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EDITORIAL:
HOW SHOULD A TRANSLATOR WALK THROUGH A TEXT?

By Rainer Schulte

In his essay “Good Writers and Good Readers,” Nabokov talks about the art of reading. His advice is a very simple one: there is only one kind of reading and that is re-reading. The translator is first of all also a reader, but a reader of a different kind who leaves nothing untouched in the act of reading. Every detail, every repetition of words, images, sounds, the spaces between paragraphs, the creation of new words, and other linguistic idiosyncrasies have to be registered by the translator-reader. The translator is not only concerned with “what” is written on the page, but also “why” it is written the way it is. Nabokov suggests that a reader in the act of re-reading should read only about five books during a lifetime. Only then would the reader be able to absorb the full impact of a text. Nice advice, but somewhat impractical.

Compared with a pianist, this idea can be taken to another level. Pianists know the notes of the score by heart before they transfer their interpretive perspectives onto the piano. Each note is explored in terms of its sound space and then linked to the next note or seen as part of a chord. Whether the piece is in a major or a minor key will attract the pianist’s reading and interpretation of the score. The multiplicity of interactions that a note of a score can create forces the performers to reconstruct the complexity of a piece that needs their coherent and convincing interpretation to flourish in the performance. At all times, the pianist will try to visualize all the intricate relationships in the act of performance. There are a few performances when every moment of a score, including the silences, blends into an organic vision of the whole. In those moments, the pianist might be able to say, “it” plays and not “I” play.

This kind of scrutiny of a text should also be the task of the translator. Ideally, a translator should know the text by heart, which certainly would be particularly desirable for the translation of poetry. In writing, the semantic levels generally dominate the approach to a text. Words have their primary and secondary meanings, which makes it easier to recognize “what” is in a text. However, like the notes in a score, words change their inherent power of communication as soon as they enter into relationships with other words, images, or metaphors. This situation should prompt the translator as reader to move from the statement of “what” is in the text to “why” it is there. The probing into the layers of meanings below the surface appearance of words leads the translator closer to what a writer might have wanted to communicate. Whatever the interpretive approach to the poem or the novel turns out to be, the translator is then faced with the new task of molding the interpretation into the available sound material, the linguistic possibilities, and the literary and cultural surroundings of the receptor language, which are distinctly different from those of the source language.

In general, discussions of the translation process focus on the semantic elements and structures of literary works. Very little has been written on the sound and rhythmic configurations of literary writings. However, looking back into history, from its very beginnings the literary tradition was an oral one until such time that the written word was spread throughout the world with the invention of the printing press. When James Joyce in 1929 asked his friends in Paris, Samuel Beckett, Alfred Péron, Ivan Goll, and Philippe Soupault, to translate a chapter from his novel Finnegans Wake into French, he was not so much concerned about the transmission of the meaning, but rather how the sounds of vowels and the rhythms of his sentences took on life in French. He wanted to be reaffirmed that meaning...
was equally communicated through sounds and semantics. For him, the power of the sound was as important as, if not even more important than, the semantic associations of words. The challenge any discussion of the practice of translation faces is the oral dimension of literary works. Most scholarship has ignored the treatment of how language and meaning come to flourish through the sound material of a language.

One of the major stylistic features of creating a certain emotional atmosphere in a text is the use of repetitions. However, repetitions are successful only if each repetition presents a slight variation of the previous repetition. If we look at Ilse Aichinger’s marvelous short story “The Bound Man” (“Der Gefesselte”), we will find that the two major driving forces in that story are the concepts of play and the rope. Both of these words are repeated numerous times throughout the story. Yet each time a repetition of the “play” or the “rope” reappears, they are repetitions with a slight variation. When the rope first appears, it is around the arm of the bound man, then we find the rope around the ankle, only to reappear at different places of the body in the rest of the story. The same is true for the recurrence of the word “play.” The variations of the repetitions intensify the effect of the story and challenge the reader to visualize the newly created visual image with each variation.

Equally important are the repetitions of sounds. However, the repetitions of the sounds and sound combinations are not as easily perceptible by the reader. They don't hold the same tangibility as the semantic environments of words, and therefore ask the reader to modify the basic approach to a work. Each vowel, whether in a source language or in the receptor language, colors the atmosphere of a sentence or paragraph. The vowels “i and e” generate a different resonance in the reader than “u” and “o.” Would it be of interest to examine Edgar Allen Poe’s short story “The Masque of the Red Death” as to the use of dark vowels in the story? Does the vowel “u” relate to a situation that is eerie and weird? Are the emotional reactions of certain vowels in the source language the same as in the receptor language? These are concerns that the translator has to play with. The strength of the interpretive perspective that the translator brings to the comprehension of the source-language text will be responsible for a powerful re-creation in the new language.

It is time that we transcend the visual appearance of words on the page toward the inherent tonal quality underlying words as sound spaces. The exploration of the sound material of poetic and fictional works must become the future challenge of critical and scholarly investigations and treatises.
AN INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA HARSHAV

By Rainer Schulte

Barbara Harshav has a distinguished career as a translator from the German, French, Hebrew, and Yiddish. Among her most recent translations are Only Yesterday, by S.Y. Agnon (from Hebrew); Negotiating Identities: States and Immigrants in France and Germany, by Riva Kastoryano (from French); Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age, by Hans Kippenberg (from German); The Labor of Life: Selected Plays, by Hanoch Levin (from Hebrew); Poems of Menke Katz (from Yiddish); Sing Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry (with Benjamin Harshav, from Yiddish); and Snapshots, by Michal Govrin (from Hebrew). Most recently, her translation of Pascal Mercier’s novel Night Train to Lisbon was met with great acclaim.

This is only a small selection of the numerous translations that Barbara Harshav has published during the past decades. In addition to her active life as a translator, she also teaches in the Comparative Literature Department at Yale, where she conducts translation workshops on the art and craft of translation. She is currently the vice president of the American Literary Translators Association and will become its president in 2009.

The following interview with Barbara Harshav reflects her enthusiasm as a translator, her remarkable erudition, and her commitment to the teaching of translation.

Rainer Schulte: You might want to talk about how you got started in the field of translation.

Barbara Harshav: Well, I suspect that like many of us, I fell into translating for various reasons. Let’s go back: as far as my French training is concerned, I learned French in primary school, then went on in high school and then in college. At a certain point, when I no longer was studying it in a formal way, I decided to study French every single day by reading novels, and that practice has continued for about forty years. I begin every day with my morning coffee, with pencil, paper, and dictionary, to read French novels and to write out translations. The practice of writing out the translation of a text is by far more productive than just reading a text. When you are just reading a text, you can easily say “I know what that means,” but you are only half sure. However, if you have to write out a translation, you have to look up the words you don’t understand, you have to get the syntax and all the idioms right. So, it makes it a more difficult enterprise, but also a more rewarding one in terms of really entering into a work.

When I started studying German, I decided that the most efficient way for me to learn a language was to master the basics, and then to start reading my way through newspapers and novels. So I have done that with French and German. As for Hebrew, I started studying Jewish history and realized that I had a serious handicap because I did not know Hebrew at all, not the alphabet, nothing. My parents did me the great favor of not sending me to Hebrew school, where I could learn to hate it the way everybody else did. I was thirty-four years old when I started learning Hebrew, and I literally fell in love with the language. There was the exhilarating feeling of learning a new language and a new alphabet at that age. It must have repeated the original childhood sense of learning to read, when the letters suddenly make sense and a new world is opened. Yiddish is the last language I learned. Knowing German and Hebrew, I had 90 percent of Yiddish. I didn’t learn Yiddish as a child, because my parents spoke the language when they didn’t want us to know what they were saying, and I wasn’t all that interested in what they were saying. I am currently studying Spanish.

Another reason that I got into translation is because the translations that I had read were so
bad. I was living in Jerusalem, doing with Hebrew what I had done with French, that is, taking a book and every morning reading it carefully with my morning coffee. And then I met a writer who was complaining, justifiably, about the awful translations that had been done of his works. I checked the translations and said that I could really do that better, and to my amazement I got my first translation attempt published in a journal. That was a great reinforcement of the whole process, and it was really funny because when I went to meet with the editor of the journal, I realized that I had never published anything as a translator and didn’t consider myself a translator, and that I was just playing. There was another editor from another journal there, and she said that if I was interested in some work, just get in touch with her. And the first editor said, “Don’t steal my translators,” and I thought to myself, “I’m a translator,” and it was sort of stumbling into it.

RS: As you indicated during your presentation to the graduate students of the Translation Workshop at The University of Texas at Dallas, all of your thinking about translation comes from the actual practice of translation, an attitude that I fully share with you. What role then should the theory of translation play, especially in the context of literature and language programs?

BH: My problem is that whenever I look at any theoretical stuff, first of all there is a kind of gibberish that prevails in these studies, and I really don’t quite understand what the whole thing is about. I find it absolutely of no help whatsoever for the practice of translation. By the way, there is an essay by Willis Barnstone that is a kind of explication of the text of Walter Benjamin’s “Task of the Translator,” in which Barnstone concludes that it is of absolutely no practical value. I am against all jargon. When I was an undergraduate, I was taught by my history professors that style is the morality of the mind. In fact, I find a purposeful obfuscation really sinful. It violates good practice. And what I find with many of the theorists is that they really do not know any foreign languages. A lot of the linguists do not know the language they are writing about.

I like to begin at the beginning. Let’s learn languages and respect the language and the cultural differences. I began teaching translation after I came back from my first ALTA Conference in 2001, and we were at Thanksgiving dinner with Mike Holquist, who was then chairman of the Comparative Literature Department at Yale, and I was telling him how exciting it had been to be at this conference. And I told him that we should really have a conference here at Yale on translation, and Michael said “Why a conference, why don’t you teach a course?” and I said “Okay, that sounds like a good idea.” So I began teaching this course, and over the years, I’ve refined it more and more. What we do now is to begin by looking at comparing translations, including such texts as the Bible, poetry, and fiction. My latest exercise, which I think worked out very well this summer, was to copy for the students four different versions of Chekhov’s story “The Lady and the Dog.” I asked the students to engage in the closest analysis possible, and I mean check every comma, compare sentences and paragraphs, and see what these differences mean for the interpretation and understanding of the story. And it was very exciting, for me certainly, and I think for the students as well. They learn how to read very closely. It is fascinating because you see the whole issue of the culture difference and the impact of that. In regard to the style and the language, for example, in the Chekhov exercise, one translation calls her not Anna Sergeyevna, but just Anne. He has her wearing not a fur coat, but a coat. Just those tiny details shift the whole focus of the story, and it is fascinating to me to see precisely what the impact of translation is on conveying literature. I think it is a wonderful tool for teaching literature. One of my Chinese students said that she found most accessible the translation that was most “domesticated,” as it were. It’s not the story that’s the issue here, it is how the story is presented. And that is where translation has the greatest impact. There is also
the issue of untranslatability. For example, Paul Celan’s “Todesfuge” is perhaps the most “accessible” of his poetry, and it is totally untranslatable. What has fascinated me in translations of that poem is that there is a clear choice to be made: “Do you go for meaning or do you go for rhythm?” The Michael Hamburger translation loses a lot of meaning, actually, but keeps the unrelenting rhythm of it. What emerges here as an essential aspect of translation is the whole issue of the cultural background of the translator. A lot of the translators are no longer oriented in the tradition within which they are working.

**RS:** You distinguish yourself from other translators by the fact that you have the language background to translate from several languages. Could you comment on how you manage to move between various languages? Does the involvement in one language facilitate jumping into another language, since you are immediately aware of the different grammatical, syntactical, and cultural idiosyncrasies? How does knowing all of these languages influence your approach to translation?

**BH:** The subject of using more than one language at the same time is fascinating to me. In fact, every day, for my own fun, I translate from French and German at least. So every day I am working with at least two languages. It gives me certain pathways into the other language, but sometimes I am working on something and I say “You know, in German, you can do this,” and so there is a spillover effect that I see in working simultaneously with all these languages. Apparently, I don’t become confused, at least not yet. In the meantime, it’s really been extremely helpful.

**RS:** Do you work at all with some of the electronic resources these days, dictionaries and so on?

**BH:** When I was at the Banff International Translation Center this summer, I didn’t take a bunch of dictionaries with me, which forced me to use electronic resources. Some of them were pretty good, and that was helpful. My problem is that I need pages, and I need to feel the pages, although it was very convenient not to have to drag around forty pounds of dictionaries with you. I found some quite good ones online, but the only problem I found is that for looking up words, they were wonderful, but for looking up phrases, it was problematic.

**RS:** You have translated fictional texts, prose texts, and poetic texts. Could you comment on how you approach the various genres and what particular genre might be closest to your own sensibility? Do you see the translation of poetry as being more difficult than other genres, and would you please comment on any similarities and differences in your working technique for poetry as compared with your working technique for other genres?

**BH:** The first problem with translating poetry is to select the text that can be translated. If one is humble enough, one would say “maybe this can be translated, but I can’t do it.” There are poetic texts that I just don’t feel comfortable doing. Fiction fascinates me, because there is a kind of greater latitude, not latitude in terms of meaning or translation, but latitude in terms of how you can explain things in the text. And of course the nonfiction stuff in some ways requires a little more work. You have to know the vocabulary of the subject, for example. I feel most comfortable translating either literary criticism or history, but I have translated philosophy. The first book I ever translated from German was a biography of Albert Einstein. So I had to go and look up all these physics terms and consulted with a friend of mine who was an expert on Einstein and to confirm that the terms were right. Another German book I translated was on economics, which again required some searching for terminology. What’s funny is that I like to translate nonfiction works because they challenge you in a way that fiction doesn’t: to make nonfiction graceful, interesting, and readable, and again there is greater latitude, not with the meaning, but at least with the style.
RS: There are quite a few very interesting creative essays in other languages, and very few of them are being translated. I am thinking about some of the essays that the German writer Dieter Wellershoff has written on literature and the arts. These are not academic articles; they are creative essays that chart new ways of thinking. I think we should make the translation of essays a regular feature of translation workshops.

BH: I agree with you, it is a genre that is overlooked, I think, and unjustifiably so. Actually, I point out to my students when I do give them Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” that the first task of the reader is the exercise of translating the essay into English before you can possibly understand it.

RS: Perhaps you could talk a little about how your translations were received by critics and readers. Which of your translations did get serious attention, especially with respect to comments about the nature and the accomplishments of the translation? Were any of your translations actually reviewed by critics who were informed about the author, the language, the country?

BH: Michiku Kakutani of the New York Times thinks that the subtext of any review should be “see how clever I am.” Even when she likes a book, her reviews tend to be nasty, or at least ungenerous. I think we could all agree that it is much easier to write a negative review than a positive one. Some critics of translations really do not know the original language. Their reviews are unintelligent, and there is no appreciation for the work of the translator. Another problem with reviews (when critics are unfamiliar with the language) is that they find one or two examples that might be clumsy, without discussing the overall positive rendering of the original in the translation. Often, the reviewer may know the language but not the ins and outs of the translation. There is also the problem of publishers interfering in translation. I once translated a book originally titled “But a few days,” a reference to a biblical passage, but the publisher changed it to the “Love of Jesus,” for reasons obscure to me. One reviewer praised the translation, but criticized me for not translating the title correctly.

RS: What have you learned from interacting with other translators? With writers? Are you associated with any professional organizations, and how has this affected your practice and view of translation?

BH: Yes, it is wonderful. The ideal is when the writer and the translator agree on the text and the language. The most recent example is Night Train to Lisbon by Pascal Mercier. I translated the novel, and the writer sent back some pages, and I suggested that I come to Berlin so we could work on it together for a week, just to make sure we had it right. I read the English aloud and the writer read the German, and together we produced a wonderful collaborative effort. For me, the ideal working relationship with writers is what I call “the tacit contract”: i.e., I know English better than you do, but you know what you want to say. Let’s see if we can reach an agreement that will satisfy us both.

RS: How would you characterize the life of a translator?

BH: My main topic is, what are the criteria for a great translator? I carry books all the time because you never know when the elevator will break down, and I am reading all the time. It is the element of play that is very important. Humility is also important, and the text is sacred. It is also true for performance. You have to have a kind of humility. I take what I do very seriously, but I do not take myself seriously.
TRANSLATION OF FIVE POEMS BY RAÚL ZURITA: TRANSLATION COMMENTARY

By Deborah Krainin

El Amor De Chile, by Raúl Zurita, was written in 1986 during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. First published in Chile in 1987, it met with harsh opposition; however, when republished in 2002, it was met with warm praise. Zurita is an active political voice and prolific author who wrote these poems during what has proved to be a dark historical time in Chile.

When approaching this collection as a whole, I considered essential the idea of how to bring to life a tribute to our permanence, which I believe is the very essence of this collection. In the case of El Amor De Chile, permanence means not only what is found in the natural landscape but also what endures within humanity: mostly love. I approached each poem as a message and a song. The message was always searching for the political undertone, the subliminal embedded in each one. The song was the intention of making the images flourish and breathe color, strength, and voice, as if nature itself were singing through these lines. History marched alongside the collection, and I wanted it to somehow lean in and let its presence be known, but not in an invasive manner. Instead, my hope is that history is almost a shadow that leans across the pages, dark enough to challenge the light, but not enough to eliminate it. The natural landscape is the voice through which Raúl Zurita chose to speak. It is a voice made human by the humanity not just connected to it, but embedded within it. I hope that my translation makes that clear, and more importantly, makes it beautiful. It was in the language of nature where I let my senses speak on the translator’s behalf.

Having access to a living poet enormously helps the final draft of the translation process. It was not until my final draft that I sat down with the poet and visited these translations together. For those images whose underlying intentions were not easily discovered in language, Zurita helped make meaning clear, and for this, I am grateful. I spent two years from start to finish translating the collection of El Amor De Chile. Over that time, I have had the opportunity to truly know the poet, and as a result, hope that I have captured his heart within these lines.

I approached the translation of these poems through literal, historical, and figurative doors. I began my first draft with a literal approach, deciding which images and phrases were based in literal image and which seemed to be out of literal reach. I then applied the literal to the historical time frame in which these poems were written to consider the duality of image and intention. In doing so, I discovered that these poems seemed to belong as a whole. Separate the poems and they can appear out of place. In some measure I felt that, like history, these poems did not want to stand apart, but somehow insisted on being part of a whole. This to me was the success of Zurita’s use of nature embodying the voices of a country and humanity silenced. The question that then arose for me was how to reinforce this poetic monument of a permanence to love and life through nature, without losing the necessary weight of political references when they appear. This quest led me to the figurative in all of its forms, where I tried to not lose either metaphorical or symbolic content.

Aside from the inherent challenges that exist when translating poetry from Spanish to English (re: placement of adjectives, reduction of definite and indefinite articles, the Spanish subjunctive most often formed in our conditional tense) arrives the challenge of making meaning carved by memory, history, and intention. Take, for instance, the poem Tribute Of Love From The Deserts, where one finds the verbs cubrir and repetir. Cubrir means to cover in various uses (to cover something up, to cover over), and repetir
means to repeat, more typically used with repetitive action. In this poem we find the following three lines: por el amor se nos volaron los pastos / que nos cubrian, repite entonces el / desierto de Atacama, .... To translate it literally means for love the fields flew us / that might cover us, repeating then / the Atacama desert. But I knew this could not be the poet’s intent: these words cover and repeat. So I began to consider the verb repetir because I felt that repite was the active verb essential to these lines. I kept digging at the idea of repetition, and since this poem was about earth and fields, I felt that repetition was more about the perennial cycles of rebirth. With this idea about how the earth renew itself, I thought these verbs were definitely about the act of reviving the desert back to life. But how to deal with the verb to cover? I considered whether the intention was bodies hidden, as in the disappeared (who were victims of political torture and murder), but still could not make the image of the eighth line work fluidly. Finally, I went to the poet, who explained that he meant to bury bodies, and then it all came together for me. How what is buried beneath the ground can then become part of the cycle of rebirth, even add to the fertilization of the land. The final images thus becoming for love we flew over the fields that buried our bodies beneath them, /our bodies that then revived / the Atacama desert, ...

There were several more instances when images anchored in verbs were not making themselves clear. A good example of this is the poem Telling You, in which we find the first line Brote mío, lecho de mis sueños. The verb brotar means literally to bud or sprout, and the word brote means a bud or shoot, or figuratively, a sign, hint. Neither verb nor noun were of any help to me initially, so I looked at the word lecho. It means bed, but can mean a bed of many kinds, including a riverbed. From there I looked at the poem as a whole and felt sure, with all of its references to water, streams, and rivers, that the first image was a riverbed of dreams (sueños/dreams). But what to do with brote? Since the initial verbs in the poem deal with things shredding, calling, exploding, spouting, etc., I believed that my choice for brote had to be in keeping somehow with those verbs. So I considered what it is that a flower does when it is budding, and it’s always the beginning of the flower revealing itself; not fully but beginning. Because of the word sueños/dreams, I followed the idea of our dreamscape, knowing that at times, what is most often revealed to us in dream is ourselves, our psyche. From there I chose to create the first line, In the riverbed of my dreams, where I reveal myself. It felt right. But I still had more questions for this poem. In the third line, the poet uses the reflexive verb romperse (to break or tear oneself) and precedes it with my love. Again, does love break or tear itself? The line has two halves, one part (donde mi amor se rompe/ where my love breaks/tears itself) being this reflexive action and the other part, y te llama, translating into and calls you. Could the line be where my love tears itself and calls you? This verb, romperse, was the first verb to indicate things coming apart in the poem, and I wanted to get it right. I let it be and moved on throughout the poem, where I hit stumbling blocks of verb and image intention. The meanings I chose for many verbs were based on a sense of how to create a kind of violence that could rest in these enormous images. Take the two translated lines for instance: like this we rise swelling and dragging ourselves/ along the rushing streams of all those who were loved. I kept getting the sense of the disappeared in this poem, of people absent and missing. I wanted to create an image of how the disappeared might have appeared in the moments before they disappeared, as well as feel the weight of their disappearance by those who had to carry on without them in the madness and not knowing that surrounded them. I thought that employing words like swell and drag as they relate to both water and body could accomplish my intention. By poem’s end, I returned again to the image of love tearing itself. In the end, I chose the verb shred: where my love shreds itself and calls you. I felt that everything was coming apart in this poem and that I needed a verb that further enforced that
image. I conferred with Zurita about my translation of this poem, as I thought that this poem, more than any other in the collection, needed to be rooted equally in the power of image and verb. Zurita confirmed that the translation successfully communicated his intention.

Sometimes the decision seems simple but is not. Take the verb esperar, which can mean to wait or to hope. Normally, the difference between the two in everyday Spanish is clear from the context of a sentence. Not in this collection. The verb is used throughout, and I spent a lot of time considering it. I met a great struggle of decision when translating esperar in the poem Tribute Of Love From The Mountain Ranges. The verb is repeated in the sixth, seventh, and tenth lines Como ustedes se esperan te esperan/Te he esperado tanto, se van diciendo (lines 6 and 7), referring to the mountains as subject. The object You was being used in its formal and informal senses. The question became, were the mountains waiting or hoping for you? Did the intention repeat or alter itself? Hope just didn’t seem right. But I felt this was a collection of hope amid a dark time, and that these poems were meant to speak for Chile. So what was Chile doing? Hoping or waiting? In the end, I leaned toward waiting; waiting out a dark time, waiting for better days, waiting for those disappeared to return. Where was hope? I felt that the gestures of nature were the essence of hope and love, but that they, too, were waiting. I constantly found myself returning to a time in history and trying to apply what I knew of that time with what I instinctively felt the poem was trying to say and do. In the end, I chose wait, and these lines became: How they wait for each other while they wait for you./ For you I have waited so long. With this, I consulted Zurita and he concurred, yes, in fact, he meant wait throughout this poem.

Also inherent in any translation process are the points at which two languages, such as English and Spanish, clash in terms of grammatical structure. Usually these are easily handled when the rules are applied. However, the rules can fail. What was difficult with this translation was that a poet was using verbs outside of their everyday realm. He was choosing verbs at times to function like metaphors, and he was playing with multiple meanings. Take, for instance, the verb renacer, which can mean reborn, renewed, or revived. In the poem The Pastures Vegetations and Winds Greet Us, the second to last line says los renacidos de las aguas. I considered the literal definitions of the verb and asked, were these people (los renacidos) the reborn, the renewed, or the revived? I knew this meaning was essential but not meant to describe the image. So I returned again to history, telling myself these people must be the reappeared (born from the idea that the disappeared could return). And why? Because historical evidence has proved that some bodies of those murdered at the hands of Chile’s military regime were dumped from helicopters into rivers, lakes, and the sea. So not only do these natural elements speak as witness in these poems, but the poems bear witness themselves to the consequences of history during this tragic time. In every line, I meant to honor the history and the love that survives through these verses.

As a translator, it is often impossible to create multiple meanings in the English verbs that do not share those Spanish meanings, as can be seen in the poem A Tribute From The Ice Floes, Icebergs and Glaciers. In the third line, we find the verb derrumbarse, which can mean collapse, shatter, to go to pieces. In the context of image, one can easily concede that the image could be interpreted as the glaciers breaking off into pieces, but again, I wanted to reflect Chile in these poems. I chose devastation because I thought it more accurately reflects the sentiment of loss in a dark time. This poem allows the glaciers to achieve what the country could not and still has not: a unity born from a desire to make things whole.

What this collection achieves, aside from poetry, is the right of a poet to create beauty and permanence during a time that saw a catastrophic demise of these essences of human life. That Zurita chose to sing in a time without song is reason enough. It has been an honor to visit him there through these poems and to help sing these songs anew in my own language.
**HOMENAJE DE LOS TEMPANOS, ICEBERGS Y GLACIARES**

Queridos glaciares, queridas blancuras de mi país…

Queridos y blancos. Ay así, ay así es el amor más blanco que se derrumba se acercan diciendo los blancos glaciares del Pacífico besándose, viniéndose entre los cielos Tras el horizonte, tras las aguas más heladas del amor de este mundo que se rompe mirando Son las cordilleras del mar, les contestan las blancas playas, los poemas, los sueños que lloran mirándose Somos el sueño que todo Chile lloró mirando, responden los albos glaciares ciñéndose desde el océano hacia el sur de este mundo, como todo el amor, como todo el amor, helados, azulándose

**A TRIBUTE FROM THE ICE FLOES, ICEBERGS AND GLACIERS**

Cherished glaciers, cherished whiteness of my country…

The cherished and whites. So this, so this is the love that’s whiter than your devastation, drawing closer, speaking, the Pacific’s white glaciers kissing themselves, arriving among the heavens. Behind the horizon, behind the world’s coldest waters of love that break, are the valleys and peaks of the sea watching, answering the white beaches, the poems, the dreams that weep watching. We are the dream that all Chile wept watching the white glaciers respond by condensing themselves from the ocean toward the south of this world, like all love, like all love icy, blue in each other.

**DICIENDOTE**

Brote mío, lecho de mis sueños

Brote mío, lecho de mis sueños allí donde mi amor se rompe y te llama donde los cielos estallan y las montañas caen también allí brotan nadando las dulces botones de tus aguas Así llegamos así subimos creciendo y arrastrándonos sobre el torrente de todos los que se quisieron Que así perduren también nuestras aguas como los ríos buenos que no se secan y que cuando por fin despertemos del largo sueño de todas estas vidas que volvamos a nacer amplios y torrentosos como los hermanos que vienen y los ríos que bañan

**TELLING YOU**

In the riverbed of my dreams, where I reveal myself

In the riverbed of my dreams where I reveal myself where my love shreds itself and calls you where the heavens explode and the mountains fall there spout the sweet tips of your flowing waters. Like this we arrive like this we rise swelling and dragging ourselves along the rushing streams of all those who were loved Thus, our waters endure as well like benevolent rivers that won’t dry up and when eventually we awaken from the great dream of all these lives that we begin again, and the great torrents like brothers will arrive and the rivers will swim.
SALUDAN LOS PASTOS VEGETACIONES Y VIENTOS

Amados Pastos

Que se vuelan, que se levantan volando desde el primer amor que subió sobre las llanuras; los pastos de nuestros cuerpos tendidos perdonándose como habrán de perdonarse todas las cosas tendidas bajo el cielo Pero de dónde han llegado, nos preguntan los sangrientos arenales, resecos de pena, arrastrándose Es que se nos cuajó de pasto la terrible noche y somos la multitud que marchará renacida bajo el viento, les contestamos nosotros los renacidos de las aguas todavía húmedos, como el horizonte, meciéndonos

HOMENAJE DE AMOR DE LOS DESIERTOS

Queridos, amados desiertos Quién podría la enorme dignidad del desierto de Atacama como un pájaro se eleva sobre los cielos apenas empujado por el viento

Purgatorio

Por el amor llegamos, por el amor subimos, por el amor se nos volaron los pastos que nos cubrían, repite entonces el desierto de Atacama, inmenso, tendido frente a los Andes, mirándolo Es que los ríos entraron sobre el cielo y nos dejaron huecos, vacíos, quemándonos como el sueño frente al alba Es que el amor nos quemó como el sueño y somos los arenales, somos ustedes, somos las líneas de Zurita, nos contestan los desiertos de Chile, infinitos, mudos de amor, llamándonos

THE PASTURES VEGETATIONS AND WINDS GREET US

Beloved pastures

That you fly, that you rise soaring from the first love that rose above the plains; the pastures of our bodies laid together forgiving each other like they will have forgiven all things laid beneath the sky. But from where have they arrived, the bloody sands ask us, slivers of grief, dragging each other. It’s as if the terrible pasture of night congealed us together and we are the multitude that will march revived beneath the wind, we answer them the reappeared from the waters still wet, like the horizon, rocking us.

A TRIBUTE OF LOVE FROM THE DESERTS

Dear, beloved deserts

Who could disturb the enormous dignity of the Atacama desert, like a bird that thermals above the skies, hardly pushed by the wind.

Purgatory

For love we reached, for love we rose, for love we flew over the fields that buried our bodies beneath them, our bodies that then revived the Atacama desert, immense, stretching open towards the Andes that fix their gaze upon it. From above the sky the rivers arrived and left us hollow, empty, burning like an open dream at dawn. It is love that burned us like the dream and we are the sands, we are them, we are the lines of Zurita, the deserts of Chile answer us, endless silences of love, calling us
HOMENAJE DE AMOR DE LAS CORDILLERAS

Queridas cordilleras

Todas las cosas viven y se aman. Las grandes montañas y las nieves que se levantan azules y se miran
Como ustedes se miran te miran
Como ustedes se esperan te esperan
Te he esperado tanto, se van diciendo unas a otras las preñadas montañas, arriba, besándose
Toda la nieve te he esperado, responden al unísono los desbordados horizontes de los Andes abriéndose igual que todas las cosas,
igual que tú
a quien ahora saludan estas cumbres
y a quien yo saludo
largando la nota más alta de las cordilleras

A TRIBUTE OF LOVE FROM THE MOUNTAIN RANGES

Dear mountain ranges

All things live and love. The great mountains and snows rise blue and look at themselves
How they look at each other while they look at you
How they wait for each other while they wait for you
For you, I have waited so long; the mountains go on saying something
to other pregnant mountains, even higher, kissing each other
All the snow I have kept waiting for you
the overflowing horizons of the Andes answer in unison opening themselves, just like all things
just like you
to whom now these summits salute
and to whom I salute releasing the note much higher than these peaks.
ON TRANSLATING BADLY: SACRIFICING AUTHENTICITY OF LANGUAGE IN THE INTEREST OF STORY AND CHARACTER

By Clare Sullivan

I believe it is fair to say that translators are, by and large, meticulous people. Fastidious. Exacting. Fussy. But then in fairness we bear a heavy responsibility: that of absorbing the full intent of an author and rendering that intent, as faithfully and authentically as possibly, in another language. It is a task of broad assimilation; in the case of a work like a novel, the assimilation of philosophy, theme, plot, and character as well as of language. Successful translation is therefore a holistic act, one that demands a total grasp of subject, from overarching concept to the most minuscule detail.

Yet for many of us, the multidimensionality of the translating task becomes obscured by the particulars of the languages we work in. We obsess over individual words and phrases, poring over dictionaries and thesauri in search of the combination of syllables that conveys just the right nuances of meaning, context, rhythm, and sound. This is of course understandable, and arguably the job description of a translator. Yet in that obsession lies risk: of losing sight of the larger elements of the story in a single-minded pursuit of linguistic accuracy.

It is the kind of mistake I very nearly made in the course of a recent project, the translation of the novel *Un martes como hoy* (2004) by Cecilia Urbina, whereby I failed to take into account the background, intentions, and limitations of one of the novel’s central characters. The initial mistake, which was rooted primarily in the dialogue, was an honest one, springing from a translator’s instinct to authentically render period language. Yet had I not ultimately perceived the error, much of the playfulness and feel of the original novel, to say nothing of some of the larger thematic elements, might well have been lost. The following essay is the story of the error that nearly was.

*Un martes como hoy*

*Un martes como hoy* is a short novel, a modern-day rendering of a Chaucerian frame story. Just as in The Canterbury Tales, the central characters are travelers: two sisters, Márkgara and Camila, and a man by the name of David whom they meet one evening in a hotel bar. All are Mexican, and in their own way, story tellers. Stranded at various points in the novel with very little to do, they pass long and uneventful evenings imaginatively reconstructing the history of one of the sisters’ long-lost ancestors: a mysterious great-grandfather by the name of Francisco Videgaray. These portions of the novel, in which the primary characters take turns adding to a group fiction, are set in modern-day Cambodia. The tale they tell takes place primarily in the American Old West. Both plot lines are romances, though of distinctly different kinds: one an intellectual and semi-realistic love triangle, the other a wild, cinematic fantasy.

The primary teller of the Old West story-within-a-story is David, who begins his narrative with this interesting rhetorical appeal: Francisco Videgaray lived the myth of the Old West before it even existed. My source (and he’s completely trustworthy) told me that the idea we have of the West is a myth, created in our collective imagination by books and especially movies. Thus at the end of the 19th century the Old West was still a real place, with all the familiar figures, but it hadn’t taken its place in the geography of fantasy. Heroes abounded, and their deeds, astonishing as they were, were remembered. But the legend was still in the making. The cowboys, the pioneers, the gold-miners, the gunslingers, bad guys maybe, if it isn’t too politically incorrect to say so, the homesteaders and their mad races to stake out the best plot of land, the Indians
(who’ve since been transformed by our changing ideologies from assassins to victims), the entire cast of that archetypal movie we know as the American West was in place, but it was all too close to be appreciated as the fiction it would become.¹ (64–65)

Thus does David lay claim to authentic knowledge of the “real” West, a West unpolluted by the mythology of popular books and movies, and by extension the language that was used there. Knowing very little, indeed nothing, of his history at this point in the book, Márgara and Camila accept his authority in this area, as indeed did I. I therefore began (just as other translators might when reading through a novel for the first time) to accumulate a set of sources of authentic Old Western English.

Deadwood: A Taste of the “Real” West?

Since the debut of HBO’s Deadwood series in 2004, much has been written in the popular press about the presumed authenticity of its language. Indeed, the dialogue in Deadwood is replete with anachronistic sentence structures and vocabulary, to say nothing of gratuitous profanity. Slate magazine television critic Matt Feeny described the language of Deadwood in this way:

In interviews, (Executive Producer David Milch) has insisted that the show, particularly the flamboyantly vulgar dialogue, is based on rigorous historical research [...]. Deadwood’s characters utter long, serpentine sentences, in diction that — depending on the speaker — can ascend to courtly abstraction or sink to the ripest vulgarity. (Feeny)

Milch himself has said this about the language in Deadwood:

I wish more people had noticed the overall language, the rhythms of period speech that we tried so hard to re-create, and the richness of the imagery. Profanity, I’ve come to believe, was the lingua franca of the time and place, which is to say that anyone, no matter what his or her background, could connect with almost anyone else on the frontier through the use of profanity. But there’s so much more to the dialogue than just the profanity. The language of the characters in the show is never generic, and everyone’s is different. They come from different backgrounds, different parts of the country, and they all express themselves a little differently. [...] These are people, you know, who all grew up long before the age of electronic media, when regional speech patterns began to lose their distinctiveness. Many of them might have been illiterate, but they knew the King James Bible and Shakespeare, and that’s what shaped the way they thought and the way they expressed themselves. (Barra)

Whether Deadwood does indeed render Western frontier language accurately remains an open question. Yet Milch’s sources, which included Library of Congress papers on oral history and H.L. Mencken’s The American Language seemed as likely a place as any to begin my investigations into what authentic Old Western English sounded like. That is, until, toward the very end of Un martes, I came across this critical piece of dialogue:

Márgara: Well anyway, you never did tell me how you came to know so much about the West.
David: Margarita, what you’re getting is a rehash of all the cowboy movies I’ve ever seen in my life. The story of Francisco that I’m telling you may be the only Western I know that’s true. (154)

It was an admission that seemed to render much of the cursory research I had done up to that point superfluous. Yet not everything about the Old West that crops up in popular culture is fictitious, I reasoned. Quite a few Western films and television shows, particularly those produced over the past ten to twenty years, are notable for their rigorous attention to detail. Might that not be enough such that I could simply assume David had at least a working
knowledge of authentic Western language and customs? The notion was at least plausible, yet subsequent investigations into the character of David yielded a range of evidence that he was no scholar of 19th-century America.

First, there is David’s background. He is a Mexican man in his late 30s who works as a paper mill executive. Though it is true that he spent most of his formative years living in America, there is nothing in Un martes to suggest that he passed them poring over Old West anthropological texts. Rather, his exposure to the Old West would most likely have come via movies, television shows, and novels. Then there is the tale itself, which as previously mentioned is highly cinematic, festooned with Western clichés. This strongly indicated that most of David’s experience of the American Old West has come to him via popular culture. Yet there was a mitigating factor that precluded such crude methodology: David’s motivations.

David is not setting out to create a comic epic. He is not trying to be “kitschy.” In fact, what he is attempting to do is compose a narrative that could plausibly pass for, and conceivably become, a permanent piece of Márgara and Camila’s family history: their great-grandfather’s “missing years,” about which no one else in the family has any information. Thus the previously cited appeal to his fictional “source,” designed to lend authority to the story he is preparing to tell. Had David ever studied or had access to true-to-life details about the Old West, there is no doubt in my mind he would have used them, for he is desperate to give the appearance of authority, yet all he knows has been mediated by popular culture. The voice I was tasked with creating for his tale, then, was one that was neither rigorously authentic nor wildly exaggerated. Some midpoint would have to be reached.

In Search of an Inauthentic Authenticity

How then to construct a style of dialogue that was on the one hand phony, yet had the ring of truth (or at least a ring that was true enough to suspend the disbelief of neophytes like Márgara and Camila)? A rough taxonomy of language, I decided, was the first order of business.

In general, I found that the cowboy language in Un martes como hoy belonged to four broad categories: saloon jargon, gambling words, terminology for violence and law enforcement, and common expressions. All were rendered in Spanish in the original text (Urbina chose not to leave them in their original English, with one exception for the sake of authenticity), which required that I retranslate them back into English. Of these four categories, I determined that the first three were employed largely in scene-setting: place descriptions, object descriptions, and to a lesser extent character descriptions. These were critical to creating a believable sense of “place” within which the less plausible aspects of the tale, primarily the dialogue and action, would occur. Thus, when it came to “scene-setting” language, I largely sought out reference tools that stayed true to the period. Of these, the most helpful were Robert Hendrickson’s Happy Trails: A Dictionary of Western Expressions and Western Words: A Dictionary of the American West by Ramon Adams.

For the action and dialogue, however, my primary sources were popular culture. I sought to glean as much as I could from the language and customs of such Western films as Stagecoach and The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance. Thus, in the end, I arrived at a translation methodology that was the direct inversion of Sanford Meisner’s famous dictum that good acting is “living truthfully under imaginary circumstances.” For me, translating David’s Old West portion of Un martes was an exercise in creating realistic circumstances in which imaginary, dare I say even absurd, action and dialogue would occur. The subsequent text provides a window into some of my decision-making processes.
As mentioned, the hero of the Old West portion of Un martes is the great-grandfather of two of the novel’s central characters, one Francisco Videgaray, who flees his wealthy family’s hacienda in Mexico, ultimately landing in a ramshackle hotel in a small Western town. Upon arrival, he heads directly to the hotel’s bar, the word for which in the parlance of the time, according to Hendrickson, would have been “cantina,” not “saloon” or “bar.” This because of the heavy influence of Spanish in the territory (“cantina,” in fact, comes from the Italian.) (Moliner 500). Adams, by comparison, includes both “cantina” and “saloon” in his dictionary. The website “Legends of America” also has an extensive section about “saloons” and their attributes. In the end, I chose cantina because I wanted to underscore the presence of Spanish in the Old West due to its proximity to Mexico and the overlap of territories before the Spanish-American War.

The word “whiskey” posed different problems in that there were so many different terms for it. My only guidance was a conviction that most terms wouldn’t be appropriate in that they contained references to particular Indian tribes or ingredients. I thus shied away from words like “firewater,” both because it had a more specific meaning and because I was saving the cliché-sounding language for the action sequences. In the end, I settled on the more general “liquor” and “rotgut.” It was for similar reasons that I gravitated toward more expected words like “barkeep” and “bartender” instead of the more garish, if authentic, terms like “bar dog” (Hendrickson 16). Interestingly, in the novel Urbina uses “cantinero,” even though the bar isn’t called a “cantina” but a “barra.”

The terminology of gambling is of course closely related to that of drinking, because practitioners of the latter were frequently also practitioners of the former. Francisco is in fact a consummate gambler. Indeed, it was his love of cards, and even more than that cheating at cards, that drove him from his family’s hacienda in the first place. He therefore lived in constant fear of being revealed as a swindler.

He was conscious of the fact that his gun wasn’t just some erotic decoration, that it had a use. But then if things got ugly, if one of the rival players that [he] routinely bilked put up a genuine fuss, what good would that little thing do [him]? (153)

According to Hendrickson, “bilked” was the most common term for cheating at the time (22). Here I rejected the term “fleeced,” which, although it does date to the late 1500s, according to the Oxford Unabridged Dictionary, was not precisely associated with gambling.

“Wrangling” (Hendrickson 250) was one of the most popular terms to describe informal barroom fighting at the time. Indeed, Francisco finds himself confronted by just such a circumstance when he cheats a notorious gambler by the name of Four-Aces Jack. This was a scene replete with opportunities to employ period language for violence and law enforcement. Four-Aces Jack challenges Francisco to a “shoot-out” (Hendrickson 210) that subsequently attracts the attention of local law enforcement. Here again there was a great temptation, especially since this descriptive language occurred in such close proximity to an action sequence, to use an authentic term like “law dog” (Hendrickson 146) or “great seizer”. Yet “sheriff” still seemed the most appropriate, particularly in that Urbina uses the English word in the original text. She explained why in one of our correspondences:

I used sheriff because the equivalent in Mexico would be (I think) “alguacil,” but nobody would think of that when picturing a Western scene; after all, all the images about the Old West come from films, and the term “sheriff” just pops up naturally, even in Spanish. If one were talking about a story of the West in Spanish, one would say “el malvado sheriff” or “el valiente sheriff,” but never anything else (e-mail).

I’m Not Gonna Hit Ya, Pilgrim

In the end, it was the dialogue and action sequences that allowed, dare I say demanded, the cliché-ridden language that peppers David’s
tale, especially in its final stages. Abhorrent as it might normally be for a self-respecting translator to indulge in such high camp, it was nevertheless necessary, given that the language is so central to understanding the David character and broader themes of romantic attachment that run through the book. The original text did contain several such examples; however, they frequently failed to convey the requisite tone when translated word-for-word from the original Spanish. I thus replaced many of them with well-known sayings from popular culture; the words “Buen viaje,” for example (Urbina 131). This phrase literally means “good trip”; however, in the context of Francisco’s tale, I translated it as “happy trails,” because the latter is much more hackneyed, though curiously enough quite authentic in its usage. According to Hendricks on, whose book employs the phrase as its title, “happy trails” really was a well-known saying of the time, commonly used as a ‘farewell” among cowboys who encountered one another by chance along the trail (119).

The description of the Four-Aces Jack character holds that he was: “muy violento y un gran tirador” (Urbina 136) [“He’s very violent and a great shot”], which I ramped up somewhat by translating it as “mean as a snake and handy with a six-gun” (155). Subsequently he is described as “enjuto” (Urbina 136) [“skinny or dried up”], though in English the line reads: “Four-Aces Jack was as lean and gnarly as a desert willow” (155).

As saddle-worn as these expressions might feel, they were nothing compared to the kitsch that occurs when Francisco finds himself stranded in a Native American village toward the very end of his story. Earlier in the novel, David had used the name “pieles rojos” (63) [red skins], a term which I indeed employed at various junctures. Even so, it was this line, in one of Francisco’s conversations with a tribal elder, that provided me with the opportunity to employ one of the most pristine examples of popular serial Western triteness: “[S]e quitó la pipa de la boca y le dijo, en un español entrecortado, tengo un mensaje para ti, forastero.” (155) I translated it this way: “He took the pipe from his mouth and said in broken Spanish: I have a message for you, kemosabe.” (180) Some may of course call this heavy-handed, since in the original term, “forastero,” simply means “stranger.” Yet as mentioned, this dialogue comes very near the end of the Francisco tale, which is itself a flurry of campy Hollywood plot twists and devices. (This scene in fact features two Native American characters smoking peace pipes.) Such an obvious bow to popular culture served my purpose of starkly emphasizing the symbolic place Francisco’s story holds within the broader novel.

At this point, I think a brief digression into the history of the expression “kemo sabe” is warranted. Although it has long been the subject of debate, “kemo sabe” is generally thought to have first been used by the character Tonto in the television series *The Lone Ranger*, written by Fran Striker. Striker was never asked, and never discussed, the origin of “kemo sabe.” However, his son, who has explored possible connections to far-flung tribes in Arizona and the Southwest, conjectures that the term most likely came from his father’s personal experiences at “Ke Mo Sah Bee” summer camp in Michigan. Tonto was in fact supposed to be a member of a Great Lakes tribe, the Potawatomi (Striker). The origin of the term has yet to be proven definitively, but the important thing is the place it holds for English speakers as one of the ultimate examples of pop Western kitsch.

The clear question at this juncture might well be: why is it so important to translate this dialogue poorly, and employ such tired vocabulary? The answer is that in the same way the Francisco tale devolves from a plausible fictional history into increasingly outlandish camp, the character of David inexorably descends from figure of mystery, authority, and respect into a simple and familiar cliché: a dreamer, a romantic, a boy in a man’s body endlessly reliving a childish fantasy in which he casts himself as the tragic hero. This fact is made clear in the final pages of the book when Márgrara describes him like this:

There’s something of the frustrated adventurer in him, he’s attracted to
impossible tasks. He told me a story … it was nothing but a litany of grand failures. My sense was that deep down he was talking about some utopian alter ego of his, the one he’d liked to have been. Maybe not in the West, but out in some imaginary territory where men run crazy risks and fall hopelessly in love with fearless women. (157)

Yet I also found other important uses for key pieces of pop culture within the text. Notably the word “pilgrim,” which undoubtedly rivals “kemo sabe” for the place of highest honor in Hollywood and serial Western satire. “Pilgrim” was first used by John Wayne in the film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) and then subsequently in *McLintock* (1963) (Anderson).

According to the website “Legends of America,” pilgrim is “a cowboy term for easterner or novice cowhand” (Weiser). In the context of the Old West (or this novel’s version of it), pilgrims are settlers who, like Francisco, have left their homelands to seek their fortune on the American frontier. When Francisco first arrives in the West after crossing the border, a stranger invites him to share a drink in this way: “Hey, muchacho, ven a tomar una copa.” (90) It’s a greeting that translates literally as “Hey, boy, come have a drink,” though I translated it instead as “Howdy, pilgrim. Sit yourself down and have a drink.” (97) On the one hand, this term fits nicely into the mission of the translation as I have described it. Yet by no small coincidence, I was also able to use it to shed even broader light on the novel *Un martes* itself.

For the idea of pilgrims and pilgrimages is one of the central themes of the book. The protagonists of the novel indeed describe themselves in this way when they first settle down to tell their group tale by lamplight. They compare themselves directly to the pilgrims of the *Canterbury Tales*, and their day-to-day escapades among the ruin of Preah Kan to a pilgrimage. Indeed, Urbina chose to set the main action of the novel at Angkor because of its significance as a stopping point for pilgrims in ancient Cambodia during the twelfth century.

The themes are brought together by the character Márbara in this passage:

Would they be like Europeans? The ones on the road to Santiago? Or like the characters from the stories told by the bonfire on the way to Canterbury? Submissive pilgrims, their tired steps demanded of them by the gods. They traveled the docile prairies of England or the arid, Spanish paths. This would be a perilous way, where one was at the mercy of beasts, of a natural world capable of swallowing armies whole and leaving no trace. “Could we be the modern pilgrims?” she wonders. […] “[W]e are seeking something beyond what we know. Not to see it, but rather to live it. An experience that only the unknown can give.” (24–25)

Clearly there is resonance here to the Francisco tale, because, although they are written in markedly different styles, both narratives are explorations of the theme of seeking oneself in a foreign land. And indeed in the same way that the ancient Cambodians sought to discover themselves via pilgrimages to Angkor, David, Márbara, and Camila are participating in a kind of journey-ritual, as is Francisco when he journeys from his Mexican home to the Old West. Thus are three distinct strains of one predominant theme brought together by the use of the word “pilgrim,” a term that did not appear in the Old West tale in the original Spanish, but by happy coincidence I was able to use to great effect within the translation.

My goal in using such exaggerated speech thus had several tiers. More than for sheer entertainment value, or to streamline the reading process for American audiences, it served to shed light onto the deeper meanings of the novel that might not have been present had I executed either a word-for-word translation, or one that stayed “truer” to the period speech that suffused the Francisco tale. Though I can conceive of a sense in which this might be considered bad translation (at least in the narrow sense), in the end I believe it serves the reader by inviting deeper entry into the novel.
Notes

1 All translations in this essay are taken from the forthcoming book: Cecilia Urbina, On a Tuesday Like Today (San Antonio. Wings Press. 2008).


5 The comic term for sheriff “great seizer” was a play on words from “Great Caesar.” Robert Hendrickson, Happy Trails: A Dictionary of Western Expressions (New York. Facts on File. 1994) 113.

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TRANSLATING MARÍA LUISA BOMBAL’S LA ÚLTIMA NIEBLA

By Ashley Hope Perez

Until now, Chilean María Luisa Bombal’s influential novel La última niebla has been available to English speakers only through the 1982 translation by Lucía Guerra-Cunningham and Richard Cunningham (collected in New Islands and Other Stories by María Luisa Bombal). Certainly, this translation was an important step, for it gave English speakers their first opportunity to access Bombal’s fiction. But although Lucía Guerra is a noted and active Bombal scholar, even a cursory examination of the New Islands text reveals numerous distortions and intrusions.¹ The Guerra-Cunningham translation tends toward paraphrase, frequently omits images, glosses over intentionally repeated language, explicates what is left ambiguous in the original, and interpolates countless similes of the translators’ invention. Reading the Guerra-Cunningham translation, one would be hard pressed to recognize Bombal as a precursor to magical realism, a fact so evident in the Spanish that Carlos Fuentes said, “María Luisa Bombal is the mother of us all.”² Although she wrote only two novels in Spanish, one in English, and a little more than half a dozen stories, Bombal nevertheless broadened the range of strategies in Latin American fiction by blending fantasy, deeply subjective narrative, and sustained ambiguity into an imagistic and lyrical form of prose.

Characteristic of both the style and content of Bombal’s fiction in Spanish, La última niebla provides an intimate portrait of a woman trapped in an unhappy marriage and isolated from others on her husband’s mist-covered hacienda. First-person narration connects the reader to the unnamed speaker as she struggles against her husband’s indifference, the unrelenting presence of the mist, and her life’s sheer lack of stimulation. Yet the reader is never sure whether the experiences the speaker describes so vividly — approaching the corpse of a young girl, bathing nude in a pond, meeting a lover in secret, seeing him pass through the woods in a carriage, going in search of his home in the city — are real or whether they exist only in her imagination to compensate for the stifling nature of reality.

A New Translation

My decision to translate La última niebla was ultimately one of expediency: I wanted to be able to expose students to Bombal’s narrative style and challenge them with the deep ambiguities of her writing. When I located the Guerra-Cunningham translation, I found it so far removed from the Spanish text, so deeply compromised, that I knew I could not teach with it. Of course, all translations of complex fiction require some compromises. But in making these compromises, the central goal of the translator must be to create an experience in English that parallels the experience of reading the original as closely as possible.

I worked to match Bombal’s phrasing and word choice, guarding carefully against paraphrase. Consider the following example:

El pálido otoño parece haber robado al estío esta ardiente mañana de sol (24).

The passage describes the unseasonable weather with a novel image, one of autumn stealing a hot day from summer. The preservation of this image is crucial, and I devised the following translation, which respects the phrasing and imagery of the original: “The pale autumn seems to have stolen this sun-scorched morning from summer” (Perez 17). But the Cunninghams translate the sentence as “Instead of autumn’s usual pale offering, this warm sunny morning seems more like summer,” eliminating the very feature that made the sentence fresh and interesting. Their “warm sunny morning” fails to capture the edge implied by “ardiente,” an adjective derived from the Spanish verb arder,
to burn. And what about the structure of the sentence itself? Why create an awkward dependent clause (“Instead of autumn’s usual pale offering”) when the original is a clean declarative sentence?

Because the sentence is the basic unit of meaning in any text, I strove to preserve Bombal’s own divisions whenever possible. In a few instances, however, I was forced to split a sentence because English simply would not support the structure and the amount of information that the original contained. For example:

Esta muerta, sobre la cual no se me ocurriría inclinarme para llamarla, porque parece que no hubiera vivido nunca, me sugiere de pronto la palabra silencio (12).

A literal translation of the sentence would read: “This dead girl, over whom it would never occur to me to lean in order to call her name, because she seems never to have lived, suggests to me suddenly the word silence.” In this instance, English will not tolerate this level of subordination, even though the structure of the original falls within accepted Spanish usage. To avoid creating the impression that Bombal was deliberately disregarding grammatical norms, I settled on the following translation: “It would never occur to me to lean down to her and call her name because she seems never to have been alive. This dead girl suggests to me suddenly the word silence” (Perez 5). Although divided into two sentences, this rendering still preserves Bombal’s grouping of words and ideas.

Maintaining the shape of Bombal’s sentences is especially important because her narrative relies heavily on the connection between the speaker’s experience of her world and the reader’s experience of the text to elicit empathy for the protagonist. The reader feels the intensity of the speaker’s physical sensations through the short sentences that report them directly: “I look at her,” “I begin to tremble,” “I move closer,” “I hear footsteps approaching.” The simple construction focuses the reader’s attention on the “I” of the narrative, and through the present tense, her world unfolds for the reader at the same time as it is unfolding for her. As Amado Alonso notes, Bombal intensifies this effect by revealing information only as it becomes immediately relevant (16). Bombal tells us, “I enter the parlor through the door that opens onto the bed of rhododendrons” (Perez 6), and the bed of rhododendrons and the parlor become real for us at the exact moment in which they enter the speaker’s consciousness.

Bombal juxtaposes these clear sensory moments with intricate descriptions that correspond to the speaker’s disquietude: “Last night I dreamt that [the mist] slipped through the cracks around doors and windows and into the house, into my room, that it softened the color of the walls and the outlines of the furniture, that it wove itself into my hair, that it clung to my body and erased it completely, completely…” (Perez 10). These long, intricately woven sentences prove disorienting, and the reader anxiously awaits the terminal punctuation, thereby sharing the speaker’s “vague uneasiness.”

The contrast between simple and elaborate sentence constructions reflects a fundamental tension in key dreamlike passages of the text. Complex, almost disorienting descriptions suggest that the speaker is dreaming, but these intricate constructions are punctuated by clean statements of sensation whose very clarity seems to point, paradoxically, to the reality of the experience. Although this contrast is abundantly apparent in the Spanish, readers of the New Islands translation would have difficulty detecting it. The Cunninghams often diminish the effect of Bombal’s direct sentences by combining them to form more conventional sentences or omitting them altogether.

Similarly, the Cunninghams tend to undermine the ambiguity of the original by inserting clarifications of the events the speaker narrates. For example, where the original states simply, “A moan, then a pause” (Perez 31), the New Islands translation reads, “His mother groans” (39). This translation suggests that the speaker immediately attaches the moan to her mother-in-law, when in fact she experiences it first as pure sound and only later connects it to
her mother-in-law: “His mother has thrown herself around her son’s neck” (Perez 31). The Cunninghams interpolate a summation of the speaker’s thoughts as she observes the scene: “Compared to Regina’s, my life has been a charade performed in shadows” (40). This forced observation simply does not exist in the original; instead, the reader can only infer the speaker’s reaction through the subtle tonal shifts of the narrative. Another intrusion by the translators appears in the next paragraph:

Are these short, repetitive sobs mine? These ridiculous sobs like hiccups that suddenly sow confusion and misunderstanding in the room around me? (Perez 32)

In Bombal’s text, the speaker’s motivations for crying are left ambiguous, but the New Islands translation imposes a definite cause for her distress by inserting the following at the beginning of the original paragraph: “And now at last come the tears, brought on by pity not for Regina but for myself” (40).

The Cunninghams’ inserted explanations make the speaker of La última niebla seem concerned with clarifying the events that take place. But this is a definite misrepresentation of her markedly solipsistic character. The speaker rarely orients the reader; instead, settings, the identity of characters, and the significance of events must be inferred, often with difficulty. It is impossible to establish any reliable timeline of the narrated events, nor is it clear which events occur in the “real” world and which events occur only within the landscape of the speaker’s mind. This ambiguity extends to the speaker herself; she, too, struggles to distinguish between memory and fantasy, reality and dream. The reader’s sense of disorientation is part of the very effect Bombal seeks to achieve; it is not a mistake to be “corrected” by translators.

Although Bombal frequently employs imagery in La última niebla, readers of the New Islands translation are likely to come away with a skewed perspective of her use of metaphorical language. The Cunninghams take great liberties with the text and often alter its language or embellish it with similes that simply do not exist in the original. These intrusions are so frequent that they nearly double the instances of metaphor in the text. For example, the Cunninghams remove a reference to trembling “shooting through my body like lightning” (Perez 28) and insert instead, “my hands shake like an old woman’s with palsy” (35). The Cunninghams’ speaker, not Bombal’s, declares that her lover is “stamped indelibly on my life like an image on porcelain” (36) and that she detests her cousin Felipe’s “wearing of decorum as though it were a suit of armor” (39). The Guerra-Cunningham translation also adds a description of a sunray piercing the speaker’s path “like a lance stuck in the earth” (9). The Cunninghams redefine a woman’s desperate gestures as being “like those of a drowning woman thrashing in the waves” (39). English-speaking readers have no way of knowing that these awkward comparisons simply do not exist in the original.

Some of the Cunninghams’ inserted comparisons and images complicate the reading of the text because they attribute to the speaker knowledge or experience that she may not possess. For example, in a section in which the speaker describes how her body has become angular, the New Islands translation has her compare herself to “one of Picasso’s nudes” (19). Bombal’s speaker never makes this comparison, nor is there any reason to believe that her convent education would have provided her with any exposure to avant-garde art. Elsewhere, the original compares the mirrors in the speaker’s bedroom to “pools of water” that “brought to mind the gentle flow of clear ponds” (Perez 24), but the translators render the latter half of the comparison as “pools of clear water reflecting sunlight in the Andes” (30, emphasis mine). Given her circumscribed existence, the speaker may never even have seen the Andes. By inserting references to information likely beyond the realm of the protagonist’s experiences, the Cunninghams undermine Bombal’s effort to portray the painful limitations of her character’s life.

Another troubling embellishment comes in one of the final sections of the novel, where the
Cunninghams translate “amor, vértigo y abandono” as “love, the dizzying violence of passion, and the great deliverance that comes like a calm when the storm of sex has passed” (45). In expanding a tight, three-word series that could be easily translated as “love, vertigo, and abandon” into twenty-two words, the New Islands translation also inserts text that is completely incompatible with the narrator of La última niebla. Certainly La última niebla is strikingly progressive, for it provides the first narration in Latin American literature of a sexual encounter from the woman’s perspective. But we must remember that the speaker herself reports this experience naïvely. She never names her orgasm as such, but rather leads us through the experience of it: “Something like a sob rises in my throat, and I don’t know why I begin to moan, and I don’t know why it is sweet to moan, why my body finds sweet this exhaustion brought on by the precious weight between my thighs” (Perez 14). This is not a woman capable of using the word “sex” (Bombal certainly doesn’t have her do so), and readers of the English should not be led to believe that she is.

Guerra herself has noted that Bombal’s writing is characterized by “logic, precision, and symmetry” (9), and indeed the organization of La última niebla is marked symmetrical, with key images and phrasing establishing clear links between parallel passages. But in several places the Guerra-Cunningham translation obscures important connections between passages by altering Bombal’s word choice. The final lines of La última niebla provide a perfect example:

Alrededor de nosotros, la niebla presta a las cosas un carácter de inmovilidad definitiva.

I translate the sentence closely to the original, as “The mist presses down around us and lends to things a character of definite immobility” (Perez 38). Here, Bombal strategically reintroduces the idea of immobility that has been repeatedly linked to the mist throughout the text. Despite the structural and symbolic significance of the word “immobility,” the Cunninghams translate the last line, “Around us the fog settles over everything like a shroud” (47, emphasis mine). The simile “like a shroud” introduces a questionable connection between death and the mist that haunts the narrator. Moreover, the alteration obscures the important connection between the final word of the text and the related images woven throughout the narrative.

Conclusion

Bombal’s use of vivid imagery, carefully orchestrated sentences, disorienting description, and intimate narrative helped change the course of Spanish-American fiction. My purpose in completing a new translation of The Final Mist has been to bring the reader closer to the world Bombal creates in Spanish, closer to the vision she offers in La última niebla. And it is ultimately a grim vision. Even as Bombal’s protagonists attempt to compensate for the emotional poverty of their surroundings by escaping into self-affirming fantasy, the stifling realities of their society inevitably infiltrate that inner world. The narrative arc of La última niebla captures this progression from the hope of physical escape to the release of fantasy and memory, from fantasy to the bitter acceptance of a life devoid of emotion. The oppressive mist that threatens to obliterate the speaker’s very existence early in the narrative is held at bay by the memory of her passionate, dream-like encounter with her lover: “The night and the mist beat futilely against the windowpanes; not a single atom of death can penetrate into this room” (Perez 13). But the speaker’s husband begins to fill her with doubts about the experience at the core of the fantasies that sustain her, and the triumph of the mist — and the unyielding strictures of her society — is final as it “presses down around us and lends to things a character of definite immobility” in the novel’s final lines.

Note: The firm Farrar, Straus and Giroux currently owns the translation rights to Bombal’s work and has not responded to my inquiries. Although my translation of The Final Mist cannot be published at this time, I invite parties interested in reading the full text or using
it for instruction to contact me at ashperez@indiana.edu.

Notes

1 In its shortcomings, the Cunningham translation ranks with the notoriously inadequate first translations of Juan Rulfo’s Pedro Páramo and Carlos Fuentes’ The Death of Artemio Cruz. Prior to the Boom, Latin American fictions translated into English were often studied as representative regional narratives rather than innovative literary creations. Thus, translations that fail to reflect the strengths and strategies of the originals may fulfill the false expectations of readers primed to expect a degree of clumsiness and affectation in the texts. For discussions of the evolution of twentieth-century Latin American fiction and its reception abroad, see Raymond Williams’ The Modern Latin American Novel, Naomi Lindstrom’s Twentieth-Century Spanish American Fiction, and John Brushwood’s The Spanish American Novel: a Twentieth-Century Survey.


3 Gloria Gálvez Lira highlights the fierce machismo of Bombal’s society, noting that, until 1953, the Chilean Penal Code contained an article that considered “exempt from responsibility a husband that killed, wounded, or mistreated his wife in the case that he discovered her in the crime — in flagranti — of adultery” (18, trans. mine).

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A CHINESE WOMAN IN TRANSLATION: A FEMINIST REREADING OF HONG YING’S Ji’er de Nü’er IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

By Chen Lijuan

Since the 1980s, scholars from different countries, especially Canada, have examined issues about translation from the feminist perspective. Most of the relevant literature addresses the fate of women writers in translation with a view to finding out whether they are just as unfairly treated in translation as they are in real life. However, discussions about Chinese women writers in translation are apparently absent in the existing scholarship. Taking this into account, this article observes the English translation of Hong Ying’s Ji’er de Nü’er from the feminist perspective. It turns out that the English translation mitigates feminist values represented in the original to varying degrees. The following conclusion is made: the female Chinese writer Hong Ying is translated less as a feminist than as a Chinese; the English translation made in this way partially accounts for the target audience’s failure to see feminism in this piece of feminist work.

Why Hong Ying? Why Ji’er de Nü’er?

In Mainland China, the woman writer Hong Ying is not popular. She is a big star, however, outside Mainland China, such as in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Britain, and America. Besides Ji’er de Nü’er (Daughter of the River), Hong Ying is also the author of K (K: The Art of Love), Beipan zhi xia (Summer of Betrayal), A nan (Ananda), Kongque de Jiaohan (Peacock Cries), and others. Most of her books are published first in Taiwan before they are reprinted in Mainland China.

The reason why I choose Hong Ying’s Ji’er de Nü’er as my case study lies in the following two facts: first, Ji’er de Nü’er as an autobiography has been translated into different languages and has won international acclaim; second, Hong Ying is a feminist writer, and her Ji’er de Nü’er is typically feminist. As I see it, the autobiography conveys a strong feminist message in the following ways: (1) showing a deep concern about women’s wretched situations, including domestic violence and sexual assault against women, their powerlessness in marriage, their traumatic experiences with abortion, and so forth; (2) disputing the reasonableness of popular stereotypes about Chinese women, including their passive sexuality, which is undone by a detailed description of the female protagonist’s sexual initiative, experiences, and fantasies; (3) casting doubt on patriarchy by deconstructing the myth of “penis envy” and portraying the father figure in a negative light; and so forth.

In today’s world, when the third wave of feminism is still gaining momentum, it is really interesting to see whether women writers, especially those who strongly identify with feminism, have fared any better. Before I discuss the English translation of Ji’er de Nü’er, I will briefly mention the censoring of this book inside China.

The Censoring of Ji’er de Nü’er Inside China

There are altogether five Chinese versions of Ji’er de Nü’er in China, including a Taiwanese version (published by Erya Publishing House in 1997) and four Mainland versions (published by Shanghai Wenyi Publishing House in 1998, Sichuan Wenyi Publishing House in 2000, Lijiang Publishing House in 2001, and Zhishi Publishing House in 2003, respectively). The Taiwanese version is the original and complete one, while the four Mainland versions have been censored to varying degrees. What is deleted is mostly politically and sexually sensitive. The 1998 Mainland version changes the title and deletes without indication “almost thirty thousand Chinese characters” (Hong Ying 2003) from the
original, including some historical facts and comments that speak out against the communist party in power, as well as references to female sexual organs, sexual initiative, experiences, and fantasies. The 2000 Mainland version also deletes some similar things but does not go as far as the 1998 one. The most recent two versions change some small details in terms of the politically and sexually sensitive parts. The censorship here has much to do with the conservative ideology of mainland China.

As we can see, the female text has been censored inside China, in its home country. What will it go through, then, when it travels outside China, to another language and another culture?

Rereading *Daughter of the River From the Feminist Perspective*

*Daughter of the River*, the English translation of Ji’er de Nü’er, is based on the complete Taiwan version (1997). Let us take a look at the cross-cultural journey the parts representing feminist values have taken.

**What has been transformed**

(1) **Violence against women**

We read of a deep concern for women who are treated violently by men in the text. The former prostitute Auntie Zhang is frequently bullied by her husband and is finally mistreated, resulting in her death. Er-wa’s mother is also frequently mistreated by her husband whenever she does not behave herself and “flirts” with male neighbors. Besides these things, the writer also expresses a deep concern for sexual assault against women. She mentions an idiot who falls victim to men’s lust and gets impregnated several times a year without knowing who is responsible. Rape is another issue frequently mentioned in the writing. The author writes how girls are deeply terrified of being raped, and she also mentions cases of rape, the sentencing of rapists, and so forth.

**Example 1**

A. The original:

这一带的女孩，听得最多的是吓人的强奸案，我却一点没害怕那要强奸我。[p. 2]

(Literal translation: What the girls of that region heard most about was frightening rapes, but I was not at all afraid that was what the man wanted to do with me.)

**The translation:** We heard all sorts of frightening rumors about rapes, but I was never afraid that was what the man had in mind. [p. 2]

B. The original:

我真希望那个跟在我身后的陌生男人不要离开，他该凶恶一点，该对我做点出格的事，

“强暴”之类叫人发抖哆嗦的事。[p. 49]

(Literal translation: I really hoped the stranger stalking me wouldn’t go away. He should be much more vicious and do something horrible to me, something like rape that one dares not think of.)

**The translation:** Sometimes I didn’t even want that stranger, the man who was always following me, to go away; in fact, I longed for him to be more menacing, to do something so heinously violent that people would shudder at the mere thought of it. [p. 41]

C. The original:

这个地方强奸犯罪率较高。山坡江边，有的是角角落落拐拐弯弯可作案，每次判刑大张旗鼓宣传，犯罪细节详细描写，大都先奸后杀，尸体腐烂无人能辨认，或是奸污后推江里。每个女孩子对男人充满恐惧。[p. 79]

(Literal translation: There was a high rate of rapes in that area, since there were all sorts of hidden nooks and crannies on the hills or by the riverbank where it could be done without detection. Whenever a rapist was tried and sentenced, the details were publicized in minute detail. The criminal usually raped then killed the girl who was left to rot beyond recognition or was thrown to the river. Every girl was terrified of men.)

**The translation:** Rapes were fairly common in that area, since there were all sorts of hidden
nooks and crannies on the hills or by the riverbank where it could be done without detection. Whenever a rapist was tried and sentenced, the details were publicized in minute detail. Most of the time the victim was murdered and left to rot or was thrown into the river. Every girl was terrified of men. [p. 66]

Rape could be regarded as one of the most sensitive gender issues in all societies at all times. In the first case, “吓人的强奸案” (frightening rapes) is transformed into “frightening rumors about rapes” in the translation. That is to say, the factual rape becomes only a rumor. In the second case, the line “强暴’之类叫人发抖哆嗦的事” (something like rape that one dare not think of) becomes “something so heinously violent that people would shudder at the mere thought of it.” The translation simply omits the word “rape.” In the third case, victim is frequently used to avoid direct references to girls, and the passive voice is preferred so as to omit the agent. In my view, the translation tends to downplay or suppress the references to the issue of rape. As I see it, the issue of rape is one of the author’s major concerns and is addressed to draw readers’ attention to the “sexual victimization of women.” It is not difficult to find, however, that the translation tends to soften the actual seriousness of the situation and thus mitigates the blame the author wants to hurl. As I remember, feminists have actually discussed the linguistic representation of rape (such as in news reports) and have come to such a conclusion that various strategies have been adopted to downplay references to rape, such as using the term victim to refer to the girl, omitting the agent, and so forth. According to Lotbinière-Harwood (1991: 152), Julia Penelope has actually put forward the concept of “agent deletion,” which means “in some contexts, through the passive and its related constructions, ‘the agent is deleted in order to protect the agents responsible for the action.’” Might the translation here be similarly motivated? Or is it because the editor or translator assumes that the reader might feel uneasy about the issue of rape?

(2) Women’s powerlessness in marriage

Most Chinese women in the old society were subordinate to men in both family and society, as they were economically dependent on them. They did not have the right to choose the right men to marry, and most of them were forced into arranged marriages.

Example 2

The original:

母亲无可奈何地自嘲，或许达到了自我安慰的目的，在她第一次和男人会面时，她就看清自己的命运，她孩子们的命运。[p. 210] (Literal translation: Mother had to laugh at herself, maybe to make herself feel better. The first time when she met the man, she had known her fate and that of her offspring.)

The translation: Mother had to laugh at herself, maybe to make herself feel better. Her fate and that of her offspring had already been determined. [p. 168]

It could be inferred from the text that Mother has been a brave and anti-traditional Chinese woman who ran away from the arranged marriage and has known about sexual politics. The original clearly indicates that Mother is fully conscious of her fate as a woman and her powerlessness to the man in the marriage. However, the translation does not seem to catch this message, because it has been left out and put in the passive voice. Now we do not see a woman with female consciousness anymore. We might suggest as a possible reason for this choice that both the publisher and the translator agree it is unnecessary to translate “在她第一次和男人会面时” (The first time when she met the man), for this might not seem to mean anything to them, and a literal and slavish translation will lead to nothing but awkwardness and wordiness. I must say, however, that the omission and modification unavoidably entail a loss, and the target reader would fail to understand Mother as a woman with female consciousness.
Example 3
The original:  
他说他是家中老大，两岁时丧父，母亲在孙 
家帮人时，被刚丧妻的孙家看中，续了弦。[ 
p. 262]  
(Literal translation: He said he was the eldest 
and his father died when he was only two. When 
she was working in the Sun home, his mother 
was settled on by the head of the household 
who was recently widowed.)  
The translation: He told her that he was the 
eldest child of a father who had died when he 
was two years old. His mother, who was 
working in the Sun home, married the recently 
widowed head of the household. [p. 207]  
This example confirms my previous claim 
that Chinese women in the old society were 
powerless in marriage. Obviously, gender 
inequality also found its way into the marriage. 
First, most Chinese women did not have the 
right to choose their Mr. Right. Right, whereas men 
could. Second, most Chinese women were not 
supposed to remarry after the death of their 
husbands, whereas there were no such 
constraints upon men. The author is fully 
conscious of women’s powerlessness in 
marriage, and transfers this perception with a 
passive voice, as is indicated in “被看中” (was 
settled on), implying that “[the woman] is 
mapped, given in marriage […]. [Men] get 
mapped, they take a wife” (Beauvoir 1974: 479; 
my emphasis). In the English translation, 
however, the passive voice is replaced with an 
active one. The translator or the editor might 
find that a literal translation will not do, and 
they adjust it “for the sake of anticipated 
communication and narrative functionality” 
(Miguélez-Carballeira 2005: 46). There is no 
denying that the translation is an adequate one in 
its own terms. I would rather say, however, that 
the feminist consciousness buried in the original 
is toned down, and the implied blame upon 
gender inequality in marriage is obliterated 
altogether, when “被看中” (was settled on) is 
replaced by the rather neutral and active 
“married.”

(3) Disputing the reasonability of stereotypes 
about women  
There have been stereotypes about women 
in China: women are supposed to be “passive in 
sex,” not showing sexual desire; women are 
supposed to be mild and ladylike and speak in a 
low voice, instead of being rude and speaking in 
a loud voice; women are supposed to get 
marrried, have babies; and so forth.

Example 4
The original: 饥饿的女兒 (title)  
(Literal translation: Daughter of Hunger)  
The translation: Daughter of the River.  
The title itself is thought-provoking. According 
to the literary critic Liu Zaifu, the key word “hunger” in the text is twofold in 
meaning, implying “hunger for food as well as 
hunger for sex” (2000; my translation). In my 
view, there is a “revolutionary potential” in such 
a title in that it breaks the sexual stereotype 
about Chinese women, who are not supposed to 
show sexual desire and initiative. As I see it, the 
double-encoded “hunger” is the keynote of the 
writing. We find, however, that the title is 
translated into “daughter of the river” instead of 
“daughter of hunger.” The translator has pointed 
out to me in an email (September 21, 2005) that 
“it was the publisher’s decision, approved by the 
author. […]. The British publisher thought that 
Brits and Americans would not want to read 
about ‘hunger’! Publishers often do that, since 
they are more concerned with marketing than 
fidelity to an author’s vision.” This is a well-
justified translation, as the translator has to 
translate that way. As far as I am concerned, 
however, although the translation turns out to be 
poetic and proper, it is never “revolutionary” 
again.

Example 5
The original:  
大姐一回来，呆不了几天，就会跟母亲大 吼 
大吵，拍桌子互相骂，骂的话听得我一头雾 
水。[p. 9] // 像是知道这点，我的 警告 就停 
止了。[p. 329]
The French feminist Simone de Beauvoir has made insightful comments on marriage in *The Second Sex*. She has claimed that “marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society” (Beauvoir 1974: 475). Overall, she does not appreciate marriage, implying that the wifehood and motherhood it entails impede women’s freedom. The author here seems to share the same view and is also fully conscious of the oppressive nature of marriage. Such oppressiveness is indicated in “每个女人” (every woman) and “得” (have to). The line in question highlights the author’s purpose to break the stereotype that all women are supposed to get married and have kids. A comparative analysis of the original and the translation leads to the finding that two changes have been made in the translation: “每个女人” (every woman) becomes “most other women”, “不得不走” (has to take) becomes “take.” The translator or the editor might find here the idea that *every woman* is forced to get married and bear a child absurd and simply wrong. Isn’t it true that most women are willing and happy to enter into marriage? Such a reflection makes them try to improve the original and make it sensible. Such a translation, however, inevitably mitigates the feminist consciousness on the part of the author.

**Example 7**

**The original:**
但是这三个父亲，都负了我，生父为我付出沉重代价，却只给我带来羞辱；养父忍下耻辱，细心照料我长大，但从未亲近过我的心；历史老师，我情人般的父亲，只顾自己离去，把我当作一桩应该忘掉的艳遇。这个世界，本来就没有父亲。它不会向我提供任何生养这个孩子的理由，与其让孩子活下来到这个世界上受辱，不如在他生命未开始之前就救出他。[p. 213]

(Literal translation: But all these three fathers had let me down. My natural father who had paid heavily because of me only brought me...)

**Translation Review**
shame. The father who raised me with great care never got close to my heart, and the history teacher, my fatherly lover, had simply left himself, treating our relationship as an eminently forgettable affair. **There was simply no father in this world.** It wasn’t going to give me any reason for giving birth to this child. It would be more reasonable to rescue him before he took his first breath than to let him live and suffer in this world.)

**The translation:** But all three of them had let me down. My natural father had paid dearly for my sake, yet had brought me nothing but shame. The father who raised me had done so with care and determination, in spite of the humiliation he suffered, but had never tried to get close to my heart. And the history teacher had failed to provide a deeper understanding of my life than I could have provided, and had simply left me, treating our relationship as an eminently forgettable affair. **This world, which had provided me with no true fathers, was incapable of putting forth a single plausible reason to bring this child into its realm. It would be far kinder to rescue him from the miseries that lay ahead before he even took his first breath.** [pp. 252–253]

In my view, the very sentence “**世界上根本没有父亲**” (there is simply no father in this world) denies the very existence of father, and thus disputes the reasonability of patriarchy, where father is the key concept. In the translation, however, the line is transformed into “this world which had provided me with no true fathers.” The line in question may seem absurd to the translator or editor. Therefore, they feel a need to improve it and make it sensible. As I see it, however, such a modification “either diffuse[s] or entirely efface[s] a markedly [feminist consciousness] from the text” (Miguélez-Carballeira 2005: 48).

**What has been deleted**

**Example 8**

**The original:**

[……]. 被阉割的小公鸡，歪倒缩在堂屋楼梯角落，不再有雄性的高叫，没人看它一

(Literal translation: [...] The castrated chick cowered at the corner of the stairs in the central room. He didn’t give his masculine shout. Nobody ever took a look at him, they had no idea that chicks also hurt. The granddaughter of Auntie Wang whose son died in the war had an apple face which was rarely seen. [...] When asked about what she was going to do in the future, she made a clear answer, “to castrate the chick.” If she knew what she was saying, the girl would surely become a most radical feminist in the future.)

**The translation:** This part was omitted. [p. 127]

The penis is mentioned here and there in the text, but with disgust, not with envy. It is described by the author as ugly, shameless, horrible, disgusting, and the like. This hatred of the male penis culminates in a detailed description of the castration of a chick. However, this important part, as we can see, is deleted. In my view, the omitted part highlights the author’s hatred of the penis and shatters the myth of “penis envy” developed by Sigmund Freud. According to Sigmund Freud (1965: 110), women “feel seriously wronged, often declare that they want to ‘have something like it too’” when they catch sight of a penis and realize its difference and significance. Feminists have taken issue with this theory, regarding it as sexist. Seen in such a light, the omitted part conveys a strong feminist message.

Another part (several paragraphs) that is also deleted has something to do with a metaphor proposed by the author somewhere in the text (p. 144). She writes that her neighbor Bald Cheung prepares a coffin for his mother when she is still in good health. Later, some naughty child puts a barren hen inside and the author wonders why it is not stifled to death. The coffin here could be interpreted as a metaphor for the stifling and oppressing
patriarchy where women have had a harsh time. However, the part that contains the metaphor is again omitted in the translation. 

When asked about the omission of the above-mentioned two parts, the translator explains to me in the same email that “it (the omission) was either at the request of Hong Ying or Henry Zhao, or was suggested by [him] or the publisher. [He] never do[es] that without the author’s approval.” He has also told me that “given the extreme length of so much of what gets translated, and the unwillingness of Western readers to buy novels that are too long, publishers often pressure authors/translators to cut.” No matter what has motivated the deletion, as far as I am concerned, such an omission undoubtedly mitigates the strong feminist message the original conveys.

Conclusion

We have found that the English translation has censored the parts representing feminist values to varying degrees, except the “juicy” parts that deal with female sexual initiative, experiences, fantasies, and so forth. The “erotic” parts, in my view, also convey a strong feminist message, as they are used by the author to create a female protagonist who breaks “the traditional image of Chinese feminine passivity to realize their erotic desires” (Laurence 2003). These “erotic” parts, however, have had a smooth journey in the cross-cultural transfer. According to the translator, the American readership “is eager to read all about the sexual adventures of young Chinese women, whose exotic allure seems never to fade in the West” (cited in Berry 2002: 25). It is also interesting to see that the cover of the English version is a naked woman, although there is only the author’s bust on the cover of the original. This means that the parts dealing with female sexuality in the original produced from a feminist perspective are not interpreted as feminist by the translating subject, but serve as a way to satisfy the American audience’s interest about oriental women’s sexual experiences. This could partly explain why female sexuality in the original does not become a target of censorship in translation. All in all, by rewriting and deleting other parts representing feminist values, the published English translation in effect mitigates feminism in the original to varying degrees.

The reason why feminism in the Chinese original is mitigated and suppressed in translation, I suppose, has something to do with the translator, at least to some extent. In fact, the translator’s preface could serve as some proof. Prof. Goldblatt writes, “…Although it narrates the story of a young woman and her family, the book belongs to an age, and finally to a nation. … This book surely will not please the Chinese government, as the oppression of its people the author convincingly narrates is what the Chinese government tries to hide. … Ji’er de Nü’er is a vivid account of the contemporary Chinese social history” (my translation). In the preface, the translator does not at all mention feminist consciousness, and this at least implies that he does not think gender issues are an integral part of the writing or that feminist consciousness is of central importance to it. We could learn from this that the original is translated less as a piece of feminist work than as an ethnographic memoir. The author’s national identity overshadows her gender identity, and national issues instead of gender issues in the text become the translator’s major concern. This may partially account for a somewhat unfair treatment of the “feminist” parts in the original.

As I see it, the suppression of feminism in Ji’er de Nü’er in translation to some extent affects the target reader’s understanding and appreciation of this piece of feminist work. Most reviews of the English version fail to see the feminism in the original. This is what Flotow puts as “translation effect,” which refers to “the visible and verifiable changes a text undergoes in translation and the effect this has on its reception in a new culture” (2000: 14). Let’s take a look at the overseas critiques of Daughter of the River: “[An] immersion in the suffering of China’s urban underclass during the years following the Great Famine of the early 1960s… [a book] of stark power” (The Boston Globe). “An astonishing picture of inner fortitude, marshaled against insult and injury
amid the turmoil and repression — both political and emotional — of mid-century China” (Publishers Weekly). “We are permanently reminded of the horrors of modern Chinese history…. A moving book which will bring tears to the eyes” (The Spectator). “This remarkable account of a childhood spent on the banks of the Yangtze River … explores the depths of personal and civil repression with an almost brutal grace” (The New Yorker). “Raw and powerful.… As you read [her] lacerating story, you feel that you have entered into the deepest truths of a tormented psyche, and into the truths as well of a bruised generation otherwise almost impossible for us to know” (Richard Bernstein, The New York Times). All these reviews have something in common: the reviewers do not see the feminism flaunted in the autobiography, but rather concern themselves with such general issues as “Chinese history,” “personal and civil repression,” and so forth. As far as I am concerned, the fact that overseas critics do not see and understand feminism in the Chinese original has something to do with translation, as people who do not have access to the original are dependent on the translation alone.

It is tempting to assume that women writers will fare better in translation with their increasingly improved social status. At least we can believe that contemporary women writers will not undergo what the woman writer Christine de Pizan in the fifteenth century has gone through, some of whose texts are “masculinized” and whose female identity as author was suppressed (Chance 1998), for women were not encouraged to write at that time. However, we must admit that even today, when the third wave of feminism is still gaining momentum, women writers, especially those with feminist consciousness, seem not to have escaped the fate of being manipulated.

Notes

1. The translator has actually written a preface to the Chinese version published in 1997.
2. The critiques are all quoted from the editorial reviews of the book posted on the website of Amazon, and they are based on the English translation only.

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ADONIS: “TWELVE CANDLES FOR GRANADA”

By Samuel Hazo

Anyone who has had the opportunity to visit the Alhambra comes away from the visit knowing that what he has seen is more than architecture. It is actually a testament that began in the twelfth century, before being defaced and otherwise partially destroyed until its restoration and resurrection in the nineteenth century. And that history survives in the atmosphere and, if you will, the spirit that pervades it. I sensed it when I walked through it less than ten years ago, listening to a knowledgeable guide tell me that the various fountains there were symbols of wealth to people of the desert, like the Syrian and North African Arabs who created them.

Adonis in “Twelve Candles for Granada” evokes the spirit of the place in the twelve sections of the poem, each devoted to a different aspect of it. I have worked from both the original Arabic and a Spanish translation of that original published in Spain and generously passed on to me by the distinguished artist Kamal Boullata. In both cases I had to rely heavily on linguists, but I hope that I have caught in my versions — as I have tried to in other translations of the poetry of Adonis — the spirit of his poetic vision of the place as well as something of the place itself. If so, that is what I intended. If not, the failing is mine.

Adonis

Twelve Candles for Granada

1
Heaven and earth are at home here between the Mediterranean and the Sierra Nevada.
The mountains and shores and waves are like friends shaking hands, and the sea reflects the shore and treetops in reverse.

At the Gate of Gomerez

I see the ghosts of poets climbing one by one to the Alhambra:
Hugo, Gongora, Jimenez, Rilke, Lorca,
and I hear Armando Palacio Valdez:
“I wish I had been born in the Age of Granada.”

This space cannot contain the echoes of history.
What history can hold the spirit of Granada?
Only a poet can ask the right questions,
can understand the airy language of the myrtle
and taste the wine of revelation on his lips.

2
The Alhambra opens its doors to heaven every afternoon to welcome its children.
Its welcome resembles the spirit of a hand lifted in prayer
while its other hand contends with blood and wounds.

Here is el Darro barefooted,
his only garment a bracelet.

The walls accept the fusillades of sunlight until they seem like tapestries of sun and colors.
I find my way to darker pleasures and put away my cares.
I seem to be the Adam of Creation, and Eve is the Alhambra itself.

And so I dream, I dream for without dreams I am nothing but food to slake the hungers of the night.

3
Am I coming or going as I move through arches and curves where the jasmine of each moment totally intoxicates me?
I’m like a drunkard in the gardens of *cufico* and *nasji*.
Music carries me away.
I feel I am going everywhere and nowhere.

Butterflies that seem as omnipresent as the air paint their colors on the walls where the clay itself becomes a song of praise.

Life resembles a jewel in the navel of a dancer whose ear-rings are the very stars.

Let me never be afraid to reach for the clouds or let my footsteps falter.
In the Courtyard of the Lions and Myrtles the moon surmounts a waterfall that shows the moon its image just as the face of someone who loves reflects love while the flames of candles disappear.

In the nooks of these columns, whose shoulders are clouds and surf, the treasures of silence whisper.

Who was the consummate sculptor who carved and crowned them with stars?

I praise them with my pen on this page so that the rivers of time may flow through my words.

The trances of heaven dwell in this place, and they are my teachers.

The breath of heaven turns into wings that bear desire like gazelles from all that stays here.

Infinity wears an *ajuba*, and the horizon sleeps in crevices.

Listen to the galleries.
Witness the marriage of night and sunrise like nuptials between my soul and myself.

Now that desire and fulfillment have rendered it nil, my body’s mine no longer.

Leave me here so that I can feel whatever creates its spaces within me.

Many universes pass through the eyes of needles. Each needle’s eye is like a window through which I see boats and herds of antelopes. Like someone climbing a palm tree, I search for distances.

I dreamt that a window wept although the weather had already waved its blue farewell.
I saw how windows of the Alhambra in moonlight were grooming prodigies that would cloak it with clouds.

Windows for me resemble lakes waiting for a dream of ships Or are they more like rings in the earlobes of the stars? Emptiness has no place in the Alhambra’s alphabet.

In the yellow, blue and red baths of Comares the water is absolutely still. Perhaps you know why?

The fountain jets seem to be stationery. Never merely bodies of water, they become a hymn. All who bathe here might think of the sky as an arm around a waist where the physical and metaphysical join in a single embrace. Or so it seems to me.

Taken aback by what I see, I say, “It’s just as well that things in ecstasy don’t know what they are.”
This evening, no longer a fantasy,
Granada sleeps in my arms,
and I tell her to forget her garments
that are only there to disguise her.

I say, “The walls have eyes, my friend,
and branches accept migrating birds
whose wings are beautiful
even though they droop.”

This is Generalife.
Perfume cannot speak for the somber walls
as water can never explain the source of itself.

Subterranean inscriptions tell of miseries and
fantasies.
Executioners and bloodshed have long since fled
these vaults and passages,
but all their histories survive.

The ghosts of many men haunt the Alhambra
as if they’ve returned from eternity.
Apparitions of women whose hair is braided
with stars
preserve the gardens of Granada.

These recollections sadden me.
Shall I pretend that I am not yet born
or say to tomorrow — “Don’t come, don’t
come.”
Like all men I am waiting to be taught
so that I can learn what I should see.

Time past is like a shadow of a broken carriage.
Years disappear like smoke.
What shall I say to the walls of the Alhambra?
Shall I rend my garments?
Shall I ask if its many columns actually mourn?

Or is time itself addressing me
because I have no time to bind my wounds?
Granada, I accept the illusion
that you delay time and aging.
I will simply listen to *casidas*
sung from your towers.
And all the while
night itself will be like a guitar that lets me
serenade her all the way to dawn.
Perhaps a newer astrolabe will let me sing 
to constellations in the heights of the 
Alhambra
and scroll my verses on a star.
Why should I look in mirrors
for what is never to be seen?
Let me marry creation and action,
each with its mate, one with the other.
Let Granada be like hands
blessing tomorrow’s fields
and everything that’s yet to come.
Let Granada venture forth
in peerless ink that writes the _moaxaja_ of the cosmos.

Let poets listen to Granada’s voice.
Let those who love only the afternoons of yesteryears
be stunned by tomorrow when it happens,
Let every evening bring the dawn.
Let roots reveal horizons,
and let the depths enrich you.
Granada is like two halves of the sun —
one half facing west, the other east.
MOURNING A POETIC VISIONARY: SANDY TAYLOR’S LEGACY OF URGENT LITERATURE
A Look Back at Curbstone, in the Words of its Authors

By Megan McDowell

Sandy Taylor, founder of Curbstone press, advocate of revolutionary literature, and inspiration to publishers, authors, and readers alike, died December 21, 2007. Sandy was widely known as a prescient leader in publishing with a vast knowledge of literature from around the globe and a deep commitment to the fight for human rights. His wisdom and leadership will be sorely missed by many, especially those in the community of activists, writers, and artists that has grown around Curbstone over the years.

Sandy was a man of many accomplishments, but perhaps the most important were the relationships he built and nurtured with the artists and writers in whom he believed. The tributes to Sandy that appeared after his death in magazines and blogs attest to a man loved and respected for his commitment to humanity as well as art and literature, and who never lost sight of his belief in the power of literature to create change.

Luis Rodriguez, author of one of Curbstone’s most successful titles, _Always Running, La vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A._, writes that he “would not be here as writer, lecturer, and editor if it were not for Sandy Taylor.” Martin Espada, another of Curbstone’s prominent authors, says “We call ourselves ‘Curbstonistas’ with pride. Curbstone Press is our City Lights, and Willimantic, Connecticut is our San Francisco.” Bobby Byrd writes of Sandy as a man “of courage and jokes and cigarettes and wisdom and laughter and joy,” who was Byrd’s mentor in starting his own press, Cinco Puntos; Sandy, he writes, was a man who declared “publishing poetry is suicidal!” and proceeded to publish book after book of poetry.

Sandy Taylor taught English for more than thirty years. He was an accomplished translator of Danish literature and the author of several books of poetry, which have been translated into Danish, Bulgarian, and Serbo-Croatian. In 1975, he and his wife Judy Doyle started Curbstone Press in order to publish one book, James Scully’s _Santiago Poems_, a poetic exposé of human rights violations in Chile. Since then, the press has grown from a two-person operation in a basement (where the co-directors printed and bound the books after their day jobs) to a nationally and internationally recognized literary organization. They have published Latino, Latin American, Vietnamese, and U.S. writers, including Claribel Alegria, Daisy Zamora, Tino Villanueva, Truong Vu, Ernesto Cardenal, and Mario Benedetti. Their authors have won many awards, and the press itself has been honored with such prizes as the American Book Award for Editing and Publishing Excellence, the Publishers Weekly / Carey Thomas Honor Award for Creative Publishing, and the ALTA Award for Dedication to Translation. A small, independent press putting out world-class authors and significant, even urgent, literature from around the world, Curbstone is a unique organization promoting awareness and change through publishing. Sandy and Judy have always shared the burden of the press, but Judy promises that the press will forge
ahead in its mission to bring unheard and stifled literary and political voices to the fore.

There will never be another Sandy Taylor. For now, there is a search for a new editor at the press, and in the meantime Judy Doyle will carry on with Curbstone’s work. In the words of Martín Espada, “we need Curbstone, and Curbstone needs us. Ultimately, it’s up to us, the writers and readers of Curbstone, to support the press during this difficult transition.”

Many writers and translators have expressed their admiration for Sandy Taylor. Here are some of them.

Margaret Randall, co-founder and editor of the journal El Corno Emplumado, published several books with Curbstone, including Risking a Somersault in the Air, a collection of interviews with Nicaraguan writers involved in the Sandinista revolution of the 1970s and 1980s; Memory Says Yes, a book of her original poetry; and Let’s Go, her translation of poems by Guatemalan poet Otto-René Castillo. During the 1990s, Randall taught at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, which, she says, “put me near enough to Willimantic that I could drive up the road and visit that amazing house on Jackson Street. One could feel it was a place of literature; few such places exist these days.” Randall sees Curbstone as filling an enormous need in the U.S., where few people — even those who love literature — seek out or know work from other places. She points to works by Claribel Alegria, Roque Dalton, and Vladimir Mayakovsky as examples of books that “simply wouldn’t have been accessible in this country, and in such fine translations, had it not been for Curbstone.”

Michael Miller agrees, saying that Curbstone “fills an important niche in the world of literary publications and is committed to quality works that are socially conscious. Often, the independent press is the only place that serious literature of a social-political nature gains a venue.” Miller is the translator of Margarita, How Beautiful the Sea by Sergio Ramirez, a Nicaraguan politician, intellectual, and fiction writer. Like many Curbstone authors, Ramirez is an example of a prominent Latin American voice deserving of greater recognition. Miller recognizes the legacy Curbstone has left to the publishing world: “because of the quality of authors it has chosen over the years, to be published in translation and also American authors it has chosen for publication for the first time — writers the quality of Marnie Mueller, for example — show(s) that there is a readership hungry for good writing and good stories, by authors who routinely get overlooked by big commercial houses. It would be impossible … that a publisher like Curbstone, over the years, would not have had a significant impact on the publishing world.”

Tino Villanueva says “I will always be indebted to Sandy Taylor for having accepted my manuscript of Scene from the Movie GIANT.” After finishing the twenty-one poems that made up his fourth volume of poetry, Villanueva sensed he had “written something of some significance” and began sending it out to publishers. “It was the late 80s … soon it became the early 90s, and things were looking bleak …. The rejection slips were relentless from publishers big and small.” Then he remembered having met Sandy at a literary conference a couple of years before. “When I introduced myself to him at the Curbstone Press table, he said he had heard of me, liked my work, and then amicably encouraged me to send him something. I did, and he did not disappoint.” Curbstone published the book in October of 1993, “and from that moment on he spared no effort to publicize and promote it.” In 1994 the book won an American Book Award and, says Villanueva, “I am immodest enough to say that the book thereafter took on a life of its own. It is now in its fourth printing. I could not have had a better editor, one enthusiastic about what he published, and one downright supportive of his authors. Gracias mil, Sandy — to you and your curbstonistas on staff.”

Jo Anne Englebert, translator of Honduran poet Roberto Sosa and longtime Curbstonista, also fondly remembers the community around the press in Willimantic. She writes: “In the eighties, when the US began to set its sights on Central America, Curbstone stepped up its production of translations. While Washington concocted outrageous fantasies to mask the violence, Sandy and Judy launched powerful
works by Central American writers — Claribel Alegría, Ernesto Cardenal, Manlio Argueta, Gioconda Belli, Sergio Ramírez, Arturo Arias, Roque Dalton, Leonel Rugama, Daisy Zamora, Roberto Sosa, and so many others. These books gave a generation of readers access to the truth of what was happening in the isthmus Neruda called ‘the sweet waist of Latin America.’ It was during this era that I began to translate for Curbstone.

“In those days, 321 Jackson Street in Willimantic, Connecticut, bulged with people working feverishly — writers, translators, volunteers of every stripe — toiling around the clock, committed to Central America and a dozen other issues. We ran on the fumes and lived on stone soup. We took turns sleeping on the signature mattress or on the floor between the presses, warmed by Sandy’s contagious guffawing, the infinite kindness of both of our hosts, and the atmosphere of goofy conviviality they never failed to create.

“Most editors focus on the production of books. Sandy was one of the very few who also focused on the makers of books. His efforts on behalf of Roberto Sosa, the writer I know best of those named above, are absolutely typical of his style of nurturing. One remembered moment stands out. It was 1985. We all were worried about Roberto. He had just published Secreto militar, poems dangerously critical of the regime. His books had immediately been banned in Honduras; generales were muttering death threats. Sandy and I were trying to think of a way to get him out of the country, perhaps with a Fulbright. I was attending an academic conference, feeling as if I had been drinking ether all day. I was getting ready for bed when the phone rang. It was Sandy; who had called my husband to get my phone number at the conference hotel. ‘Listen, Jo Anne, I want you to call Roberto.’ ‘In Tegucigalpa?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Now?’ ‘Yes, right away. I just heard back from Sam Hamill. I want you to translate for Roberto what Sam said about his poetry. Take this down: “These elegiac and erotic lyrics present a voice as personal, as elegant, and as timeless as the great poets of the T’ang dynasty or the Greek Anthology. Roberto Sosa joins passion and humility, ecstasy and grief, clarity and wisdom, to make poems as lucid and incandescent as anyone writing today.” Got it?’ ‘My god, yes!’ ‘Please call him right now. Roberto needs to hear this before he goes to sleep tonight.’ I did, and he did, thanks to a remarkable human being named Sandy Taylor.”

Curbstone Press is the product of a firm belief in the power of literature to communicate truths about human lives in all parts of the world, whether indigenous Guatemalan women, east coast fishermen, urban teens, Latino families, or veterans of the Viet Nam war. What Curbstone promotes is the idea that literature is an artery that connects readers to the realities and mysteries of other cultures.

Wayne Karlin, who is the series editor for Curbstone’s “Voices from Viet Nam” series, tells a story that illustrates this perfectly: “In 1993, I met the Vietnamese writer Le Minh Khue, who I found had been in places and at times in the Vietnam war where I would have killed her if I saw her (I was a helicopter gunner, she worked as a teenage volunteer clearing bombs on the Ho Chi
Minh Trails). We both had a moment of epiphany when we realized that fact, as if we were seeing the human beings we could not see in the war, when she was target and terror for me on the ground, and I was death and terror for her in the air. Since we are both writers, we came to see that moment as an exemplar of what each of us thought literature, stories and poems, could do, in general, and, because of our particular case, cross-culturally; that is, reveal the complex humanity of people who otherwise are dehumanized by convenient myth — whether demonized or idealized. We both felt, indeed, that dehumanization was the very process which made wars inevitable and that literature was the antithesis of that process, and so we became determined to have translated and publish works from Vietnam in America and vice versa.”

Karlin and Khue brought their project idea to Holt, Karlin’s publisher at the time, who turned the idea down because it “wasn’t commercial enough.” This was repeated by several publishers until the poet Martín Espada introduced Karlin to Sandy Taylor. “Sandy immediately saw the power and potential of such an anthology. It fit very well with Curbstone’s mission, which focuses on ‘publishing creative writers whose work promotes human rights and intercultural understanding.’” Curbstone published two anthologies: *The Other Side of Heaven: Post War Fiction by Vietnamese and American Writers*, co-edited by Karlin, Khue, and Truong Vu; and *Love After War: Contemporary Fiction from Vietnam*, co-edited by Karlin and novelist Ho Anh Thai. To date, the “Voices from Vietnam” series has published books by six Vietnamese writers and led to Karlin’s co-editing the first anthology of American short fiction published in Vietnam since the war: *Truyen Ngan My Duong Dai (Contemporary American Short Stories)*. Karlin believes that art needs to create surrogate experiences that allow them to see patterns and connections in events. He admits, however, “to feeling a certain bleakness and despair, not about the ability of art to do that, but about the lack of effect all of the literature that came out of the Vietnam war had — as evidenced by the new war in Iraq.” He says that while there is no dearth of translated works coming from the Middle East, “(w)hat does frustrate me is that not enough people are reading those books…. What frustrates me is the lack of readers.” But it is an ongoing struggle, and Curbstone will continue to fight: Sandy’s last acquisition before he died was a novel by Nora Eisenberg called *When You Come Home*, about the lasting effects of war in Iraq. Karlin, like everyone who worked with Sandy, emphasizes his vision: “Sandy … was an enabler. He had the vision to cut through to what was important and then he gave you the means to do it. I miss him deeply. I believe what he created in Curbstone will continue, since I know his partner, Judy Doyle, and the other dedicated people there always shared Sandy’s vision.”

Curbstone’s commitment goes beyond simply publishing books; they work to promote a social vision of peace and equality through the books they publish, using extensive author tours, community-based outreach programs, and educational programs built around their titles to get the word out. As writer Marnie Mueller puts it, “Sandy and Judy cared about each and every book they published.” Mueller’s fiction takes a firm stand on political issues, which made many publishers wary of her work: “Until very recently, American publishers were skittish about fiction with hard-hitting subjective politics at its core. I think Curbstone has been a big influence on publishing in that regard.”

Mueller’s first novel, *Green Fires*, is set against the first clashes between indigenous peoples and international oil companies in the Ecuadorian rainforest. She took the book to many publishers, both large and small, but got only “positive rejections” — they liked the book, but wouldn’t publish it. Finally, she met Sandy Taylor and Judy Doyle at a party to benefit the Sandinistas. They accepted the book, and, says
Mueller, “from then on my publishing life was a joy!”

The difference between Curbstone and most other publishers is that they believe in every book they publish. In Mueller’s case, they set up a national tour, got her book reviewed extensively, and arranged interviews on important national and local radio shows. They submitted her novel for the Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers and pushed until the book was chosen. They made certain the book was in contention for prizes, and got the novel adopted for numerous college and high school courses. They got it optioned for film and translated into German. “All of this,” says Mueller, “is extraordinary for a first novelist.” At Curbstone, they want their writers to succeed, “but more than that, they want our world views and our voices and our politics to play a role in the ongoing artistic and political discourse in the United States and around the world. They want our books to reach underserved communities. They want children who have no books in their homes to have and hold and own real books. For me, their passion was palpable from the beginning.”

When she wrote her second novel, The Climate of the Country, Mueller “toyed with the idea of going with a commercial press.” Her agent sent it to some places, “but the level of discourse in the rejections was so lacking in understanding of the book that I decided to remain with Curbstone. It was the right decision.” The Climate of the Country is about the Tule Lake Japanese American Segregation Camp, during “a period when, as a result of oppressive measures from the top administration of the camps, people turned against one another, and the scars from that period remain to this day.” The response to the book was overwhelmingly positive, which Mueller attributes to the fact that “Curbstone allowed me to be brutally honest in my portrayal of a very difficult period in the incarceration of Japanese-Americans …. The Japanese-Americans who read the book were extremely grateful that the story had been told and in the telling I hadn’t taken sides, but had shown the faults and strengths of both groups. Other publishers had seemed reluctant to publish such unvarnished truth. They wanted a more sanitized, sentimental version of what went on.”

At Curbstone, says Mueller, “they never give up on a book. Bad reviews are like a clarion call to work harder on a book’s behalf. Sandy’s mantra in those cases was always, ‘We’ll prove the bastards wrong.’” And so, with her third book, Mueller didn’t think twice about going back to Curbstone.

She says that Curbstone’s commitment to keeping their books in print and their continuous promotion of backlist titles mean that her books are still finding new readers. “I still hear that reading groups are discussing them and universities and high schools are assigning my novels …. I get impassioned notes telling me how I’ve spoken to some truth or other in their lives.” After 9/11, she received comments from people who, after reading The Climate of the Country, had a different perspective on the xenophobia against Muslim Americans. “Attribute these ongoing responses, and the fact that they are ongoing, to the diligence of the people at Curbstone Press in keeping our books alive.”

Martín Espada is the editor of the anthology Poetry Like Bread, which came about after he and Sandy discussed the idea of a single book that would “represent Curbstone as a whole, poetically, politically, and philosophically.” The title comes from the Roque Dalton lines that also supplied Curbstone’s motto: “I believe the world is beautiful, / and that poetry, like bread, is for everyone.”

Espada sees Curbstone as part of the great tradition of poets and writers who “speak for those without an opportunity to be heard. Think of Neruda at the heights of Machu Picchu, who said in Canto XII: “I come to speak for your dead mouths.” Think of Whitman, who said, in #24 of “Song of Myself:” “Through me many long-dumb voices.” Sandy himself, Espada’s second father, mentor, friend, guide and compañero, was the proverbial larger-than-life character, who smoked
constantly and laughed loudly at his own jokes.
“A cross between Willy Loman and Ché Guevara … Sandy was proof positive that you could be furious at injustice, railing at the world, and still love life madly.”

Espada went to visit Sandy in the hospital just before he died. Soon after, he wrote an elegy for him “based on my memory of our visit to Guadalajara, Mexico, many years ago, where we ended up seeing the mural of the great José Clemente Orozco.” He read the poem at Sandy’s memorial service; it follows below.

**Visions of the Chapel Ceiling in Guadalajara**

*For Sandy Taylor (1931–2007)*

*By Martíne Espada*

Sandy, if you heard me, if you hear me:
I don’t know why I said the words in Spanish.

I hated the words I heard on the phone — *massive stroke, coma, come now if you want to say goodbye* — turning like carousel horses in my head as I drifted to the car, forgetting
the book of poems to read at your bedside.
I hated the words I struggled to recall all the way to the hospital, the breath of my poems sticking white as moths to the windshield.
I hated the words of the nurse who swore I’ve seen them come back after the Last Rites, then disappeared as if she did not mean it.

You had no words to say, you who would declaim *Ozymandias* from memory, conjuring the wreckage of the pharaoh in the sand: *Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!*
Now you snarled into the oxygen mask, refusing to die,
the gray radical who kept a shotgun in the corner for the Klan.
The missile strike that lit up the battlefield of your brain cheated us all.
If you had an hour before the firing squad, the poet in you would have composed a last will and testament in rhyming couplets.

I hated words that night, but we were alone in the room
when the poems came back, the poems you always asked me to read aloud, the poems you printed in my books page after page, so I spoke them in your ear, and I sang them in your ear:

*En Jayuya, los lagartijos se dispersan como una flota de canoas verdes ante el invasor.*
In Jayuya, the lizards scatter like a fleet of green canoes before the invader.

The words leapt from my mouth in Spanish, and I wondered what you would understand, remembering Guadalajara,
where you wheeled a hand-truck of books and astounded everyone with the hopping three-legged dog of your accent. Yet you knew the poets of our América, their voices bursting like a thousand sparrows from the doors and windows of your house.
The bandit poet, who escaped his executioners when the earthquake made of his jail an ancient ruin, sits in your kitchen with coffee and bread, waiting for you.

You knew the way in Guadalajara, the orphanage, the chapel at the orphanage, Orozco’s murals at the chapel.
There were benches wide enough for lying down to witness the visions on the ceiling: *El Hombre de Fuego,*
the Man of Fire, a being of flame walking on air, soaring over the exhausted ashen creatures at his feet, the stampede of conquistadores and priests, the Indios writhing in their wake.

Sandy, we had no need of words that day, two poets silenced at last by the scratching of a paintbrush, father and son not of blood, but ink.
May you have visions of the chapel ceiling in Guadalajara.
May you meet the Man of Fire and shake his hand.
May you ignite a cigarette with his index finger.
May you cackle and cackle at your own joke.
IS POUND A TRANSLATOR OF CHINESE POETRY?

By Ming Dong Gu

The first anthology of Chinese poetry, the Shijing, or Book of Songs in Waley’s popular translation, has been translated into English by numerous scholars: Bernhard Karlgren, James Legge, and Arthur Waley, to name just a few widely acclaimed translators. While these scholars’ translations are known among Sinologists, a widely known rendition among the general English reading public is Ezra Pound’s famous, or notorious, translation. Pound’s rendition is undoubtedly the most controversial version of the Chinese classic. Pound’s career as a translator of Chinese poetry was launched with the publication of Cathay in 1915. Over the years since then, he translated a number of Chinese classics into English. Among them, he translated the Analects of Confucius, The Great Learning, and the 305 poems of the Book of Songs. His translation has won highest praises from creative writers like T.S. Eliot, literary theorists like I.A. Richards, and comparatists like Hugh Kenner, but it has received a low evaluation from scholars of literary Sinology. Of course, Sinologists do not deny the high literary quality of Pound’s translation, but they have dismissed it as translation per se because they regard it as a free, untrammeled re-creation or re-writing. George Kennedy, a well-known Sinologist, who comments on Pound’s Chinese translation, expresses a representative opinion: “Undoubtedly this is fine poetry. Undoubtedly it is bad translation. Pound has the practice, but not the learning. He is to be saluted as a poet, but not as a translator.”

Despite their different orientations, the supporters and critics alike share a common ground. Neither of the two groups has taken Pound’s translation of Chinese poetry as serious translation. T.S. Eliot, for example, pronounced his famous judgment after reading Cathay, which includes a few poems from the Book of Songs: “…it must be pointed out that Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time.” This statement explicitly suggests that Pound’s Cathay poems are not so much a translation of original Chinese poems as poems recreated out of the Chinese materials. Since then, the Cathay poems have been widely regarded as avant-garde English poems in Anglo-American Modernism. Hugh Kenner also expresses a similar evaluation: “Its real achievement lay not on the frontier of comparative poetics, but securely within the effort, then going forward in London, to rethink the nature of an English poem.”

Professional translators of Chinese poetry hold similar opinions. While marveling at Pound’s poetic talent and creative genius, they deplored his lack of scholarship and disregard for fidelity. Among them, Arthur Waley is the most famous in rendering Chinese poetry and most vocal in criticizing Pound’s inaccurate translation. In a way, he simply dismissed Pound’s Cathay poems as a third-hand rendition mediated first through the Japanese scholar Mr. Shida and then through Ernest Fenollosa. Clearly, a third-hand retransmission cannot be considered an accurate translation. However, when Pound completed the translation of the Shijing in his later life, he included the poems from Cathay with little modification.

In the 1990s, scholars of comparative literature revisited the controversy of Pound’s translation of Chinese poetry. They generally voiced positive opinions of his translation, but they also declined to regard his rendition as translation. Adopting the contemporary theories of reading and interpretation, they argue that Pound deliberately misread Chinese poems and then rendered them into English so as to advance his political, ethical, and aesthetic agendas. Once again, Pound’s translation has been explicitly or implicitly dismissed as translation per se.

Having briefly reviewed the reception of Pound’s translation of Chinese poetry, I wish to ask an unavoidable question: Should Pound’s rendition be viewed as a translation or as
imaginative recreation? I will examine a few of Pound’s translated poems in comparison with the original Chinese poems and in relation to his own theory of translation as well as contemporary theories of hermeneutics and translation. I will focus on a few carefully selected poems from the Shijing. Before analyzing the chosen translations, I wish to briefly consider Pound’s theory of translation.

Pound did not expound his theory of translation systematically in his lifetime. Nor did he express any clearly defined conceptual principles concerning the translation of Chinese poetry. In one of his essays, “Guido’s Relations” (1929), however, Pound voiced an explicit theory of translation. Although this essay is not directly related to the translation of Chinese poetry (its subject matter is the translation of a thirteenth-century Italian poet, Guido Cavalcanti), the principles he articulated there seem to have governed his translation practice in his lifetime, whether it is Chinese poetry or poetry of other European traditions. In this essay, Pound expressed two basic views on translation. His first view is that the task of translation is a search for stylistic equivalences, which he states as the search for “a verbal weight about equal to that of the original” (p. 32). The search for equivalences seems to suggest that Pound’s idea of translation is not any different from that of other professional translators: fidelity to the original. This is Pound’s principal view of translation. Despite his emphasis on the significance of fidelity, Pound considered the task of translation as having a good deal of autonomy. The freedom given by this autonomy made him hold a second view of translation: “This refers to ‘interpretive translation.’ The ‘other sort,’ I mean in cases where the ‘translator’ is definitely making a new poem, falls simply in the domain of original writing, or if it does not it must be censured according to equal standards, and praised with some sort of just deduction, assessable only in the particular case” (p. 33).

His second view implies two separate sub-views. In the first sub-view, he still retains the main idea of his first view. As one scholar understands it, “A translated text might be ‘interpretive,’ a critical ‘accompaniment,’ usually printed next to the foreign poem and composed of linguistic peculiarities that direct the reader across the page to foreign textual features, like a lexical choice or a prosodic effect.” In the second sub-view, the translated text is not so much a translated version as an original work of literary creation, for he seems to hold the view that a translation may be “original writing.” Even though he admits that such a translation should strictly be considered original writing in which the translator’s understanding of the foreign texts is so heavily under the sway of his own culture and the rendition is so heavily guided by the literary standards of the target language as to make the translated version seem a “new poem” in the target language, he insists that this kind of rewriting is still a form of translation because the relationship between the original poem and translated text still exists. My reading of Pound’s essay seems to suggest that Pound in fact articulates three views of translation, which may be summarized as (1) recreative translation; (2) interpretive translation; and (3) faithful translation. Recreative translation is experimental rewriting in which the translator attempts to recreate a version of a foreign poem in terms of principles guided by the translator’s political, ethical, or aesthetic agendas. In the case of Pound’s first attempt at translating Chinese poetry in Cathay, he professes to have the objective to reinvigorate English poetic language. In his translation of Cavalcanti’s Italian poetry, Pound held a similar aim and hoped to challenge previous Victorian translations that seem to him “obfuscated” by pre-Raphaelite medievalism. As Pound himself puts it, “My perception was not obfuscated by Guido’s Italian, difficult as it then was for me to read. I was obfuscated by the Victorian language.” He wants to invigorate the English language by overcoming the “six centuries of derivative convention and loose usage [that] have obscured the exact significance of such phrases as: ‘The death of the heart,’ and ‘The departure of the soul.’”

Interpretive translation aims at the translation of a culture as well as poems and attempts to reveal what is hidden in a foreign poem and makes it readily available for the reader of a different culture. In faithful
translation, a translator is engaged in rendering the poetry of a foreign language into the target language as faithfully as possible. In Pound’s career as a translator, he seems to have engaged in all three forms of translation. Usually, the three forms of translation blend with one another. He himself seems to have admitted to this blending. In his translation of Guido’s poetry, for example, he tried to be faithful to the original poems, but he did not hesitate to make changes: “I give the Italian to show that there is no deception, I have invented nothing, I have given a verbal weight about equal to that of the original, and arrived at this equality by dropping a couple of syllables per line.”

My examination of Pound’s translation of the Shijing informs me that he too was blending the three forms of translation in his Chinese project. I will cite a few of his translated versions to illustrate his three views of translation. First, I will cite an example of creative translation. This is Poem 167 in the Shijing. Pound’s version first appeared in 1915 in Cathay. A comparison of Pound’s version with Arthur Waley’s version shows that it is rather free and should be regarded as a recreative translation:

Poem 167

Pound’s Translation
Pick a fern, pick a fern, ferns are high,
“Home,” I’ll say: home, the year’s gone by,
no house, no roof, these huns of the hoof.
Work, work, work, that’s how it runs,
We are here because of these huns.

Pick a fern, pick a fern, soft as they come,
I’ll say “Home.”
Hungry all of us, thirsty here,
no home news for nearly a year.

Pick a fern, pick a fern, if they scratch,
I’ll say “Home,” what’s the catch?
I’ll say “Go home,” now October’s come.
King wants us to give it all,
no rest, spring, summer, winter, fall,
Sorrow to us, sorrow to you.
we won’t get out of here till we’re through.

When it’s cherry-time with you,
we’ll see the captain’s car go thru,
four big horses to pull that load.
that’s what comes along the road,
what do you call three fights a month,
and won ’em all?

Four car-horses strong and tall
and the boss who can drive ’em all
as we slog along beside his car,
ivory bow-tips and shagreen case
to say nothing of what we face
sloggin’ along in the Hien-yün war.

Willows were green when we set out,
it’s blowin’ an’ snowin’ as we go
down this road, muddy and slow,
hungry and thirsty and blue as doubt
(no one feels half of what we know).

Waley’s Translation
We pluck the bracken, pluck the bracken
While the young shoots were springing up.
Oh, to go back, go back!
The year is ending.
We have no house, no home
Because of the Xian-yun.
We cannot rest or bide
Because of the Xian-yun.

We pluck the bracken, pluck the bracken
While the shoots were soft.
Oh, to go back, go back!
Our hearts are sad,
Our sad hearts burn,
We are hungry and thirsty,
But our campaign is not over,
Nor is any of us sent home with news.

We pluck the bracken, pluck the bracken
But the shoots were hard.
Oh, to go back, go back!
The year is running out.
But the king’s business never ends;
We cannot rest or bide.
Our sad hearts are very bitter;
We went, but do not come.
What splendid thin
g is that?
It is the flower of the cherry-
tree.
What great carriage is that?
It is our lord’s chariot,
His war-chariot ready yoked,
With its four steeds so eager.
How should we dare stop or tarry?
In one month we have had three alarms.

We yoke the teams of four,
Those steeds so strong,
That our lord rides behind,
That lesser men protect
The four steeds so grand,
The ivory bow-ends, the fish-skin quiver.
Yes, we must be always on our guard;
The Xian-yun are very swift.

Long ago, when we started,
The willows spread their shade.
Now that we turn back
The snowflakes fly.
   The march before us is long,
   We are thirsty and hungry,
   Our hearts are stricken with sorrow,
   But no one listens to our plaint.  

Even a casual comparison is sufficient to tell
us that Pound did not even bother to keep the line
number of the stanza in the original Chinese
poem. Why did Pound ignore the original format
of the poem? There are two reasons. First, since
his translation was based on the notes by Ernest
Fenollosa and he had only minimal knowledge of
the Chinese language, he could only have the
main idea of the original poem. Second, at that
time Pound was seriously pondering on how to
challenge the Victorian English poetry both in its
content and form. The translation of the Chinese
poems enabled him to invent a poetic language
and poetic form that radically deviate from the
stilted Victorian poetry. It is mainly for this
reason that Eliot said that Pound was “the great
inventor of Chinese poetry for our time.” Eliot’s
pronouncement means that Pound was not so
much a translator of Chinese poetry at that time as
an inventor of a new form of poetry inspired by
the content and form of Chinese poetry.

The category of recreative translation appeals
to Pound a great deal. Even after he gained a
considerable knowledge of the Chinese language,
he still resorted to this form of translation a lot.
His translation of the first poem in the Shijing
is a case in point. To show how Pound translated
the original Chinese poem according to his
interpretation of the poem, I will attach the
original Chinese version and give a translation of
my own:

Poem No. 1

“Guan, guan,” cries the osprey,  关关雎鸠,
On the islet of the Yellow River.  在河之洲。
A graceful and virtuous lady  君子好逑,
Is a fit mate for a noble man.  君子好逑。

Long and short is water weed;  参差荇菜,
To left and right I search for it.  左右流之。
A graceful and virtuous lady,  君子好逑,
Day and night I search for her.  君子好逑。

Seeking her with no success,  求之不得,
I pine for her awake or asleep.  悠哉悠哉,
Endless, endless is my longing;  辗转反侧。
I toss and turn in my bed.  辗转反侧。

Long and short is water weed,  参差荇菜,
To left and right I gather it.  左右采之。
A graceful and virtuous lady,  君子好逑,
I play my zither to befriend her.  琴瑟友之。

Long and short is water weed;  参差荇菜,
To left and right I choose it.  左右芼之。
A graceful and virtuous lady,  君子好逑,
I amuse her with bells and drums.  钟鼓乐之。

Pound’s Translation

“Hid! Hid!” the fish-hawk saith,  关关雎鸠,
by isle in Ho the fish-hawk saith:
“Dark and clear,
“Dark and clear,
So shall be the prince’s fere.”
Clear as the stream her modesty;
As neath dark boughs her secrecy, reed against reed tall on slight
As the stream moves left and right, dark and clear, dark and clear.
To seek and not find
As a dream in his mind, think how her robe should be, distantly, to toss and turn, to toss and turn.

High reed caught in ts’ai grass so deep her secrecy;
Lute sound in lute sound is caught, touching, passing, left and right.
Bang the gong of her delight.\(^{12}\)

Waley’s Translation

“Fair, fair,” cry the osprey On the island in the river.
Lovely is the noble lady, Fair bride for our lord.

In patches grows the water mallow; To left and right one must seek it.
Shy was this noble lady; Day and night he sought her.

Sought her and could not get her; Day and night he grieved.
Long thoughts, oh, long unhappy thoughts, Now on his back, now tossing on to his side.

In patches grows the water mallow; To left and right one must gather it.
Shy is this noble lady; With great zither and little we hearten her.

In patches grows the water mallow; To left and right one must choose it.
Shy is this noble lady; With bells and drums we will gladden her.\(^{13}\)

Pound did not go on a completely free ride in his translation. He made a full use of the open hermeneutic space to exercise his imagination a bit. A comparison of the three versions shows that

the original Chinese poem has an interpretive space that sanctions different translations. Pound’s version differs from Waley’s and my translations in several significant aspects. For example, “fu” may be an empty word in this poem, but it also means “costume.” Pound translated it into “robe.” This variation, while revealing his inadequate knowledge of Chinese language, serves to show that Pound was really engaged in literal translation. Another major deviation from the original is found in Pound’s last stanza. He collapsed two original stanzas into one and condensed the information contained in the original stanzas. He also missed a crucial detail, “play zither to befriend her.” These deviations might be regarded as evidence of Pound’s inadequate knowledge of Chinese philology, or even mistakes. However, as Pound states in his essay on translation, “the mistake is ‘quite natural,’ very few mistakes are ‘unnatural.’”\(^{14}\) In the case of this poem, Pound made the mistakes because he wanted to make the English version sound like a natural English poem. Pound’s version shows that the relationship between the translated text and the original poem still largely exists.

In the category of interpretive translation, I will cite Pound’s translation of Poem 23 in the Shijing:

Pound’s Translation

Lies a dead deer on yonder plain Whom white grass covers, A melancholy maid in spring is luck for lovers.

Where the scrub elm skirts the wood, Be it not in white mat bound, As a Jewell flawless found, dead as doe is maidenhood.

Hark! Unhand my girdle-knot, stay, stay, stay or the dog may bark.\(^{15}\)
Waley’s Translation
In the Wilds Is a Dead Doe
In the wilds there is a dead doe;
With white rushes we cover her.
There was a lady longing for the spring;
A fair knight seduced her.

In the wood there is clump of oaks,
And in the wilds a dead deer
With white rushes well bound;
There was a lady fair as jade.

“heigh, not so hasty, not so rough;
Heigh, do not touch my handkerchief.
Take care, or the dog will bark.”

This is a rustic song of seduction and tryst, although Confucian scholars interpreted it entirely differently as a song of marriage rites with a didactic purpose. If we disregard Pound’s splitting a poetic line into several short lines for poetic effect, his version is quite close to Waley’s version. The most glaring point is the phrase, “dead as doe is maidenhood.” In terms of the original Chinese poem, Waley’s translation seems more faithful than Pound’s, but Pound’s translation does not deviate from the original as far as it appears. The impression that he translated the poem quite freely comes from the fact that while Waley translates the poem as closely faithful to the original as possible and allows the deep implication to lie latent for the reader to figure out, Pound spells out the latent meanings of the poem. In Pound’s version, the expression “dead as doe is maidenhood” does not appear in the original Chinese poem, but its latent meaning is there. There are several missing links that relate Pound’s added point to the original poem. The first link is the relation between “dead doe” and the girl, between “white reeds” and the “fine man.” The first two lines do not merely offer a background for the next two lines. In fact, there is an inherent relation of comparison between the two sets of lines. Modern psychology informs us that in the domain of the unconscious, the loss of life is often the equivalent for the loss of virginity. Literatures of various nations attest to this theory. A lovesick girl is a reward to a young man as a wild doe is a good catch for a huntsman. The poem first talks about the death of a doe, which refers to the hunting of does. Then it goes on to talk about the lovesickness of a maid. Through juxtaposition of the two phenomena, the poem relates the hunting to seduction, and the loss of life to loss of virginity. In life and folklore, the loss of virginity is often equated with the loss of life for a female. The difference between Waley’s translation and Pound’s translation is that while Waley attempts to put the reader to work in his reading, Pound goes a step further to guide the reader in his reading: “In the long run the translator is in all probability impotent to do all of the work for the linguistically lazy reader. He can show where the treasure lies, he can guide the reader in choice of what tongue is to be studied, and he can very materially assist the hurried student who has a smattering of a language and the energy to read the original text alongside the metrical gloze.”

Insofar as poetry goes, Pound’s translation is definitely superior to Waley’s version in poetic form. Waley translated the poem faithfully, and he pays enough attention to the rhythm of the poem, but he did not attend to the rhyme of the poem. By contrast, Pound makes careful efforts to make his translated version conform to a rhyming scheme, as he generally does in his translation of all the poems in the Shijing:

Stanza 1: ABAB; “plain” and “spring,”
“covers” and “lovers”
Stanza 2: ABBA “wood” and “maiden-hood,”
“bound” and “found”
Stanza 3: ABBA: “hark” and “bark,” “knot” and “dog”

Pound’s translation of Poem 23 is relatively faithful to the original. Indeed, we might say it borders on the category of faithful translation. Pound’s translation of Poem 129 is a more faithful version. I juxtapose below my own translation and Pound’s translation.
My Version

Reeds
Thick grow the reed leaves;
Their white dew turns to frost.
That so-called someone
Must be somewhere along this stream.
I went up the river to look for him/her,
But the way was difficult and long.
I went down the stream to look for him/her,
He/she seems to be in the mid-water.

Luxuriant grow the reed leaves;
Their white dew is not yet dry.
That so-called someone
Is at the water’s side.
Upstream I sought him/her,
But the way is hard and steep.
Downstream I sought him/her,
He/she seems to be at the islet in the water.

Splendid grow the reed leaves
Their white dew ceaselessly falls.
That so-called someone
Is at the water’s edge.
Upstream I sought him/her,
But the way is hard and tortuous.
Downstream I sought him/her,
He/she seems to be on the shoals of the water.

Pound’s Version

Phantom
Dark, dark be reed and rush,
the white dew turns to frost;
what manner of man is this?
lost?

Gin I rin up,
Gin I go down,
Up stream heavy, there he’d be
In mid water distantly.

Chill, chill be the reeds,
the white dew not yet dry;
What manner of man is he
under the hanging bank?
Up stream heavily.
gin I swim down,
on tufted isle
distantly.

Ever falls dew on bright reeds.
What manner of thing is he
who seems to be there on the marge

Up stream, to the West, at large?
Hard to go up, to swim, tho’ he seem
there on the isle, mid-stream.18

This is a love song, in spite of various
allegorical interpretations. It depicts the hope and
expectation, disappointment, and distraction of the
poet who longs for his/her sweetheart. The poem is
vague and mysterious, for the person sought is like
a phantom. Pound gives his translated version just
that title. Except for a few details, his version is
faithful to the original poem. Even those variations
are sanctioned by the openness of the original
poem.

Having examined a few of Pound’s translated
Chinese poem in relation to his own theory of
translation, I wish to make some concluding
remarks. Pound blended all three methods
of translation in his rendering of the Shijing poems.
The three categories of translation often appear in
the translation of a single poem. I venture to
suggest that Pound’s rendering should be viewed
as translations, for three reasons. First, translators
of the Shijing suffer from several handicaps,
which, paradoxically, also give them an
autonomy. Although philological problems in the
Shijing have mostly been resolved by traditional
scholars, there are some large issues that cannot
be resolved by philology alone. In the 1930s,
scholars like Gu Jiegang, Wen I-to, and others,
with the aid of historiography, comparative
mythology, and ethnography, succeeded in
clarifying some important issues left untouched
by philology. But the question of adequate
understanding still remains. For a single poem,
scholars have already come up with more than
one reading. Take the first poem of the Shijing,
“Guanju,” for example. There are, according to
my incomplete statistics, eight major
interpretations and many more minor readings.
Of the major interpretations, the poem has been
construed to cover heaven and earth, individuals and society, government and politics, mores and morality, family relations and human relations, customs and habits, physical passion and spiritual sublimation, eulogy and satire, etc. The interpretations are not always compatible with each other. In fact, some directly conflict with and contradict each other. In terms of the multiple interpretations, we may say that the poem is practically open. This is also true of many other poems in the anthology. Thus, all translators of the Shi Jing may make their own decision as to how to understand the poems. Pound, as Rossetti says in the preface to his Early Italian Poets, has only attempted to “cut various knots, and make arbitrary decisions” on his own.

Second, the open nature of the collection gave Pound and other translators much room to make their decision in translation. Except for blatant errors and misunderstandings of classical Chinese, Pound’s variations in his translation are largely justified by the openness of the interpretive space. The Shi Jing is a collection of poems that possess varying degrees of openness. The poems are open because (1) their authors are unknown, or at least unverifiable, although some conjectures may be made; (2) the original purpose for composing these poems is unknown; (3) the contexts in which these poems were composed are vague and indeterminate; and (4) the signifying elements of individual poems are multivalent, the structuring principles are open-ended, and the possible themes and effects are open. The question of adequate understanding dogs the translation of each poem. Thus, the differences in Pound’s version are but the results of his making choices sanctioned by the openness of the poem and by the autonomy of interpretive translation.

Third, Pound’s translation is justified by modern theories of translation that emphasize linguistic equivalence as well as the translation of cultures. In the past half century, conceptual inquiries into translation have shifted from the notion of translation as a linguistic act of faithful rendition of a text from one language into another to the view of translation as an interpretive and negotiative act that privileges the target-language inscription in the foreign text and emphasizes cross-cultural representation of creative values. In view of this new orientation, I suggest that Pound’s translation anticipated a contemporary theory of translation that stresses the fusion of horizons embodied in the original and target texts.

After collating some of his translated poems with their original Chinese poems in the local context of his time and his own theory of translation, we must admit that Pound was indeed engaged in translation, as he professed. Considering the enlarged notion of translation in the larger context of postmodern theories of translation, we have all the more reason to call into question the belief generally held by previous scholars that Pound was either engaged in creative rewriting of Chinese poems or in misreading so as to write original poems. Pound spent intermittently fifty years studying the Chinese language. His commitment to learning the Chinese language is not a whim but a sustained effort to gain the direct means to understand and learn about Chinese culture and poetry. Despite the variations, differences, errors, and misunderstandings in his translated versions, he was genuinely engaged in the act of translation. I therefore wish to draw the conclusion that Pound is indeed a translator of Chinese poetry.

Notes

6Lawrence Venuti’s comment in The Translation Studies Reader, p. 12.
7Pound, “Guido’s Relation,” p. 27.
9 Pound, “Guido’s Relation,” p. 32.
I Don’t Believe in Ghosts

Boredom often creates strange ghosts, white fogs in which the buildings sway and there’s no stability or law. What happened to the old choreography of vanishing ghosts?

Rain in Europe. Clouds on the horizon open and close for the tragedies of the time. Sober above Shakespeare’s statue, Romeo and Juliet have fallen out of love.

Now that I know all the legends, I pick them up, strangely focused, to light (as if with a magnifying glass) the unfiltered cigarettes of my poems—

fuses of metaphors for poetic explosions that change the core of a person to the core of the universe. I’ve never believed in the ghosts weak-minded people weave on their looms.

I believe in life, everything I love, the entirety of a giant stadium. I want to kick the planet like a soccer ball into the open goal of the future.

Often I get up in the night, but you need to know I never sleepwalk. I stretch out my arms like two streets, blood moving through them like traffic.

And sometimes I’m an extraordinary optimist, though the cancer of bureaucrats tortures me. It’s more difficult to leave than to take gloves off icy hands.

Moikom Zeqo and translator Wayne Miller

a bilingual albanian and english edition
available at your local bookstore or BOA’s secure online store www.boaeditions.org
BOOK REVIEWS


Regina Galasso, Reviewer

In recent years, there has been a growing critical acknowledgement of the literary production in Spanish or by writers from Spanish-speaking countries outside the geographical borders of Latin America and Spain. Studies of this kind have embraced the creative work of not only living but also deceased authors. In doing so, this tendency has provided the opportunity to recuperate overlooked texts as well as re-evaluate current practices of literary history and studies by welcoming authors who have traveled across national and linguistic borders. As a result, translation becomes an integral part of dealing with this corpus, because the texts need to be translated in order to be read in the dominant language of the author’s homeland or the newly adopted environment. Hugh Hazelton contributes to the growing awareness of this literature not only as a critic but also as a translator in *Latinocanadá: A Critical Study of Ten Latin American Writers of Canada* (2007).

Hazelton’s 312-page book opens with an introduction followed by individual studies of ten Latino-Canadian authors and never-before-published translations of their work. Well aware of the “complex interplay of geographical, cultural, and literary factors” (23) that are part of composing an anthology, Hazelton explains the factors that determine his selection of authors and texts, ranging from the mass of their corpus and its translation into English to gender and national, regional, and socio-economic background. The carefully composed list of authors in *Latinocanadá* are Jorge Etcheverry (Chile, 1945), Margarita Feliciano (Argentina, 1938), Gilberto Flores Patiño (Mexico, 1941), Alfredo Lavergne (Chile, 1951), Alfonso Quijada Urias (El Salvador, 1940), Nela Rio (Argentina, 1938), Alejandro Saravia (Bolivia, 1962), Yvonne Américo Truque (Colombia, 1955), Pablo Urbanyi (Argentina, 1939), and Leandro Urbina (Chile, 1949). Each section, marked with the author’s name and a subtitle, offers biographical information concentrating on the author’s career in general and literary activity in Canada as well as an overview of the themes and development of the author’s work. At times, Hazelton provides helpful close readings of selected texts.

Hazelton is very much engaged on many levels with his subject, as he frequently mentions the spouses, ex-wives, and friends of each author as well as his own participation in Latino-Canadian literary production. In this way, he is able to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the environment — spouses are in some instances also translators and artistic collaborators — as well as add a personal touch that exposes a sensitivity toward a nonacademic audience. Hazelton also explains for the nonspecialized reader the significance of names like Borges, Cortázar, and Puig in the main text or footnotes. Overall, *Latinocanadá* appeals to readers already familiar with Latino-Canadian writing or Hispanic literature at large as well as to anyone interested in any literary production in Canada.

The introduction, titled “Latin American Writing in Canada: Formation of a Literature,” outlines the breadth and depth of Latino-Canadian literature, occupying a place in every principal literary genre. Hazelton tells about the history of major waves of Peninsular and Latin American migration to Canada and about the emergence and adaptation of a Latino-Canadian literature. He deals not only with the writers themselves but also with the presses, publications, literary festivals and events, collaborations, and translations, among other pivotal factors, that have helped Latino writing to gain coherence and visibility in Canada. Next, Hazelton focuses on the main themes and their
transformation depending on a particular writer’s Canadian experience. The introduction serves as a guide not only to the birth and development of Latino-Canadian writing but also to an understanding of “a parallel literature” (4), a term Hazelton credits to critic and poet Gary Geddes, or “one that runs alongside those of mainstream English- and French-speaking Canada and also feeds new writers into the literature of the two official languages” (4). U.S.-Latino writing is another obvious example of a “parallel literature.”

Latinocanadá reveals the complex linguistic situation surrounding Latino-Canadian literature, because it is not just about Spanish and English but also about French and Portuguese, or a variety of languages in a single text. Since translations make up a large part of this anthology and Hazelton is an award-winning translator (2006 Governor General’s Literary Award), the book could benefit from a commentary by Hazelton himself on the process and obstacles involved with translating the authors he includes. This would certainly be of interest to fellow translators and draw the attention of a nonspecialized audience to the details and challenges of the craft of translation.

Hazelton’s book is a fine union of both his critical and creative forces. Beyond the parameters of Latino-Canadian writing, this text also recognizes the multilingual origins of contemporary Canadian literature and questions the boundaries of national literatures of Latin American countries. Hazelton carves out a solid space for Canada in the vast, multilingual world of Hispanic literary production. Finally, Latinocanadá would be a nice counterpart to a course on U.S.-Latino literature in order to achieve a greater knowledge of the place of writers born in dominantly Spanish-speaking countries or Spanish-language literary production in areas north of the U.S.-Mexico border.


*Albert Lloret, Reviewer*

The verses of Ausiàs March (Valencia, 1400–1459) embrace the poetic legacy of the troubadours in a unique way. His contemporaries in the kingdoms of Aragon and Castille, presently Spain, acclaimed and emulated his long, picturesque similies, his scientifically informed love theory, or his energetic, severe, and self-centered poetical voice. Furthermore, sixteenth-century Spanish poets of the Renaissance esteemed March’s verses in a way comparable only to Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*. As a result, his poetry not only became a repository of images and conceits that Garcilaso de la Vega and Juan Boscán would borrow to write their own sonnets, but was also printed, translated from Catalan into Spanish, and even reprinted on several occasions, as classics and best-selling works merited in the 1500s, and still do nowadays.

In *Verse Translations of Thirty Poems*, Robert Archer has selected thirty poems from March’s one hundred and twenty-odd compositions, in what stands as a fully representative choice of March’s various registers. Just as the first editors and translators of March’s works did back in the sixteenth century, Archer has distributed the poems in different sections. The first section of the anthology is devoted to “Love Poems,” followed by “Poems of Praise and Blame,” “Philosophical Poems,” “Poems on Grief,” and finally “A Poem on God and Predestination.” Obviously, those epigraphs do not pretend to categorize in absolute terms each composition, but rather to orient the reader according to the way March has traditionally been interpreted. Likewise, the introduction and a few essential end notes included in the edition helpfully bridge the gap between a fifteenth-century audience and the modern reader.
The translation is accompanied by a Catalan text, from Archer’s own critical edition of Ausiàs March (1998). In this respect, there is a problematic detail, actually very small, but which should be noted. In poem LXVIII (“It’s just the opposite with me”), lines 6–8 of the translation are not the same lines of the original text included on the opposite page. Instead, they are a fragment of a stanza that appears solely in one sixteenth-century edition of the text. For the sake of philological coherence, perhaps it would have been preferable either not to translate those lines at all, or to have included and translated the entire stanza.

Archer’s selection of texts favors March’s shorter and lyrical compositions such as the esparses (single-stanzaic compositions) but limits the number of longer and discursive pieces. In particular, among the more memorable pieces of March’s work, poem CVI could have been included in the “Philosophical” section; also poems XLV and LXXXVII, which are thorough accounts of March’s thought on love. This choice to privilege brevity and lyricism, which agrees with contemporary poetical tendencies and commonly appears in all existing anthologies of March’s poetry, does not, however, preclude the reader from getting to know the essential features of March’s works. The anthology includes, for instance, the long poem XCII (“Those ruthless hands no mortal ever spared”), which can also be read as an exposition of March’s love theory and is well grounded on moral philosophy.

Archer has based some of his present verse translations on his own prose renderings of the poetry of Ausiàs March, which appeared in his previous edition as an aid to read the Catalan text (1992). But whether translated anew or reworked into verse, the present translation does not correspond verse-to-verse with the original (although this could have been another legitimate option). Interestingly enough, the translator seems to have been working with different ranges of the text, from a couplet to a whole stanza, before successfully bringing March into modern English as faithfully as possible. Therefore, the meter employed has been instrumental. The blank iambic pentameter has allowed the original decasyllabic stanzas to flow from one line to the next, freeing the translation of a rhyme discipline, which surely would have forced March’s poetry into unforeseen tortures. Such translation, though, has occasionally required the original end-stopping lines to become enjambments, renouncing March’s particular syntax and prosody (e.g., poem I, lines 43–44; II, 27–28, 36–37; III, 3–4, etc.).

Among the fine uses of this poetics of translation, poems XIII and XLVI are notable. In the first stanza of poem XIII, March opposes some of the worldly pleasures people commonly enjoy (lines 1–4) to his suffering caused by love, comparable to the pains of the damned (II. 5–8). Whereas March’s original verses set forth two sets of images joined by a single conjunction (e, i.e., “and”), Archer’s English translation structures the two quatrains syntactically in order to clarify that the poetic voice is content with his fate. This is typically claimed by the poetic voice in other places, such as poem X (lines 25–32) and poem XXVIII, for example.

Why should I object if people only think of feast-days, and how best to mix in fun with worship, and fill the squares and streets and bright gardens, and hear the great tales sung? For I would sooner walk among the tombs and ply damned spirits with my questions; I know they’ll answer, for there’s no one else who’d willingly join their lamentation. (XIII, 1–8, my italics)

Poem XLVI provides another example of the translator’s desire for transparency, departing from a verse-to-verse translation, and coherent to March’s poetic voice. Here, the poetic voice ponders how no danger, extreme situation, or even death can weaken his love. The first stanza stages a battle of the same winds that should bring his ship back to his beloved. In the original text, the poetic voice situates the winds against each other, confidently abandoning his fate to them. In the translation, emphasis is given to the determined will of the poetic voice.
for his return, clarifying his position in the first two lines.

*I shall return*: the winds shall swell my sails,
*I’ll set a course* of danger through the sea,
not caring West and North-West winds take arms:
Levanter with Sirocco will hold firm,
helped by their allies — North-Eastern, Midi —
who humbly will entreat the great North wind
to stay its blast, so favouring their cause
that all five together may bring me back.(XLVI, 1–8, my italics)

As these two examples illustrate, this new translation of March’s poetry will aid the academic reader to access the “content” enclosed in the stanzas of an outstanding poet of the late Middle Ages who had a considerable bearing on the Renaissance. In addition, Archer’s verse translation of March, accessible to a wide variety of readers, will hopefully have a presence beyond classrooms and university libraries, at least like those of Ovid, Petrarch, and Shakespeare.

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Gregory J. Racz, Reviewer

In the Translator’s Note to The Solitudes, his 1964 version of Soledades by Spanish Baroque author Luis de Góngora y Argote (1561–1627) — still the finest rendering of this work in English — Gilbert F. Cunningham writes graciously of an earlier translation by the renowned Cambridge hispanist E.M. Wilson: “This pioneer version, published in 1931….is made on a slightly different principle from mine, for though the form is the *silva*, Professor Wilson has, probably wisely, attained greater freedom by not tying himself to the precise metrical scheme of the original. Indeed, had this not been so, I do not think I would have attempted the task myself, but in the circumstances I have felt that a new rendering on a different basis was worth the endeavor.” It is difficult to ascertain what “principle” led John Dent-Young to undertake this handsome, but ultimately disappointing, volume of Góngora translations, which features uneven renderings of thirty-eight *romances*, *letrillas*, and sonnets by this master of Spanish indirection; the first of the two enigmatic *Soledades*; all sixty-three stanzas of the *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea*; and nearly three-fourths of a longish, self-parodic ballad on the ill-fated love of Pyramis and Thisbe. Dent-Young’s facing-page translations are accompanied by a critical apparatus that all but announces his ad hoc approach to recoding Góngora for English-language audiences. While no one will argue too strenuously with his statement that “[d]ifferent poems have required different strategies,” other assertions from this volume’s Introduction are too often undercut by explanations in the Commentary.

Seemingly set on saving Góngora from his reputation as an arcane, mannered, and recherché versifier, Dent-Young writes: “My hope was that I could rescue Góngora from his role as textbook example of the Baroque and give him a human voice. I have tried not to sentimentalize the poems or to make too big a change in their form…. What I would like above all is to have caught the down-to-earth aspect of Góngora’s poetry and the seriousness of his approach, whatever the mood and tone of a particular poem.” Of course, Góngora’s poetry follows the strict metrical and stanzaic patterns of his day; Dent-Young’s often prosy approximations of the Spanish lines and half-hearted stabs at assonantal patterns and rhyme schemes, not to mention his need for extra lines in the first Solitude, make one wonder what he means by “too big a change” in form. Peppered throughout the book’s Commentary are glosses that speak to the limits of Dent-Young’s translatorial vision. On his rendering of a 1580 *romancillo* he writes: “Here I have not made a serious attempt to reproduce the form beyond trying to keep the lines as short as possible, but I
have tried to keep the conversational tone.” Of a *letrilla* from 1581, one reads: “I have tried to capture the spirit, without reproducing the rhyme scheme.” Regarding his translation of sonnets, Dent-Young feebly asserts: “In most of my versions, where it does not interfere too much with the meaning, I have attempted some kind of sound link in the rhyming positions.” (For whatever reason, Góngora’s sonnets do fare best here.) In a note on the first stanza of The Fable of Polyphemus and Galatea, Dent-Young confesses to losing both the word-play in the name “Niebla” (mist) and any mention of the *zampoña* or rustic flute. Commenting on Stanza 37, he writes: “A more literal version of line 6 would be ‘even if bronze surrounded it, diamond walled it in,’ but I could not make that fit.” For ll. 285–292 of Pyramus and Thisbe, this: “she stumbles (in the Spanish; it didn’t seem to fit in the English).” Again, for a 1608 romance: “Unfortunately I have not been able to match the brevity of the original.” Unfortunate, indeed.

Perhaps, this highlighting of translation losses castigates Dent-Young unduly for his professional honesty. Still, he does appear unsure of how to proceed with Góngora, and at several points the reader is left with the sense that the Spanish Baroque is unfamiliar territory for him. A blurb on the dust jacket reveals only that “John Dent-Young is a freelance editor and translator who has also translated from Mandarin Chinese” and that “[h]e was a lecturer in English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for nearly twenty years.” A short note on the copyright page indicates that “[h]e is co-author, with his son Alex, of the full English version of the Chinese classical novel the Shuihuzhuan (often known in English as The Water Margin), published in five parts under the titles The Broken Seals, The Tiger Killers, The Gathering Company, Iron Ox, and The Scattered Flock.” Perhaps this deducible lack of expertise with the language and conventions of Góngora’s poetry explains the tentative phrasing of his notes. Take, for example, the 1587 romance “Hamme dicho hermanas” [Sisters, they tell me]. Translating “Por que no movais” as “So to spare you a movement,” Dent-Young writes in the Commentary: “The Spanish probably suggests ‘so you won’t have an abortion.’” A later line prompts this confession: “I don’t understand the reference to ‘those who sign with their foot,’ though there seems to be no problem in relating it to horses.” Regarding “presa” and “pinta,” Dent-Young writes, again admitting his difficulty: “*Presa* and *pinta* is said to have been the name of a card game that was banned in 1597. I imagine these were terms used in play. I have improvised a translation.” It is, frankly, consternating to see a note read “Line 21 would perhaps be better rendered as ‘with an eye on his profits,’” when this is in fact the case, or to learn in the Commentary of another line that “[t]he literal translation is actually funnier and even more colloquial” than the poetry translation turns out to be.

John Dent-Young is not the first translator to have met his match in Góngora, whose works have appeared in English intermittently since the years following his death. Principal among near-contemporary translators were such poetic luminaries as Thomas Stanley and Sir Richard Fanshawe. Lord Holland, John Bowring (of “Watchman, Tell Us of the Night” fame), Archdeacon Edward Churton (Thackeray’s kindly tutor at Charterhouse), and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow all produced admirable versions spanning the nineteenth century. Others such as Alice Jane McVan and John Pierrepont Rice followed with translations of their own after the rediscovery of Góngora by scholars of Spain’s Generation of ’27, notably Dámaso Alonso, on the tercentenary of his death. Wilson succinctly describes *gongorismo* as “remarkable for a latinisation of vocabulary and syntax, combined with a great elaboration and complication of metaphor…. The syntactic liberties were more violent… — hyperbata, absolutes and Greek accusatives — …. Inversions are to be found in most poetry, but Góngora crowded his pages with them and further distorted the normal order of the sentence by separating the noun from the adjective and the verb from the auxiliary.” Regarding practical approaches to translation, Cunningham remarks: “Many of Góngora’s
characteristic effects, such as his classical syntax, are impossible in an uninflected language like English.” Wilson concurs, suggesting the strategy of embedding, as in his translation of “que Himeneo a sus mesas te destina” (Soledad primera, l. 314) as “Destined, for Hymeneal banquets, prey.” Dent-Young, too, notes in his Introduction to the First Solitude: “I have not tried to reproduce Góngora’s hyperbaton (unusual word order) because I believe Latinate word order is awkward in English and is too much associated with ‘poetic’ style. Instead, I have pushed the branching and embedding potential of English to its limit….” This “limit” is immediately apparent in l. 5 of the Dedication to the First Solitude, about which Dent-Young explains in a note that he has had to mention the title “duke” where only an apostrophe to some unknown “tú” appears in Spanish because the imperative verb relating to this figure does not appear for eight more lines.

A fair-minded reviewer would have to admit, then, that translations of Góngora into English have never truly managed to convey his style; three and a half centuries of Anglo-American examples tend to reflect the target-culture poetic values of their day instead of conveying any real sense of Baroque rhetoric. This said, Dent-Young does manage to produce occasionally mellifluous lines, as here in a passage from Pyramus and Thisbe describing the latter’s nether regions: “The etcetera was of marble/ and its hidden declivities/ might do serious injury/ to those nude divinities...” (“El etcétera es de mármol,/ cuyos relieves ocultos/ traían mórvido hiercer/ a los divinos desnudos...” ll. 73–76). He is notably hamfisted with rhyming refrains, though, flatly rendering “dejadme llorar/ orillas del mar” from a 1580 romance [But yesterday married] as “Give me leave to cry/ on the seashore.” Consider McVan’s translation of ll. 45–48 from a 1603 romance [In the pinewoods of the Júcar]. “Serranas de Cuenca/ iban al pinar,/ unas por piñones,/ otras, por bailar” becomes to her musical ear “Cuenca girls/ To pine groves chance./ Some for pine nuts,/ Some to dance.” Now contrast it to Dent-Young’s leaden “The girls of Cuenca/ went to the pinewood,/ some for pine nuts,/ others for the dance.” Dent-Young fares no better with mystic poems such as the 1621 letrilla [A carnation has fallen], subtitled “For the birth of Christ Our Lord.” His translation of “Caido se le ha un Clavel/ hoy a la Aurora del seno:/ ¡qué glorioso que está el heno,/ porque ha caído sobre él!” (ll. 1–4) as “A carnation has fallen/ from the bosom of dawn./ How blessed the hay is,/ for that’s where it’s fallen” is easily bested by Longfellow’s “Today from the Aurora’s bosom/ A pink has fallen— crimson blossom:/ And oh, how glorious rests the hay/ On which the fallen blossom lay!”

A snippet of the 1,091 lines of the First Solitude should similarly make the case for the superiority of Cunningham’s not-always-strictly-rhymed but faithfully metrical translation. Referring to one of the animals brought for slaughter to a wedding feast, the text reads: “No excedía la oreja/ el pululante ramo/ del ternezuelo gamo,/ que mal llevar se dejó:/ y con razón: que el tálamo desdeña/ la sombra aun de lisonja tan pequeña” (ll. 329–334). Cunningham smoothes out Góngora’s syntax and explicitates the passage as follows: “His sprouting antlers still/ Too short to reach the ear,/ One led a gentle deer/ that brooked the halter ill,/ And rightly so, for Hymen disavows/ The slightest shade of horn on married brows.” Dent-Young can only approximate the poetic qualities of the Spanish original in this fashion: “Also a young deer/ whose budding antlers/ don’t exceed his ears in length/ is dragged protesting, and with reason, for/ the marriage bed resents/ the merest shadow of such endowments.”

As for the Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea written in ottava rima, Mack Singleton’s 1975 translation comes closer to echoing Góngora’s archaic vocabulary and lofty diction than any English-language rendering of this author. The best version available of this substantial work, Singleton’s Polyphemus transmutes the traditional abababcc rhyme scheme of this originally Italian stanza into ababcdcd, as in this translation of Stanza 26, in which Acis leaves
refreshment beside the sleeping Galatea. The Spanish, in all its metaphorical splendor, reads:

El celestial humor recién cuajado
que la almendra guardó entre verde y seca,
en blanca mimbre se lo puso al lado,
y un copo, en verdes juncos, de manteca;
en breve corcho, pero bien labrado,
un rubio hijo de una encina hueca,
dulcísimo panal, a cuya cera
su néctar vinculó la primavera.

Compare Singleton’s version below to Dent-Young’s, which follows:

A dew in pearl-coagulation fresh
Of almonds (ripe — by age, though not oppressed)
Beside her set he in a wicker mesh
And wedgèd butter in a rush-hewn nest;
In cork diminutive shorn clean of chinks
Lies ruddy fruit of forest’s hollow king —
An honeyed comb — whose drowsy nectar winks
In cells of wax — incarcerated spring!

He laid beside her in a plaited creel
freshly peeled almonds, between green and dry,
barely formed and set from celestial dew,
with a pat of butter reposing on green reeds,
and a small box, skilfully made from cork,
containing that blonde child of the hollow oak,
the honeycomb, where in each compact sector
spring has bound to wax her sweetest nectar.

If Wilson’s Solitudes was Edwardian England’s
solution to the conundrum that Góngora so clearly remains in the English-speaking world,
then Dent-Young’s game but short-of-the-mark efforts typify the dominant trends in poetry
translation for the last sixty or so years. Expertly phrased by Yves Bonnefoy, these are: “une légère condensation de l’originale…, un net rajeunissement de celui-ci, et la production d’une poéticité légèrement ‘prosaïque’. ” Condensed, modernized, and slightly prosified — Dent-Young has given a reading public
fearful of poetic form and comfortable only with free verse the Góngora it rightly deserves.


Rainer Schulte, Reviewer

Jean de La Fontaine belongs to the eminent French writers of the seventeenth century.

He counted Racine, Boileau, and Molière among his friends. The latter one was almost the same age as La Fontaine, the other two considerably younger. Norman Shapiro has lived with La Fontaine for many decades. The culmination of his interaction with the fables is this voluminous collection of La Fontaine’s complete fables. The Greek word for fable, derived from the Latin fibula, is mythos, which simply means story. And indeed, La Fontaine’s fables do tell a story in each case. These stories, about 250 of them, speak in their simplicity and wit to children as well as to adults. La Fontaine worked on these fables, which have been organized into “Twelve Books,” during most of his life. The first six books appeared in 1668, five books ten years later, and the twelfth volume in 1694, the year before his death.

From now on, the translation of La Fontaine’s fables will always be associated with Norman Shapiro. In his introduction to the Fifty Fables of La Fontaine, Shapiro makes the nice distinction between “recreation” and “re-creation.” For him translation is first of all a form of “recreation,” yet by necessity also a form of “re-creation.” It is this latter definition that characterizes Shapiro’s translations. There is a lightness of tone in these fables as the translator plays within the sounds and rhythms of the original French to be transplanted into the chains of the English language.

Obviously, translation can never be considered the exact reproduction of the original language. However, what counts is the specific interpretive perspective and insight that the translator re-creates in the new language. The pleasure of translating these fables vibrates in
the lines of each one of them. Shapiro’s keen ear listens to the refined nuances of tune and tone, to speak with Seamus Heaney, in the words and the lines of La Fontaine’s free verse. It is clear that Shapiro knows to go beyond the word on the pages to re-imagine and re-sense the deeper emotional and aesthetic situations that lie behind these words. That ability surfaces in those moments of the translation when Shapiro frees himself from the literal meaning of words, does not try to reproduce the literalness, but rather finds corresponding linguistic and sound structures in English that bring the atmosphere of the original to life — a rare gift of a translator.

The great inspiration for the fables, however, came from Aesop, perhaps the father of the fable genre, and La Fontaine is eager to expresses his admiration at the very beginning of “Book One.”

Je chante les héro dont Esope est le père,
Troupe de qui l’histoire, encor que mensongère,
Contient des vérités qui servent de leçons.

I sing those heroes, Aesop’s progeny,
Whose tales, fictitious though indeed they be,
Contain much truth. Herein, endowed with speech….

I would venture that there is hardly any French student who has not learned one or the other fable by Jean de La Fontaine by heart, which also includes me when I attended the French Lycée. How could we forget the words of “Le Corbeau et le Renard!” In general, the earlier fables based on animals are more immediately accessible to children, whereas the fables of the later years are more philosophically oriented.

Translators are continuously attracted to producing new translations of the fables. Quite a few translations of the fables have appeared in the past three decades. What prompts translators to produce yet another translation of a poem that has already been translated many times? Paul Valéry once observed that a poem is never finished; it can only be abandoned in despair. Of course this is doubly true of a translation; if a poem is any good, it asks to be translated again. The original source language does not call for a translation within the same language. However, a translation calls for a new translation to bring the work into the pulse of the present language. Languages change, the semantic associations of words change, the aesthetic sensibility of an age changes, and the interpretive perceptions of translators change. After all, the success of a translation depends on the intensity of the interpretive approach that the translator brings to the text. No translation will ever be an identical reproduction of the original. The translator will create situations in the new language that are similar to those in the original but not identical. However, the successful transplantation of the semantic intricacies and sound nuances of the source language spaces will depend entirely on how coherent and insightful a translator has created a vision of the work.

Shapiro’s translation reflects such an internalized vision of the oeuvre of La Fontaine, an interpretive vision that is consistent throughout the twelve books of the fables. The color of word-sounds blends well into the overall tone of each fable. No unexpected fortissimos break the atmosphere of the fables. Even when Shapiro becomes creative in his word choices or emendations of lines, those unexpected insertions might surprise the reader, but they balance the rhythm of the sound progression.

I refer to a line of “Le Renard et le Corbeau,” the fable that is reproduced in every anthology of French literature. I want to discuss a few translations of this poem, especially the opening lines. The interpretive approaches and the choice of words and expressions vary greatly.

Here are the opening lines of this fable preceded by the French.

Le Corbeau et le Renard

Maître Corbeau, sur un arbre perché,
Tenait en son bec un fromage.
Maître Renard, par l’odeur alléché,
Lui tint à peu près ce langage:
«Hé ! Bonjour, Monsieur du Corbeau.
Que vous êtes joli! que vous me semblez beau!»

The Fox and the Crow
On his airy perch among the branches
Master Crow was holding cheese in his beak.
Master Fox, whose pose suggested fragrances,
Said in language which of course I cannot speak,
“Aha, superb Sir Ebony, well met.
How black! Who else boasts your metallic jet!
[Translated by Marianne Moore. 1952]

The Crow and the Fox
Mr. Crow, perched in a tree, held in his beak
A Piece of cheese.
Mr. Fox, attracted by the smell,
Began to speak
In terms roughly like these:
“Hullo!
I mean, good morning, honourable Crow,
You look uncommonly well,
Indeed you look a veritable Romeo.
[Translated by James Michie. 1979]

The Crow and the Fox
At the top of a tree perched master Crow;
In his beak he was holding a cheese.
Drawn by the smell, Master Fox spoke, below.
The words, more or less, were these:
“Hey, now, Sir Crow! Good day, good day!
How very handsome you do look, how grandly,
distingué!”
[Translated by Norman B. Spector. 1988]

The Crow and the Fox
Perched on a treetop, Master Crow
Was clutching in his bill a cheese,
When Master Fox, sniffing the fragrant breeze,
Came by and, more or less, addressed him so:
“Good day to you, Your Ravenhood!
How beautiful you are! How fine! How fair!
[Translated by Norman R. Shapiro. 2007]

The tremendous differences in the above translations are immediately visible. Changes of sensibility and word choices multiply to the extent that some of the word choices are no longer accessible to the reader in the context of the fable. Marianne Moore’s translation evokes a dissonant sound in the reader’s ear, perhaps not so much because of the semantic choices but rather because of the sounds that don’t fit into the overall tone of her translation. I refer to the “Aha, superb Sir Ebony, well met” and the “metallic jet.” Those expressions fall outside of the tone that she has established in the beginning lines.

Spector forces the issue in a different way. The following two lines stick out:
“Hey, now, Sir Crow! Good day, good day!
How very handsome you do look, how grandly, distingué!”
As far as the meaning is concerned, the translator communicates what La Fontaine wants to express. However, the two lines disrupt the tone movement of the previous lines and do sound a little précieux.

Michie goes even one step further by introducing the comparison with “Romeo.” Obviously each translator can stretch his or her interpretive outlook on a work. Yet, whatever the final product might be, the solutions should reinforce the overall structure and aesthetic orientation of a literary work.

Shapiro also pushed his translation a little to the edge when he introduces “Your Ravenhood.” Even though the word choice attracts the attention of the reader at once, it extends the flowing calm and balance of these opening lines. Whether there are echoes of Poe should be left to the imagination and the memory of the reader. In Shapiro’s translations, meaning and sound patterns flow into each other with metrical control and create La Fontaine’s soothing melody, which is reinforced through a never-ending wit and humor to articulate and to overcome his distaste for human folly.

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