with beasts and trees.”

The wonders of nature are juxtaposed to the destruction of the environment by humans. The beauty of animals and nature clashes with the intrusion of chainsaws that desecrate the forests. Aridjis’ constant concern with the ecological future of the planet finds moments of meditative introspection in a series of self-portraits from his youth and a long poem about his mother’s death, “The Amazement of Time.” The vision of his poems covers a large territory: the Spanish Inquisition, Zapata and Montezuma, the Aztec ceremonies of sacrifice, and the erotic side of human existence. Aridjis seeks inspiration in Dante’s universe. For him, Dante is a moral poet who was deeply involved in the turmoil of his own time and judged his society with a strong critical eye.

In the last two lines of his poem “Preguntas” (Questions) from his 1971 collection El poeta niño (The Boy Poet), Aridjis articulates his poetic vision:

“o seré siempre esto que soy
un hombre de palabras?”
(or will I always be that which I am
a man of words?)

Aridjis formulates this statement as a question. His oeuvre confirms that he is a poet of words. And there are certain words that glow through many of his poems.

Above all, “light” dominates his poetic outlook: the day sings light; a man watches light shine on the fruit; blades of light; the afternoon smells of light; only the light on the leaves; and a white light meets with a red and green light in the same poem. Aridjis celebrates silence and
transparency, stones and clouds. His is a paradoxical view of life, and we come to understand the world through the ever-present tension of opposites. He writes: “with the sun on our faces/ we also/ move toward transparency” (p.87); “this black stone/is a piece of the night” (p.137); and “I a shadow on the hot stones/I a breath in a never ending silence” (p.105).

On the one hand, Aridjis searches the light on this earth; on the other, he has a keen eye for the violence and misery of this world. The poem “We Inherit Pain and Pass it On,” translated by Eliot Weinberger, shows that side of his poetry.

We Inherit Pain and Pass it On
Our parents left us
blood and words
we leave our children
blood and words
we sing to our bones
beside the fire
we sharpen our fists
into daggers
almost dead
we kill ourselves
almost nothing
we rip out our eyes
our parents left us
blood and words
we leave our children
blood and words
(p. 99)

Heredemos el Dolor y lo Transmittimos
Sangre y palabras
nos dejaron los viejos
sangre y palabras
dejamos a nuestros hijos
junto al fuego
cantamos a nuestros huesos
afilamos nuestros puños
los hacemos puñales
ya casi muertos
nos asesinamos

Almost like a Bach fugue, the poet hammers his message through the repetition of “blood and words.” Bach actually appears several times in various of his poems.

Even though thirteen translators are listed, the majority of the poems were translated by Eliot Weinberger and George McWhirter. Weinberger translated all the poems included in Exaltation of Light. With very few exceptions, McWhirter translated all the poems from The Building of Death, Images for the End of the Millennium, Second Expulsion from Paradise, The Poet in Danger of Extinction, Archbishop Building a Fire, A Time of Angels, and Eyes to See Otherwise. Weinberger and McWhirter translated most of the poems that were published after 1971. The other translators were primarily involved in transplanting the poems written between 1960 and 1971. Unfortunately, the translators are listed in the table of contents only with their respective initials but not with the actual translations of each poem. Thus, the reader experiences some difficulties in figuring out who translated what poem. In a future edition of Eyes to See Otherwise, this editorial policy should be corrected.

The variety of translation perspectives brought to the interpretation of Aridjis’ poems through the eyes of the translators makes this collection a fascinating reading. His poetic universe covers the pianissimo sounds of his lyrical vision and his fortissimo explosions lamenting the destruction that humanity has inflicted on the planet earth. Ultimately, it is the light, la luz, with all its resonances that opens doors of hope toward the future. In particular, Aridjis celebrates the power of light in the poems in his volume Exaltation of Light, which are all translated by Eliot Weinberger. Weinberger understands that Aridjis’ poetry is driven by the word, the poet as an “hombre de palabras.” The translators bring a great variety of interpretive perspectives to their translations; they all immersed themselves into the internal movements of Aridjis’ words and images, yet, at the same time, they always kept their ears close to the melodious voice of each poem. In its final analysis, Aridjis sees in all the destruction that human beings have caused on the planet earth a ray of hope that springs from the creative energy of the individual.
The first major new translations of Freud in more than thirty years—available only from Penguin Classics

THE NEW PENGUIN FREUD

ADAM PHILLIPS, GENERAL EDITOR

“A bold attempt to present Freud as an important European writer whose work inspired twentieth-century artists, filmmakers, and poets...Penguin should be congratulated on this innovative and timely project.”

—The Observer (UK)

“The first translation of the great mystic saint’s most powerful and influential work by anyone outside the Catholic Church.

THE INTERIOR CASTLE
ST. TERESA OF AVILA
Newly Translated with an Introduction by Mirabai Starr
Penguin Classics 896 pp. 0-14-044760-1 $10.00

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA AND TWO ESSAYS ON AMERICA
ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE
Newly Translated by Gerald Bevan Introduction by Isaac Kramnick Notes by Jeff Selinger
Penguin Classics 224 pp. 0-14-043782-7 $12.00

THE SCHREBER CASE
Translated by Andrew Webber
Introduction by Colin MacCabe
Penguin Classics 96 pp. 0-14-043782-5 $12.00

THE GREEK SOPHISTS
Translated by John Dillon
Introduction by John Dillon
Penguin Classics 256 pp. 0-14-043689-8 $14.00

For more information on the individual and forthcoming titles in The New Penguin Freud Series go to www.penguin.com/pcfreud

PENGUIN GROUP (USA) Academic Marketing Department 375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014 www.penguin.com/academic
**BOOK REVIEW**


*Steven F. White, Reviewer*

The Return of the River, winner of the 2003 National Translation Award, contains some of the most striking contemporary poems being written in the Spanish language and has been translated here in resoundingly effective and innovative ways by Jo Anne Engelbert, who has dedicated many years to the task of presenting the work of Honduran Roberto Sosa to readers in English. It is hard to believe that this remarkable poet will soon turn 75, yet still is not very well known outside Latin America. This volume of his selected poems, composed over some forty years, presented in a bilingual edition by Curbstone Press, and now recognized by the American Literary Translators Association, should be the perfect way to begin to rectify this situation.

A close look at the trajectory of Sosa’s writing reveals that the poet experienced tremendous stylistic and thematic breakthroughs in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the publication of the two volumes *Los pobres* (The Poor) and *Un mundo para todos dividido* (A World for All, Divided). For once, there was justice: respectively, the books received Spain’s prestigious Adonais Prize and Cuba’s Casa de las Américas Prize. In fact, I would suggest that readers dive into The Return of the River and begin with these powerful poems that constitute pp. 61–155. This is the heart of Sosa’s most accomplished work, such as the tour de force “Mi padre” / “My Father” (from *Los pobres*), which moves audiences to tears and enthusiastic applause:

Caminaba — doy mi testimonio — del brazo de fantasmas que lo llevaron a ninguna parte.

Caía abandono abajo, cada vez más abajo, más abajo con ayes sin sonido repitiendo ruidos no aprendidos,

buscando continuamente el encuentro con los arrullos dentro de la apariencia.

He was walking —
I swear it —
Arm in arm with ghosts leading him nowhere.
He was falling into abandonment, deeper and deeper, deeper still, uttering silent moans, repeating unlearned sounds trying to find a lullaby within appearances.

“La hora baja” / “Qualms” (from *Un mundo para todos dividido*) contains chilling, engaged enigmas that enable the poem simultaneously to live in the Honduras of the poet’s lifetime and to inhabit other geographic and temporal boundaries:

Dando vueltas y cambios crecimos duramente.

De nosotros se levantaron los jueces de dos caras; los perseguidores de cien ojos, veloces en la bruma y alegres consumidores de distancias; los delatores fáciles; los verdugos sedientos de púrpura; los falsos testigos creadores de la gráfica del humo; los pacientes hacedores de nocturnos cuchillos.

Algunos dijeron: *es el destino que nos fue asignado* y huyeron dejando la noche enterrada. Otros prefirieron encerrarse entre cuatro paredes sin principio ni fin.

Pero todos nosotros — a cierta hora — recorremos la callejuela de nuestro pasado de donde volvemos con los cabellos tintos en sangre.
Knocking about, kicked around and around, we grew up hard.

From our ranks came
two-faced judges; hundred-eyed pursuers
who eagerly devoured the road, swift in the mist;
easy snitches; executioners thirsting for purple;
false witnesses, inventors of smoke writing;
and patient artisans
of nocturnal knives.

Some said: this is the fate
that was in our stars,
and fled,
burying the night. Others
shut themselves up within four walls that neither
begin nor end.

But all of us — at a certain hour — prowl
the alley of our past
and return,
our hair stained with blood.

The Peruvian poet César Vallejo breathes in the sentiment of these poems, and so does the Lorca who wrote Poet in New York, but Sosa’s empathies often have a more detached precision. Like knives, these poems can cut deeply, but sometimes they are hard to grasp because they’re all blade and no handle. For me, Sosa is not a Surrealist. He has discovered an astonishing poetic language that enables him to write the lucid dreams of his being awake in the nightmare of history.

Sosa’s is a world of brutality and the severest consequences for those who attempt to say what he says, especially in his more explicit subsequent publication Secreto militar (Military Secret). In these thirteen poems, following the Latin American antecedent that Neruda establishes in Canto general, Sosa is not afraid to name names, to use the written word as a means of denouncing the specific people who have each played an infamous role in writing the twentieth-century history of the Americas “inside a drop of blood”: Carías, Stroessner, Duvalier, Pinochet, Trujillo, and Hernández Martínez. There is also a place in this book for the military dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, who appears as a giant boa constrictor (capable of swallowing his country’s well-advertised eternal spring”) for his role in formulating the policies in the 1980s that resulted in the deaths of so many indigenous people in Guatemala.

As translator, Jo Anne Engelbert consistently demonstrates her ability to take the right kinds of risks. Although she is always respectful of the original text, she has a nearly perfect understanding of when to vary syntax and line breaks to create new equivalences in English. There are also some serious and exciting examples of what Rainer Schulte has called “associative, nonlinear thinking” in Engelbert’s translations of Sosa, such as in the poem “Los Indios” / “The Indians”:

Los he visto sin zapatos y casi desnudos,
en grupos
al cuidado de voces tendidas como látigos,
o borrachos balanceándose con los charcos del ocaso
de regreso a sus cabañas
situadas en el final de los olvidos.

I have seen them in groups,
barefoot and almost nude,
controlled by voices that sting like whips,
or drunk, weaving between sunset puddles
to reach their huts perched on the brink of oblivion.

In every poem, there is evidence of Engelbert’s expertise as a translator, especially in terms of her thorough comprehension of the nuances of meaning in the Spanish, her sensitivity to the musicality of the English she is shaping, and her recognition of the absolute importance of allowing Sosa’s mysteries to remain intact in translation.

Occasionally, Engelbert, for the sake of clarity and poetic effect, augments in her translation, adding words and isolating new units of meaning with her line breaks:

Temibles
abogados
perfeccionan el día y su azul dentellada.
(“La casa de la justicia”)

Fearsome attorneys
perfect the day
and test the swiftness of their blue teeth.
(“The House of Justice”)

El origen les llama.
Recorren con ojos dulces cuanto no tienen.
En las noches recuerdan los hechos y palabras de los justos.
(“El otro océano”)

The voice of origin is calling them.
They gaze with gentle eyes
on all they do not have.
At nightfall they recall
the words and deeds of the just.
(“The Other Ocean”)

But Engelbert seems to be much more prone to elision in her translations of Sosa’s poems, streamlining his lines or his rhetorical structures, distilling a core of meaning, highlighting a hitherto unobtrusive adjective or eliminating another:

¿Qué humano no ha sentido
en el sitio del corazón
esos dedos picoteados
por degradantes pájaros de cobre?
(“La ciudad de los niños mendigos”)

Whose heart has never felt those fingers
pecked
by birds with copper beaks?
(“The City of Beggar Children”)

Todo ello ocurre con admirable naturalidad mientras
la gente aparece y desaparece sin percibirnos
siquiera, porque, no hay duda, en medio de la trans-
parencia derrumbada se cree que somos perros.
(“Los perros”)

That’s how it is. People come and go, not giving us a glance. In the transparent space around us, they take us for two dogs.
(“Dogs”)

If one examines Engelbert’s translations using a smaller unit of measurement, say, one or two words, there is also a great deal to admire about her imaginative, context-driven solutions to some perennial problems in Spanish. What follows is a kind of non-traditional mini-dictionary, which I hope is not inappropriate (even if it reflects how Engelbert sometimes changes parts of speech). If not in Translation Review, where?!

abierto — yielding
abrirse — to yawn (in the spatial sense)
acobardado — cringing
acumulado — heaped-up
aguardar — to set aside
alrededor — ruffling
amistad — company
amistad segura — friendship in my heart
anudarse — to be ribboned
arrogante — overconfident
azulinante — habluccinated
bufonada — clown act
casi — supposed
(nunca) concluido — undead
creencias — cant
custodiar — to monitor
decir — to confide
definitivamente — it’s clear
delicadeza — charm
delincuente — gunmoll
deshora — night
deslealtades — sellouts
disponer — to ordain
edificar — to concoct
envejecidas (por el odio) — hate-wizened
escritura — script
estrellado — star-shattered
extraído — spun
fabricar placer — to brew a cup of pleasure
golpe — thud
hablar — to expound
hablar oblicuo — to speak with forked tongue
huir — to fade
humillados — dispossessed
idéntico — hasn’t changed
inventado — ready-made
laberinto — multiple mazes
llamar — to beckon
matices — inner workings
negro — moonless
odio — to fester
orillado — bereft
pausado — deft
(en dos) pedazos — cut in two
penumbra — waiting night
pertenece — to have to one’s name
(re) rebeldía — smoldering
recluido — ringed
sacar — to sire
sensible — capable of feeling
sobrevenir — to ravish
Tierra — whole earth
unir — to fuse
vuelo — halo

When I read Engelbert’s convincing translations of Sosa’s poems, I find poems in English that inspire confi-
dence and bear close scrutiny whether I attempt to gauge her work in terms of the smallest unit of measurement (word by word) or the largest (whole poems or even the entire book). In a few instances, however, I admit to having ambivalent feelings about her effort to take Sosa’s conventional politicized language and turn it into something more unexpected or (to use Robert Bly’s term) “especially fragrant.” For example, Engelbert takes the adjective from the phrase “the cold war,” with its obvious political connotations and attaches it to the metaphor that follows. Thus, in “Los elegidos de la violencia”/“The Chosen Ones,” “La guerra fría/tiende su mano azul y mata” becomes “War extends its cold blue hand and kills.” Likewise, in “Esta luz que suscribo”/“This Light by which I Write,” Engelbert translates the perhaps overly straightforward “mi gran compromiso” as “my enduring oath.” Nor does it seem wise, given the historical basis of inequality in Latin America, to translate “haciendas” as “fortunes” in that the wealth of the Generals in Sosa’s poem “Las sales enigmáticas”/“The Enigmatic Salts” is specifically derived from their vast holdings of land.

My misgivings with The Return of the River have nothing to do with the translation but rather how the book as a whole may not do enough to illuminate fully the work of Sosa for the poet’s new readers. In his introduction, for example, Sam Hamill takes a pointedly anti-academic stance. He feels compelled to assail a critical vocabulary often applied to poetry that “has been nailed inside the tidy academic coffins of fads and movements, entombed in “post-modernism” or “deconstructionism” or “neo-anythingism.” Agreed. As a reader, I can certainly accept this attitude, because I, too, would prefer not to read about Sosa in the impenetrable jargon that constitutes a great deal of contemporary literary criticism. But Hamill still needs to do his job. Despite his insightful comparisons of Sosa’s poetry with work by Chinese poets from the T’ang dynasty and poetry from the Greek Anthology, Hamill makes no effort to describe, however briefly, what is perhaps most obvious: as a poet writing in Spanish, Sosa is talking with Vallejo, Neruda, and Lorca; he’s also engaged in a dialogue with the Biblical language of the Psalms. Hamill makes a passing reference to the “Contra war in Nicaragua,” but many potential new readers (university students, for example) were born in 1985 and need more to go on. In other words, a good introduction to Sosa’s poetry needs to take into account a generation of readers who were children when the Berlin Wall fell and who truly do not grasp the geopolitical realities that underlie the literal meaning of the title of Sosa’s best collection Un mundo para todos dividido (A World for All, Divided).

But there is something even more disconcerting about the introduction. Although Hamill is a skilled translator himself, he makes no mention at all of Engelbert’s efforts in this regard. In fact, the poem “From Child to Adult” (“De niño a hombre”), which he cites as an example of Sosa’s rejection of “the objectification of women so often associated with Hispanic romantic verse” (though how, I wonder, does Hamill read “Mist Woman”?), should have been an occasion to praise the translator, because the conscious, insistent feminization of Sosa’s masculine child is all Engelbert. Her translation exists on the page opposite the Spanish original as a brilliant counterpoint to Sosa’s entirely more traditional language:

Es fácil dejar a un niño
a merced de los pájaros.

Mirarle sin asombro
los ojos de luces indefensas.

Dejarlo dando voces
entre una multitud.

No entender el idioma
claro de su media lengua.

O decirle a alguien:
es suyo para siempre.

Es fácil,
facilísimo.

Lo difícil
es darle la dimensión
de un hombre verdadero.

It’s easy to abandon a child
to the mercy of birds.

To look without wonder
into her eyes of helpless light.

To let her cry
on a crowded street.

To ignore the clear language
of her baby talk.
Or say to someone:
You can have her,
she’s yours forever.
It’s easy,
very easy.

What is hard
is to give her
the true dimension of a human life.

If translation is a kind of interlingual conversation (facilitated in this particular edition by the en face inclusion of the original Spanish) that seeks to define new equilibriums, editors, reviewers, and teachers, can all serve readers more effectively by becoming engaged in this dialogue themselves on some level. By pointing out the controversial nature of Engelbert’s translation strategy in this instance, there is an opportunity to discuss sexism in language, the role of the translator, and the way one text (the original) attempts to coexist with another (the translation).

Whose responsibility is it to include in an anthology of this kind essential items such as a basic bibliography of the author’s works (including, in this case, the volume of translations by Jim Lindsay that Princeton published some years ago) as well as a very selective listing of critical studies and any available interviews with the author? Does this task correspond to the person who writes the introduction, the translator, the author, the publisher? Curbstone Press, in keeping with its stated mission to seek out and teach “the highest aesthetic expression of the dedication to human rights and intercultural understanding,” is generally very conscientious regarding these issues (and even takes the next step by getting their authors to connect with a diverse public in innovative ways). Perhaps this explains my disappointment with the limitations of Hamill’s introduction in terms of locating Sosa in a literary and sociohistorical context. I wondered, too, why the publisher makes the erroneous statement on the back cover of Sosa’s book that “the poems in The Return of the River were written between 1990 and the present.” One of the advantages of this volume of selected poems is precisely the fact that it includes a range of poetry produced over nearly four decades. As a teacher, I always appreciate it when the publishers of works in translation choose to serve the breadth of their readers in as full a way as possible, overcoming their fears of bringing out an “academic” edition that they assume will be less marketable. Here, in the parochial United States, we usually need all the help we can get when it comes to international authors.

But, ultimately, none of this detracts from the quality of the poems in this anthology. In his prologue, Sosa describes his book as “perhaps the echo of the echo of the eternal return, repeating itself in concentric circles around the dream of a society free of the antihuman nightmare and its fabricated image.” The Return of the River is a stunning collaboration between Roberto Sosa, a world-class poet who needs to be more widely known, and Jo Anne Engelbert, a translator who has created new banks for the river of Sosa’s poetry in English.
Street of Lost Footsteps
By Lyonel Trouillot
Translated and introduction by Linda Coverdale

Lyonel Trouillot’s harrowing novel depicts a night of blazing violence in modern-day Port-au-Prince, and recalls hundreds of years of violence stretching back even before the birth of Haiti in the fires of revolution.

Need for the Bike
By Paul Fournel
Translated by Allan Stoekl

Need for the Bike conducts readers into a personal world of communication whose center is the bicycle, and where all people and things pass by way of the bike.

An Empty House
By Carlos Cerda
Translated by Andrea G. Labinger

A story of contemporary Chile by one of its most prominent novelists, An Empty House depicts the dissolution of an upper-middle-class family against a chilling background of exile, return, and discovery.

Macadam Dreams
By Gisèle Pineau
Translated by C. Dickson

A cyclone inexorably sweeps Eliette into her past in this novel about the wayward violence of love and nature in Guadeloupe.

University of Nebraska Press
800.755.1105
www.nebraskapress.unl.edu
Dedicated to the promotion and advancement of the study and craft of translation, translators, and publishers of translated works since 1978. Annual conferences, newsletters, and the journal *Translation Review* and its supplement, *Annotated Books Received*, provide members of this professional association with the latest information in the field of translation.

American Literary Translators Association
The University of Texas at Dallas
Mail Station MC35, Box 830688
Richardson TX 75083-0688

972-883-2093
Fax: 972-883-6303

www.literarytranslators.org