The AALITRA Review

A JOURNAL OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

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AALITRA

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The AALITRA Review
publishes high-quality material concerned with literary translation, as well as translations of literary texts from other languages into English. It aims to foster a community of literary translators and to be a forum for lively debate concerning issues related to the translation of literary texts. All submissions are subject to anonymous peer review.

We welcome submissions in the following areas:
– scholarly articles on aspects of translation (both practical and theoretical)
– interviews with established translators on aspects of their practice
– book reviews of translations and texts about translation.
– original translations of poetry and prose accompanied by a translator's commentary

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Translation Plus: On Literary Translation and Creative Writing

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Abstract
How do the disciplines of translation studies and creative writing relate in an institutional setting or in current practice more broadly? What role does translation play in the creative writing workshop or classroom, especially for students writing in English as a second language? What benefits are there in the interchange? What can translation add? The article considers these questions in a wide-ranging discussion of writing processes that recognize translation as both a constraint and a highly elastic and enabling concept. Reference is made to writers such as Juan Pablo Villalobos, Ben Lerner and Merlinda Bobis whose work is thematically concerned with issues of translation, and the author's own novel, *The Red Thread*, which adapts a Chinese text, as well as pedagogical experiments in creative writing involving literary texts from languages other than English. This contributes to an argument that translation is an integral part of contemporary creative practice in a world characterized by mobility, multiplicity and transculturalism.

Did she say Ivanhoe?
All around those parts is where the man lived who was right meat for her.
A long time ago it must be, they took a fancy to one another.
I suppose she's getting an old woman now.

My epigraph comes from Tamsin Donaldson's essay "Translating Oral Literature: Aboriginal Song Texts" and is her version of a Ngiyambaa song from Western New South Wales that "was composed by the late Jack King, father of Archie King, the lone survivor of those who were 'made men' in 1914", by going through the last initiation ceremonies held in their country (Donaldson 64). Her essay "offers a sprinkling of examples from an extensive oral literature whose full range remains unknown, and [which is…] for the most part disappearing" (63). Her "'translations', in the sense developed here" are scrupulous, and also creative, and survive as a resource for later learners of, and creators in, Ngiyambaa.

I dedicate what follows to Tamsin Donaldson (1939-2014), linguist, translator, scholar and friend.

Translation *and*. Translation *plus*[1]

Translation adds value, bringing other creators and creations into being, in ways that reflect the mobility and multiplicity of our world. If we are experienced students of literature in the twenty-first century, we welcome the opportunity translation gives us to read in this way, with inquiring criticality and a theoretical toolbox to match, excited by the extra steps that come with translational reading and writing, as measures of how far we have travelled. The

[1] I'm grateful to the Australian Association for Literary Translation (AALITRA) for the invitation to speak at the forum called "Translation and…" held in Melbourne in November 2013. This article enlarges on that presentation.

adding may be a kind of stripping away, too. *Hubad*, "translation" in Cebuano, one of the languages of the Philippines, for example, connotes undressing. Translation reveals.

In the creative practice that seeks to express and critique the world in new ways, illuminating its better potential, there is almost always a process of translation, where translators are called on to be collaborators and commentators, interpreting and exposing others and self. I wish to focus specifically here on the "and" that happens when creative writing combines with literary translation, but this is just one case of what occurs in the world at large when the practice of translation is folded into other callings, as David Bellos observes in his well-informed and witty discussion of contemporary translation, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?*, where he considers the "lawyer-linguists" of the European Court of Justice and the "journalist-translators" of the wire services: "in the work of many international organizations, no precise boundary can be drawn between translation, on the one hand, and drafting […] a text […] on the other" (Bellos 245). We're all clerks.

How, then, does it work? If we accept that literary translation is a form of creative practice, how do the disciplines of translation studies and creative writing relate to each other in an institutional setting? Literary translators work with other languages, but so, often, do creative writers. Sometimes literary translators are members of authors' associations, sometimes they have their own association. Sometimes they are eligible for literary grants and prizes, sometimes the rules are different, as are the terms and conditions for their work. In academia, where the literary translator is often a teacher and scholar in area studies, a work of translation struggles for recognition unless its "research component" is demonstrable through its scholarly apparatus or its classification as a "non-traditional research output" (to use Australian Research Council language), a creative piece in its own right. These arguments reflect the tightrope that translators walk, a similar high wire to the creative writer's.

In terms of recognition and remuneration, literary translators struggle. The "and" that joins their work to creative writing can be helpful, as Brian Nelson and Rita Wilson argue strategically:

> Translation still elicits widespread distrust or disregard. In recent years, however, there has been increasing recognition of the creativity of translation. Translation is rightly seen as a form of writing (or, more precisely, re-writing) just as all writing, however original, involves processes that are a kind of translation. […] The activity of the writer and that of the translator are indivisible.
>
> (Nelson and Wilson 35, 38)

The argument for literary translation as creative practice has more often been made by the translator than the creative writer. It is sometimes presented as a new phenomenon (which it's not), as if to recognize a response to a new kind of situation. New writing emerges in contemporary contexts that are unprecedented – writers work from their own unique experiences and perspectives – and the expanded zone that translation marks is indeed part of that, especially now, in the twenty-first century. It's linguistic, but also personal and cultural, familial, migratory, hybrid, heterogeneous. As Nelson and Wilson put it:

> Translation denotes not only the art and craft of the "literary" or "professional/technical" translator, but also a larger cultural formation that emerges through the global flow of migrants and refugees.
>
> (Nelson and Wilson 41)

That makes it worthwhile to ask what creative writers, in particular, can get from literary translation. Which aspects of translation are relevant to the workshop where writers develop their craft and vision? Literary history shows that writers who translate find an "elective affinity" in what they translate that emerges as a formative presence in their own work, both in style and content: Dryden translating Virgil, Eliot Mallarmé, or Pound with classical Chinese poetry, Elizabeth Bishop translating Carlos Drummond de Andrade. Many of the best writers are sometime translators, and the best translators are valued for what their words give us: good writing.

Translation doesn't exist in isolation. It is always a turning from one thing to another, a doubling partnership between languages and between writers and writing roles, including the role of reader. Translation is available for more than one relationship or form of transmission too, open to variants, always provisional. The apparent singularity of a final version is deceptive. Sometimes we can read between the lines, hear echoes, read back. Creative writing is like that too, in different ways.

As the medium for world literature, translation is an active participant in emergent writing and cultural exchange, allowing us to cross borders, to go beyond our boundaries, to hear those stories we would otherwise miss. Those other stories that extend, challenge and overturn what we know.

"And Other Stories" happens to be the name of a new UK press whose mission is to publish "the types of stories" that other publishers "would consider too risky to take on": a collaborative undertaking that creates its own community through a subscriber model. New translations of contemporary literature make up a defining part of And Other Stories' list. That the publishers of literary translation are so often small, non-mainstream and innovative, committed to literary values in an interventionist way, is part of this other story too. A restless curiosity and desire to destabilize the institutions and conventions of literature, in a spirit of lively experiment, appreciative receptiveness and reciprocal hospitality, make the business of translation an engine of generation: a means of entry to unknown spaces, where you break out and break in.

And Other Stories has joined with the *London Review of Books* World Literature Series for translation master classes and events, including with Juan Pablo Villalobos, the Mexican author of *Down the Rabbit Hole* (2011) and *Quesadillas* (2012), both translated into English by Rosalind Harvey. Villalobos is himself a sometime translator, from Brazilian Portuguese into Spanish; Harvey honed her practice through a Master's in Literary Translation from the University of East Anglia, renowned for its creative writing pedagogy. Here literary translation joins with creative writing and new literary flows in energizing, elliptical curves. Born in 1973, Villalobos is one of the contemporary writers who foreground translation as a way of presenting a polyglot, polyvalent world that both demands and resists interpretation. *Down the Rabbit Hole* is a miniature novel narrated by a young Mexican boy whose father is a drug lord. The kid is called Tochtli, the word for "rabbit" in Nahuatl, Mexico's main indigenous language. His father is called Yolcaut, "rattlesnake". But the boy's teacher, Mazatzin, which means "deer", admires Japanese culture and prefers to call the boy Usagi, Japanese for "rabbit", instead of his Nahuatl name. The naming of characters is unsettling in this Spanish-language novel, like everything in the child's terrible, traumatic world. The author scrutinizes language as part of the interpretative inquiry that gives this work its highly distinctive texture. Tochtli says:

> Some people say I'm precocious. They say it mainly because they think I know difficult words for a little boy. Some of the difficult words I know are: sordid, disastrous, immaculate, pathetic and devastating. […] What happens is I have a

> trick, like magicians who pull rabbits out of hats, except I pull words out of the dictionary.
>
> (Villalobos 3)

The translator's title for the novel, *Down the Rabbit Hole*, overlays the Spanish original, *Fiesta en la madriguera*, preparing us for a literary work in which the child's intelligence regarding absurd, disorientating experience turns the adult world on its head. We go down the hole and through the glass like Alice, in a cultural approximation that reminds us where we're not. Nahuatl, Japanese, Spanish, English: language asymmetry for a world without equity or justice.

"Where does the story begin?" asks Merlinda Bobis in her novel *The Solemn Lantern Maker* (172). From the mute lantern maker of the title, a boy called Noland, to the corrupt senator, the war-damaged American officer, the police, the journalists, and a street kid called Elvis who cares what happens to Noland more than he cares what happens to himself, the author weaves together lives that intersect in dreams, fears, conspiracies and the actions that each takes for the sake of survival. In dealing with dark material, Bobis stays on the side of the light, heeding Italo Calvino's advice in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, where he notes that "to cut off Medusa's head without being turned to stone, Perseus supports himself on the very lightest of things, the winds and the clouds, and fixes his gaze upon what can be revealed only by indirect vision, an image caught in a mirror" (Calvino 4). In *The Solemn Lantern Maker* the most terrible things are presented through the crisscrossing voices and fantastic imaginings of children and the dispossessed, and through an interplay of languages: "How easy for one query to bear the weight of a life, of many lives – the one asked about, the one asking, the one asked to ask who finds himself unwittingly owning the question, owning the lost one" (Bobis 160). The book shines like the star-shaped lanterns Noland makes. Noland. No land. Named for the loss of land. Part of the sparkle comes from words of vernacular Tagalog that betoken loss and resilience, as people seek redress for impunity. The novel continues the trajectory of Bobis's work in mobilizing multiple linguistic resources (English, Pilipino, Bikol) in pursuit of impactful creative truth.[2]

Merlinda Bobis teaches creative writing at the University of Wollongong and it's no surprise that creative writing programs such as at Wollongong, or at Adelaide, where I teach, and in many other places, should be receptive to the kind of writerly experiment that an engagement with linguistic plurality can bring. If creative writing programs have been accused of producing the creative writing novel, we are now beginning to see the emergence of the *translation plus* creative writing novel. One fascinating example is *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011) by Ben Lerner. The author is a graduate of and teacher in writing programs in the United States and his book is published by an independent non-profit literary publisher there called Coffee House Press. It comes with garlands from John Ashbery – the title borrows the title of one of his poems – and has garnered good reviews at home and abroad. What's it about? A poet from a writing program who has a fellowship in Madrid to remix Lorca in a creative translational response based on minimal Spanish and just being there. It's funny, always scrutinizing its own dubious integrity, or fraudulent audacity, and the transgression of limits, against the knowledge – mostly out of frame – of the terrorist bombing of the actual Atocha station on 11 March 2004.

Here's the narrator's account of his creative practice as literary translator:

> From the Prado I would typically walk to a small café called El Rincón where I'd eat a sandwich. […] Then I'd walk a few blocks more to El Retiro, the city's

[2] For further discussion, see Giffard-Foret.

central park, find a bench, take out my notebooks, the pocket dictionary, Lorca, and get high.

If the sun were out and I proportioned the hash and tobacco correctly, if there were other people around, but at a distance, so that I could hear that they were speaking without hearing in which language, a small wave of euphoria would break over me. […] I had the endless day, months and months of endless days, and yet my return date bounded this sense of boundlessness, kept it from becoming threatening. I would begin to feel a rush of what I considered love, first for the things at hand: the swifts, if that's what they were, hopping in the dust, the avenues of old-world trees, […] the park's artificial lake. […]

On these days I worked on what I called translation. I opened the Lorca more or less at random, transcribed the English recto onto a page of my first notebook, and began to make changes, replacing a word with whatever word I first associated with it and/or scrambling the order of the lines, and then I made whatever changes these changes suggested to me. Or I looked up the Spanish word for the English word I wanted to replace, and then replaced that word with an English word that approximated its sound ("under the arc of the sky" became "Under the arc of the cielo," which became "Under the arc of the cello"). I then braided fragments of the prose I kept in my second notebook with the translations I had thus produced ("Under the arc of the cello / I open the Lorca at random," and so on).

But if there were no sun and the proportioning was off, if there were either too many people around or if the park was empty, an abyss opened up inside me as I smoked. Now the afternoon was boundless in a terrifying way. […] It was worse than having a sinking feeling; I *was* a sinking feeling […]. It was like failing to have awoken at the right point in a nightmare; now you had to live in it […]. He, if I can put it that way, had felt this as a child when they sent him to camp; his heart seemed at once to race and stop. Then his breath caught, flattened, shattered; as though a window had broken at thirty thousand feet, there was a sudden vacuum […] and he was at a loss; he became a symptom of himself.

(Lerner 14-17)

In this passage translation provides the structure and the process that enables the narrator to write. His practice – a kind of combinatorial algorithm – is, for all its randomness, a safety net, and on the days when it is not there, he is overwhelmed. He loses himself in the endless possibilities of his own consciousness, the contradictions, the fragmentation, the schizophrenia, unable to give any of it the necessary form that writing requires – except that in a further contradictory twist he has just produced a brilliant riff on personality collapse in which he recreates his first-person narrator as a third-person character, a fiction-making capacity arising from the anxiety of constraint not kicking in.

The narrator here reminds me of Lambert Strether in Henry James's novel *The Ambassadors*. Strether too hovers over the void of purposelessness, once he is set loose from his American frame of value in the differently calibrated morality of Paris. His response is to take to heart his own injunction "to live all you can", even if it means permitting a kind of chaos of selfhood. In plainer words, the exercise of translation here in Lerner's novel permits a degree of risk-taking that is creatively enabling for the narrator. As translation enters the very texture of his embodied self-reflexiveness, he becomes a poet/novelist rather than any sort of reliable translator. The creative practice devours the translation process that gives birth to it.

For many writers and artists translation means a plus in this way. It can be there as influence, exercise, borrowing or theft, an undertone, a shadow, a presence from elsewhere that reveals the work as exceeding its bounds, or understating its claims. This happens across art forms too, where translation can be understood as an attempt to transpose language into another communicative medium, such as music or visual art. A written text can be inspiration or source. The American composer Charles Ives, for instance, takes the writing of Emerson as a starting point in several of his works, notably *The Unanswered Question* (1908), which has a phrase from Emerson's poem "The Sphinx" as its title. Ives's composition gives idiosyncratic musical expression to a transcendental worldview he recognizes in Emerson, using techniques of adaptive assemblage to do so. Emerson's philosophical question is thus answered in a way that is no answer, since it doesn't meet the original in language. The paradoxical answer comes in a form that is performable but not translatable back.

In no less radical and confounding a manner, the contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing makes art out of interventions in text at a foundational level, re-scripting Chinese writing in his mind-bending *A Book from the Sky* (*Tianshu*) (1988) and the more playful *Square Word Calligraphy* (1994) where he re-designs English words to look like Chinese. In both cases he alludes to the double seeing, and sometimes blindness, that can occur when we look cross-culturally.

In *Piano Lessons* (2012), pianist Anna Goldsworthy writes about music in a way that finds verbal equivalences for both the music itself and her experience of playing it as she develops the personal understanding that will result in a performance that effectively, physically, communicates an interpretation. In her "Liszt" chapter, Goldsworthy writes of the self-discovery that accompanied her encounter with Liszt's *Rigoletto* paraphrase, the discovery of seduction as the necessary extra, the artist's art. Transcription, several times over, becomes a way to achieve expressive self-realization.

Yet a dedicated translator might not be comfortable with such uses of the term "translation". Carefree, self-serving, irresponsible might be more critical descriptions of the open-endedness of the processes I am indicating, where translational practices feed other creative effects but abandon the translator's contract with his/her silent partners to reproduce the meaning of the original in another form. There may be grey areas and play areas, but in recognizing literary translation as a kind of creative practice, we need to look more carefully at what, from a translator's point of view, but not a creative writer's, are the limits.

David Bellos takes a strong position in this debate. He wants to "beat the bounds" of what translation can mean, drawing a line at extension beyond the linguistic. However entertaining the result, should musical transcription, ekphrasis, stage or screen adaptation, transcoding or rewriting be included under the umbrella of translation (Bellos 310-14)? While there may be good, stringent reasons for delimiting the usage, in practice the genie has escaped from the bottle, which suits our genre-bending cultural moment with its mash-ups, remixes and zombie Jane Austens. The objection to letting translation refer to other kinds of transformation is based in linguistic philosophy privileging the word over the image and the alphabet over the ideogram in a Western and logocentric way. A reflection on Chinese writing-painting, where text and image are integral aspects of one expression, or Australian Aboriginal storytelling, where song maps on to marks on the body or the ground, suggests the need for a more encompassing concept, where interplay between different modes is given space to occur. Alexis Wright describes how:

> contemporary Indigenous storytelling has a visual, descriptive form in the way its stories are told. However, the written form is also visual in that it looks something like a spinning multi-stranded helix of stories. This is the condition of contemporary Indigenous storytelling that […] is a consequence of our racial

> diaspora in Australia. The helix of divided strands is forever moving, entwining all stories together, just like a lyrebird is capable of singing several tunes at once.
>
> (Wright 84)

While translation can be defined in terms of the constraints under which the translator works, those constraints can change in response to different situations, as becomes apparent when the impulse to translate oneself takes a creative form. In her essay "Parallel Creations: Between Self-translation and the Translation of the Self", in a collection called *Creative Constraints: Translation and Authorship*, co-edited with Leah Gerber, Rita Wilson considers translingual writings that "establish a dialogic process between the culture of origin and the host culture" in an attempt "to encompass both the 'original' and the re-located cultural-linguistic self" (Wilson 48-9). Such writing arises with unprecedented global flows: "Increased migration and the consequent increase in horizontal language acquisition gave rise to a new polyphonic linguistic and literary reality in the twentieth century" (48n). This is only accelerating in the twenty-first, and it is part of our global citizenship to recognize it hospitably.

Andrea Hirata's novel *The Rainbow Troops* (*Laskar Pelangi*) appeared on the world stage in response to a new need-to-know attitude to Indonesia, as the country underwent its dynamic and testing democratization. It's the story of a group of island kids who fight to save their local school in the face of pressure on all sides. It's a charming book that could not have achieved its domestic welcome, selling an estimated 15 million copies, in an earlier, more restrictive phase of Indonesia's political culture. It's a celebratory book, and the English version has been popular too. As English readers, we're grateful to the translation, and to the publisher who took a chance on it. Hirata speaks enough English to have retold his Bahasa story to his translator in English, who then, with the help of editors, polished it up, as translator Angie Kilbane explains.[3] The result has an oral, tale-telling immediacy that is almost raw, quite a lot of repetition and circularity, and an eclectic mix of vocabulary and register, especially around things we, as foreign readers, are assumed not to know – about Islamic education, for example, or the names of local plants, or folklore. The many Bahasa terms foreignize this world but also take us there, to our near neighbour, for me, writing as an Australian. In this case, though the translation would get a thorough going-over in a translation workshop, it doesn't matter that it wasn't all ironed out. *The Rainbow Troops* moves most people to tears anyway.

Creative Constraints incorporates reports on workshops that bring the author into the room to work with translators on a version of a new text. If the editor is there too, it highlights the many decisions that can be made in seeking to produce the best possible rendering. These days in the case of translation into English the author may be able to translate her own text into English, and may have difficulty accepting the decisions made by translator and editor, in a further consequence of our new linguistic reality. This was the topic in a case study of a translation from Arabic in an editing workshop organized by the British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT), where the question of who must finally take responsibility for a translation as published came into sharp focus. The BCLT's translation workshop model has been adapted widely, including in China, India and Indonesia. In the case of China, writing and translation have traditionally been quite separate activities, giving the translator free rein, unencumbered by the author of the original. The BCLT workshop model changes this, helping translators see that a text's original author, the creative writer, may have something useful to offer in the process. It was a surprise to see creative writing workshops introduced alongside translation workshops at this year's Chinese English Literary

[3] See http://andrea-hirata.com/note-from-angie-kilbane-the-rainbow-troops-translator/ (accessed 30 April 2015).

Translation summer school at Huangshan. The move recognizes the scope for improving the quality of translations in both directions by improving the quality of the translators' skills as writers, which is not about their knowledge of the target language but how they use it.

A more radical workshop happened at BCLT's summer translation summit at the University of East Anglia, where bird song was played and translators were asked to find verbal equivalents.[4] Birds have always inspired poets, as kindred songsters, from the cuckoo that brought summer a-coming in to the ospreys that cry in one of China's oldest love poems. To translate the language of the birds is a challenge and a constraint of another kind, into the post-human. The exercise is relevant to the question of how you might begin to translate a poem from a language you don't understand, once that desire comes upon you.

My focus on process reflects the educational and developmental context of creative writing programs where the emphasis is on what methods can best encourage new writing to emerge. Much of the new energy around translation in relation to creative writing occurs in situations where people are trying to extend their skills, often through collaborative, interdisciplinary and transnational modes, within the structured, but experimental space of the university. The folding of translational practice into creative writing, and into literary studies more generally, and inter-art collaboration too, is part of a recalibration of the creative arts in a more mobile, global field. It requires exploratory classroom practice, pedagogy and research, as new, transcultural knowledges are constructed and critiqued. Such practice connects with inquiry into the nature and limits of the literary in a world where communication is increasingly interactive, taking place in strings of responses and counter-responses, across languages and media, in digital form, though never only virtual.

The example from Ben Lerner suggests what is possible for writers in combining creative practice with translational processes. It is easily imagined as a classroom exercise. There are other similar models. In an essay on "Writing Asian Poetry in English" that appeared in *Mascara*, I mention experiments in adopting foreign poetic forms into English for students who do not know the source language – haiku, tanka, sijo. The question is what makes the crossing along with the form, of a cultural or conceptual kind, linguistic, but extra-linguistic too. It's a question that can be asked of English-language transcription, adaptation or appropriation of Indigenous poetic modes, as Stuart Cooke describes in *Speaking the Earth's Languages: A Theory for Australian-Chilean Postcolonial Poetics* (2013), calling them "performances *in* themselves […] in which both settler and indigenous peoples have played crucial roles" (Cooke xx).[5]

I've had fun in a master class with students who collectively had a rich array of other-language expertise, but did not have the one other language in common. We attempted a translation of a poem, which became a rewriting, a remix, an improvisation, as expectations and constraints shifted. In the case of Chinese I recommend *A Little Primer of Tu Fu* where the great translator David Hawkes opens up different ways to approach some classical Chinese poems. He gives the Chinese characters and their *pinyin* romanization, a short contextual discussion, a word for word, line by line gloss, and a prose paraphrase that allows a non-Chinese reader to understand how meaning is made. From there students can go on to read other translations of these famous poems and express an opinion: "this works better for me than that", "this is more interesting", "this has more appeal", "I can do more with this than that".[6] For Urdu, V.G. Kiernan's *Poems from Iqbal* (1955) is recommended.

[4] Conducted by poetry translator Sasha Dugdale.
http://www.poetryschool.com/courses-workshops/face-to-face/from-birdsong-to-translation.php (accessed 30 April 2015)

[5] See also http://cordite.org.au/reviews/jose-cooke/ (accessed 30 April 2015).

[6] For further discussion, see Jose, "Compost and Pollination", esp. 15-18.

Such simple exercises can be introduced into the laboratory of the creative classroom at any stage. They have special appeal as the creative writing classroom itself travels, and as English-language creative writing courses are taken by more and more second-language students, who are making English their language of choice as writers. By partnering with universities elsewhere that are developing their own creative writing programs in English, where English is a "second language", such as the University of Stockholm and Renmin University in Beijing, to name just two, there is an opportunity to participate in adapting models that began in the Anglosphere into other linguistic, cultural and social contexts. In *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing: Beyond Babel*, Dan Disney observes that this "emergent […] field remains largely unsupported by interdisciplinary theoretical discourses" (55). The collection he has edited reports on a range of classroom experiments around the world where, for other language speakers who are translating themselves into English, "the English language is viewed as a space of possibility and emergence" (as Eddie Tay describes his practice as a creative writing teacher in Hong Kong) (Disney 103). Another relevant example, where the multilingual nature of transnational creativity was highlighted, is the Transnational Creatives workshop organized by Bath Spa University with the University of Stockholm's Department of English for partners in the Global Academy of Liberal Arts (GALA) in Sweden in August 2014.

Translation has always been a necessary agent in the transmission of new ideas. In the crossing from one cultural situation to another, knowledge and understanding are created or changed. That is the urgency, prestige and scrutiny that attach to translation. Tolstoy's ideas were sought in translation ahead of his novels, for example, as Rosamund Bartlett points out, *The Kingdom of God is Within You* was being read in English "within months of its completion in 1893", including "in South Africa by a young Indian lawyer called Mohandas Gandhi" (Bartlett 7). For early twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals translation of foreign texts was the way in which new thinking could be facilitated – through potent, adaptive translations of works such as Ibsen's *A Doll's House* or Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali poems, as well as Marx and Freud. "Some of the greatest writers of the time devoted themselves to the task of translation, introducing a diverse range of Western, Japanese and Soviet literature", including for film adaptation (Jaivin 36). Such "translingual practice", as Lydia Liu terms it in her book of that title, played a key role in China's modernity in the Republican period and again in the "open door" years after 1979. Fou Lei's translation of French Nobel literature laureate Romain Rolland's novel *Jean Christophe* in 1936-41 was still influential a generation later, on those who endured the Cultural Revolution and became committed to an opposing "heroic struggle in the name of art" (Roberts 38-9).

Translation can still work this way in China, as literary scholar Lu Jiande reminds us. At the China-Australia Literary Forum in Beijing in 2013 he spoke of the impact on Chinese intellectuals of J. M. Coetzee's work, noting the way new kinds of thinking were introduced through Coetzee's novels – specifically, with the example of *Disgrace*, in terms of relations between humans and animals. "All experience requires scrutiny and examination", so Chinese author Li Er encapsulates what he has learned from reading Coetzee in Chinese (n.p.).

Anglophone intellectuals should not find that strange. So much of our conceptual apparatus has been delivered through translation – of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Agamben and other leading continental philosophers in recent decades, replete with linguistic adaptations and neologisms: aporia, rhizome and so on. The translators of such texts become their interpreters and advocates: Brian Massumi for Deleuze and Guattari, for example, and Gayatri Spivak for Derrida. Their introductions, notes and additional material become part of the larger effort to convey meaning. Readers of such texts become as expert

in the theory of literature as with literature itself. The translator's mediation replaces the original with a substitute reading experience.

The most widely cited text *on* translation is itself routinely quoted *in* translation, usually without any acknowledgement that a return to the original might produce changed meanings. A telling exception is Stephen Rendall's note accompanying the reprint of Harry Zorn's 1968 translation of the iconic essay to which I refer, Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator", where it appears in *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti.

All this only goes to show that people look to translation for a power to change things, creative writers as much as anyone.

In my own practice as a writer I have turned to translation as a medium for my own creative exploration of the expression of feelings and ideas, including aesthetic ideas, across cultures. You'll notice from my formulation that I am blurring the feelings a person might have when interacting deeply with a person from another place with the experience of transmission between one culture and another on a larger level. This is what happens when I write about China, which has attracted me as a creative subject since I first visited in 1983, or even before that in my imagination. It has been a long journey now and I have spent a great deal of time with China one way or another. When I came to write my third novel on a Chinese subject, I wanted to go deeper, to move away from the structure of encounter, with its ready inscription of an East-West binary, towards something more like immersion: as fish and water. The way I did so was through the intermediary of a book. In this case it was an unusual and cherished Chinese book called *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, written by a man called Shen Fu in 1808 but not published until 1877, without its last two chapters. It's a memoir of the life of a loving couple that ends suddenly and tragically, and also enigmatically, since only four of its chapters are extant. To complicate things it appears that the author's pages were mixed up on the way to publication, so what we have is to an extent disorderly and incoherent: non-linear and fragmentary, to use aesthetic terms from our time. This patched text was beautifully translated into English by the great Chinese writer-translator Lin Yutang and published in Shanghai in 1935-6. Lin helped the book travel by his praise of Yun, its heroine, in an essay in his best-selling *The Importance of Living*, published in New York in 1937 after he moved to the United States. He calls Yun "the most beautiful woman in Chinese literature" (Lin 311).

My novel begins in Shanghai in 2000, when it appears that the two missing chapters of the old book have been found. The text exerts a strange power over a young Chinese man who works at the auction house where they are to be sold. He comes to believe he and his foreign girlfriend are living out the life of Shen Fu and his wife, reincarnated in the transforming world of a new China. It becomes imperative to know how the story ends, and whether the two missing chapters are real or fake. In my novel, which is called *The Red Thread*, the lovers' past lives are experienced through Lin Yutang's slightly archaic translation of the original, which I re-assemble and extend, as it comes to overlap with the present. Part of the effect is to allow the transmission of the qualities by which Shen Fu and Yun live their lives in a world where old, broken things could be found and valued, in intimate remembered moments.

Here's a passage, printed in red in my book, that represents my translation of Lin Yutang's translation into a changed imaginative context that allows its meaning to resonate in a new way:

> Yun had a peculiar fondness for old books and broken slips of painting. […] When she saw scrolls of calligraphy or painting that were partly torn, she would find some old paper and paste them together nicely, and ask me to fill up the

broken spaces. Then she would roll them up and label them "Beautiful Gleanings".

[…] Once I said to her, "It is a pity that you were born a woman. If you were a man, we could travel together and visit all the great mountains and the famous places throughout the country."

"Oh, this is not so very difficult," said Yun. "Wait till my hair has gone grey. Even if I cannot accompany you to the Five Sacred Mountains, then we can travel to the nearer places, as far south as the West Lake and as far north as Yangzhou."

"Of course this is all right," I said, "except that I am afraid when you are grey-haired, you will be too old to travel."

"If I can't do it in this life," she replied, "then I shall do it in the next."

(Jose, *The Red Thread*, 225-6)

That becomes the prompt for a novel that is both a homage to a text from another language and a transmission of its ideas, aesthetic qualities and emotional landscape into contemporary English-language fiction.

In my recent book, called *Bapo* (2014), published by Giramondo, another small publisher that likes translation, I take this a little further. It is a series of short prose fictions, some of them quite essayistic in manner. The title is a Chinese term. *Bā* means "eight", *pò* means "worn" or "broken". When worn, burnt or broken things are assembled into a kind of collage, as depicted illusionistically by a painter, it's given the – relatively obscure – name *bāpò*. Ever since I first heard of this concept, I have envisaged it as a kind of writing, where fragments, prismatic perspectives, and an aesthetic of incompleteness, ongoing-ness and re-assembly, could be applied to express the complex shades of an experience of China over many years, and of those who have moved through, or in and out of, a changing China, and a changing outside world, specifically Australia, as it relates to China: a condition of mobility and fluidity that eludes final meaning.

For me that is signed by a title which is taken over directly rather than translated. Potential readers will interpret it in a speculative way before they open the book, where it is explained in an introduction. It's a risky business to give a book a foreign language title, though I'm by no means the first to do so. Fellini got away with it for his great movie, known universally as *La Strada*. Gregory David Roberts did it with his bestselling novel of India, *Shantaram* (2003), and Miguel Syjuco chose a loaded Spanish word for the title of his novel of the Philippines, *Ilustrado* (2010). As did Timothy Doyle in *Dyandi*, a word for "to the last drop of blood", the sacred oath from their creation song that marks the B'laan commitment to saving their environment.

I don't want to put people off with *Bapo* as a title. I hope it will beckon people to the multiple, prompting them, as it did me, to take a step beyond what we already know. That foreign word, untranslated, can be an open sesame.

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An Interview with Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp, Literary Translator

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Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp is a British translator of Arabic, German and Russian fiction and non-fiction. She is the translator of Fadi Zaghmout's *The Bride of Amman* and co-translator Samar Yazbek's *The Crossing*. She has also translated plays from Russia, Syria and Lebanon, and several Arabic short stories and children's books. Her blog can be found at https://ruthahmedzai.wordpress.com/

Jennifer Stockwell (JS): Tell us a bit about yourself and your language background – how did you get to where you are today? Who or what has most inspired you? What shapes your choices of the variety of language-related occupations that fill your time?

Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp (RAK): I have always been an obsessive language learner and knew I wanted to work with languages somehow, and translation was what I loved most in my undergraduate degree (German and Russian). I met an inspiring French translator in my early twenties who translated English novels in her spare time and perhaps she gave me the first inkling that this was a possibility. But although I translated a few chapters of a Russian novel for my MA dissertation, and hoped to get a contract to publish the whole book, it didn't occur to me then that translating fiction could be the basis of a career.

After graduation I was still focused on working as an in-house translator in a major organization. So I was pleased when I landed a job as a UK government linguist and straightaway began an intensive Arabic course – fantastic, until I realised after 5 years that big organizations and bureaucracies are really not for me. I was keen to become a freelance translator but a bit nervous about making the break, so took up an opportunity to teach Russian part-time in a school. I was already teaching Arabic a few hours a week too, and the steady teaching hours over the next couple of years gave me a stable basis on which to build up my translation portfolio and find clients.

It was when I was on maternity leave with my first son that I realized how much I missed translating foreign fiction, which had been such a large part of my degree at Oxford. I had been reading a lot of Arabic fiction as a way of studying the language, but it was the summer school at the British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT) at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, that inspired me to take the leap and start translating. The next step was winning a place on the New Books in German "Emerging Translators" program, a fantastic scheme where early career translators from German are given a paid commission to translate an extract from a contemporary novel. All the translators attended a workshop with the brilliant translator Shaun Whiteside where we critiqued each other's translations and brainstormed ideas for tricky passages. Finally, we were paired up to edit each other's work before publication in *New Books in German* – a showcase magazine promoting contemporary works from Austria, Germany and Switzerland. This experience was a real confidence boost and made me realize the power of collaboration.

After that the biggest impetus that propelled me forwards as a literary translator was the BCLT mentorship. I didn't have a book to work on at that stage so I set myself the goal of translating six short pieces (chapters or short stories) and getting at least one published. I just about managed and loved the chance to experiment with six different authors' styles, with constructive feedback from my mentor, Professor Paul Starkey. It has led on to further work in lots of serendipitous ways.

JS: How does your typical week look? (Although I'm going to guess there is no such thing as typical!) It would be interesting to visualize how you might spend your time as a translator.

RAK: I mentioned that I used to teach, but this year I finally reached the point where I accepted that I didn't have time to anymore, as with three languages and so many interesting translation projects landing in my inbox, there's always pressure on my time – especially juggling work around two small children. But I do think translation and teaching balance each other very well and I'd love to go back to it one day, especially by combining the two and teaching translation.

What I love about freelancing is the variety. When I'm working on a book or a long translation, there are days or weeks where I work in a similar way, editing for hours and hours on end, but I vary my location a lot as I'm easily distracted! When I translated *The Bride of Amman*, I was very nomadic with my laptop, and the editing stage was fun as the text seemed imbued with memories of where I was when I translated that particular chapter for the first time. If I'm not working on a big text then I'm often juggling various jobs at the same time, so I might go from medical translation in the morning to editing a colleague's literary prose in the evening.

JS: Further to this, any tips on managing workload and time as a freelance translator? What advice do you have for aspiring literary translators?

RAK: One of the hardest things about freelancing is working out what to charge for your time and defending your right to a decent salary. It's helpful to get into the habit of timing yourself as you work, excluding idle web browsing when you get distracted, but including research, which is a very time-consuming but essential part of translation. I try to keep a tally in my accounts spreadsheet of how long a job took me, so I can quickly see how much I earned per hour (because usually I charge by word or page) and I get a sense of where my strengths and weaknesses are, what sort of timeframe to allow for a job, and what is a reasonable fee to suggest to new clients. This is particularly important as it has made me realize just how incredibly slow literary translation is compared to more formulaic business, legal or medical translation, where even though a lot of research is involved, there is at least something approaching a correct answer. In literary prose, there is never an easy answer; just endless drafts of trial and error, and hopefully eventually hitting on the perfect solution.

JS: How do you identify novels or stories to translate? Do they come to you or do you discover them and find a publisher? How does that process work?

RAK: In a couple of cases, to expand my portfolio during my BCLT mentorship, I made contact with the author or publisher and asked permission to translate and publish an extract or chapter. You can translate without permission but can't publish anything online or in print without the permission of the copyright holder. Some translators have advised that you're more likely to get a response from a busy publisher if you say you've already translated an extract rather than saying that you want to.

On the whole though, work has come to me from editors who have seen my work in journals or through word of mouth recommendations. I have twice been asked by a publisher to translate a book because I'd already published translations of extracts by the author in question. It is worth making contact with editors of journals as well as publishing houses, and getting to know their list and submission preferences, so that you can suggest books or stories to them when you come across something you love. Sadly I don't have a lot of time for pitching work to editors, but I did have (eventual!) success through this route once, when I wrote to about twenty publishing houses about a Syrian book – *The Shell*, by Mustafa Khalife – which I felt absolutely had to be published in English. Pitching books, or doing reader's reports, can be a good way to get to know publishers, but on the other hand even if you bring an amazing book to a publisher's attention and they buy the translation rights from the

original publishers, they won't necessarily commission you to do the translation. And unfortunately, even if you are asked to translate the book, if the publisher can't offer a decent fee for the translation you might not be able to accept the job anyway.

JS: Tell us about your most recent experiences of translating two books from Arabic to English? What were the challenges and what did you learn along the way?

RAK: More than anything, I've been challenged by tenses in Arabic. I've always known they were tricky because they're so vague compared to the very precise English tenses, and they just operate differently in narrative prose, but when editing *The Bride of Amman* I found I was in such a muddle that I had to draw out a timeline for each chapter, marking where the narrator was in relation to the events described – for example, was the perspective from later on the same day, or several weeks later?

Because the book is chopped up into segments narrated by five different characters, I also worried that I would blur the five voices together. In fact, the Arabic wasn't particularly nuanced in this regard, but I still wanted to edit each character in isolation to reduce contamination from one character to the next. I think editing the chapters out of sequence like this was helpful for reading the text differently and analysing the internal logic, as well as seeing where my earlier chapters needed more work, but I expect this is a strategy I might adopt again with non-fiction more than with fiction.

A challenge I often face with Arabic, unfortunately, is poor editing of the original text. But on the flipside, I'm often extremely relieved when I ask a colleague about a puzzling sentence and find that it's not just me – it's definitely a typo!

JS: Tips for the translation process: what are your greatest challenges when approaching a literary translation? What are your primary considerations, and what strategies do you employ in approaching a new translation?

RAK: I think it always takes me a while to get into my stride, and I'm much more cautious early on, leaving a lot more alternative translations, question marks and comments in the margins. Although writing lots of notes can seem fiddly and slow down the first draft, it is often worth it when I go back to edit and can no longer remember why I chose one particular solution. Sometimes it's the scribbled notes in the margins that contain the gems that I go back and put in later.

I tend to try to do my first draft as quickly as I can, and very roughly, as even after reading the book or story through before starting, it isn't until I've made myself translate it that I really get into the details of the text and get a feel for how I want to convey the voice, the register and the tone. I find there's no point chiselling away at the detail until I've got the rough outline in place. A lot of questions you can get distracted by earlier on are resolved later in the text anyway.

And after that, there is no end to the rounds of editing a text might need before it's ready. Of course I have got quicker with experience, but I still like to print out and edit several drafts on paper before I'm happy. Allowing ample time to take a break from the text before the final edit is essential: I need to be able to see the text with new eyes (even with a new type font so that the line length changes and the text layout is affected) and a fresh perspective.

JS: What advice do you have about the practical aspects of being a translator, i.e. pay, contracts, publishers, networking, selling yourself?

RAK: Join your local professional body, such as the UK's Translators Association (part of the Society of Authors) or ALTA in the States, for up-to-date advice and access to networks of colleagues and potential clients. The TA in the UK offers free contract vetting and advice for members, which is very reassuring, especially as you can join as soon as you are offered your first contract for a book-length translation. Both the TA and the Emerging Translators Network offer an extremely friendly and supportive email discussion group and regular

events including panel discussions and workshops on every aspect of breaking into this profession and surviving.

With regards to pay, although to get a foot in the door in publishing we all find ourselves having to do poorly paid or pro bono work at times, it is important to remember to value your skills as a highly qualified, multilingual professional and to resist contributing to the downward pressure on rates. It is frustrating for full-time translators to have to compete with those translating in their spare time, as an extra to another career, but having said that it might be reasonable to compromise on the fee if you can negotiate a very far off deadline for a book and can fit it in around other better-paid translation work. At all stages it is worth politely educating or reminding publishers and editors who are not linguists of the work involved in translation; many simply don't realize what a challenging and time-consuming task it is, and what kind of remuneration is realistic.

In the UK there are some fantastic opportunities for schmoozing with publishers and translators alike: good ones include London Book Fair, International Translation Day, the Translate in the City summer school (evening events are sometimes free even if you're not a paid-up participant in the course) and SLOVO Russian literature festival. Sign up to publishers' mailing lists and follow them on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn to hear of opportunities and book launches – another good place to get chatting to publishers and dazzle them with your knowledge of contemporary Somali literature, or whatever your niche may be!

JS: What are your favourite translation resources – your most-used links and the most well-thumbed books on your shelf?

RAK: For Arabic, I'm quite traditional with an extremely well-thumbed copy of Hans Wehr never far from my reach, which is full of notes in the margins (I have a pristine hardback copy too, for when I am ashamed to be seen with that tatty copy!). For all my languages, I have several dictionaries of idioms and colloquialisms I couldn't live without. There are some great dictionaries online but I still need my big paper tomes, especially when I'm concentrating on a text and don't want to get distracted by keeping a web browser open. When I sat the Institute of Linguists' Diploma in Translation for Arabic, I actually brought a wheelie suitcase with me full of dictionaries. I use thesaurus.com every day but I still love browsing through Rogets too.

JS: What are your current and future projects?

RAK: I'm just about to embark on another joint translation, but of Russian non-fiction this time: a very dense academic text on historical Turko-Slavic linguistics. Hard, but right up my street! There are also two novels in the pipeline, but as the publishers are applying for translation grants there is no way of knowing how long it will take before a contract materializes, if at all, so I will have to take other work if it comes up first.

JS: What would be your dream novel (or novels) to translate? Or what *sort* of novel? What draws you to a new project?

RAK: I'm still hoping to find a publisher for *The Shirt*, a lovely Russian novel I started translating way back in 2004. But more generally I would love to translate children's fiction – picture books, chapter books, young adult – you name it. As for novels, I'm particularly interested in historic settings, for example I would love to translate *The Nabatean*, a novel by Egyptian author Youssef Zeidan about the fall of the ancient civilization centred round Petra in Jordan, and the rise of Islam. But above all, my dream is just to have more time to read and to find more dream novels to translate in the first place!

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Review of Imma Monsó's *A Man of His Word* (trans. Maruxa Relaño and Martha Tennent)

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Imma Monsó. *A Man of His Word*. Translated by Maruxa Relaño and Martha Tennent. Madrid: Hispabooks, 2014.

———. *Un home de paraula*. Barcelona: RBA La Magrana, 2006.

Some time following the death of her partner, Catalan writer Imma Monsó asked a friend for "books on the grieving process" because "I want to know what's in store." Finally remembering, her friend hands her "two sheets of paper with the title: *The Mourning Process. Guidelines to Evaluate Pathological Grief*". Disappointed, Monsó asks "Is this all?" To which her friend replies, "You'll have to fill in the rest yourself" (121). *A Man of His Word*, published originally in Catalan in 2006 as *Un home de paraula*, is the result of Monsó filling in the rest.

Born in Mequinensa, a town that was later flooded to make way for a dam, Monsó burst onto the Catalan literary scene in her late thirties with *No se sap mai* [You Never Know, 1996] and since then she has become one of the best writers in contemporary Catalan literature. Her reputation is due to her novels and short story collections which, unusually for Catalan writers, have been translated into Castilian and have become bestsellers throughout Spain. Her success is due to her ironic take on European society and its values as well as her focus on women's lives and tender treatment of difficult topics such as cancer. Her fiction has drawn comparisons to the works of Catalan writers, Josep Pla (1897-1981), Jesús Moncada (1941-2005), Quim Monzó (1952) and Mercè Rodoreda (1908-1983), all of whom have been translated into English, as well as to Franz Kafka, J. D. Salinger, Dorothy Parker, Lorrie Moore, Helen Simpson, German writer and author of *The Mussel Feast*, Birgit Vanderbeke, as well as Belgian author, Amélie Nothomb.

A Man of His Word is based in fact – the death of Monsó's husband, a philosophy teacher, in 2003 – but it is fact made literature. The book has an unusual structure. Monsó divides the chapters into two types: A and B. "The A chapters will be about how we met, us, life with him. The B chapters will be about how I lost him, life without him. This will also serve as a mnemonic device (I've been a bit confused lately): A for affection, amusement, acceptance; B for barbarous, brutal, bare, burgeoning" (17). In writing about the death of a loved one there is a risk of crossing the line into sentimentality. Monsó avoids this by employing the third person in the A chapters and by using nicknames. Her husband becomes Cometa, the Catalan word for comet, because he lit up the sky, not just hers, but that of everyone he met. Monsó herself becomes Lot, from *papalote*, meaning dimwit or, in Mexican Spanish, a child's kite, one of the last of the many nicknames he gave her. Their adopted daughter is called Píulix, an invented Gallic name inspired by the *Asterix* books that Cometa read to her. The B chapters are more immediate and are narrated in the first person. This shift between first and third person seems initially forced but it quickly becomes natural, marking the distance Monsó feels between her experiences of their life together and her life now.

The book's title plays on Cometa's integrity – once committed to something he sees it through – and also to the process by which Monsó is able to reconstruct him. Cometa is a man of his word and, now, a man of words. His physical body gone, all that exists is the idea

of him. The flesh made word. As a writer, Monsó has a gift with which she can make sense of her experience. Words enable her "to talk about him, about life with him, about life without him" (13). Words also save her from the depths of despair. The opportunity for suicide is avoided by words that "strip the death wish of its solemnity; words divest you of the energy needed to move from thought to action. […] By exhausting the subject of killing yourself, you contribute to the feeling you've already killed yourself", she reports calmly (119).

Monsó's writing is tender and moving, honest and direct. Although she was completely enamoured of her late husband, *A Man of His Word* is not an exercise in hagiography, nor does it fall into self-pity. Monsó uses her trademark humour well at times to resist the maudlin nature of the topic.

A Man of His Word is well rendered in English by Relaño and Tennent. The translators favour Venuti's foreignizing practice, with some Catalan words, mainly food and forms of address, left in the original. It is ironic, however, that in a work originally written in Catalan the language that most appears in the translation is Castilian (Spanish), particularly references to popular Spanish and Latin American songs. An interesting dilemma for translators is raised when Mercè Rodoreda's classic novel, *La plaça del Diamant* (1962), is mentioned by Cometa. Relaño and Tennent use the title of the 1980 English translation, *The Time of the Doves*, by David Rosenthal. However, the novel has been translated into English on two other occasions with different titles: *The Pigeon Girl* (1967, Eda O'Shiel) and *In Diamond Square* (2013, Peter Bush). While the translators perhaps chose Rosenthal's text because it is better known, Peter Bush's radical translation published by Virago is most likely to be more readily available to English readers today. It is also the text that more accurately replicates Rodoreda's style.

Although at least one of her short stories, "The Window", has previously appeared in English, Monsó's *A Man of His Word* is the first of her books to be translated into English. It is hoped that Anglophone readers will not have to wait long to read more from a writer whose literary star shines bright.

Review of Yu Hua's *The Seventh Day* (trans. Allan H. Barr)

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Yu Hua. *The Seventh Day*. Translated by Allan H. Barr. Melbourne: Text, 2015.

———. *Diqi tian*. Beijing: New Star Press, 2013.

Yu Hua is representative of the avant-garde writers of the 1980s and 1990s in China. Born in 1960, Yu published his first novella in 1983. Many of his prize-winning novels, including *To Live*, *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* and *Brothers*, have been translated into more than twenty languages. *To Live*, written in 1993, was adapted into an eponymous film by the internationally reputed Chinese director Zhang Yimou in 1994. As *To Live* touches upon the politically sensitive topics of the Great Leap Forward Movement and the Cultural Revolution, Zhang's film was banned in China, which helped both the novel and the film to reach a broader international audience. The novel subsequently won Italy's Premio Grinzane Cavour in 1998 and France's Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2004. Some critics such as Wang Damin contend that the 1998 Italian prize established Yu as an internationally recognized writer. It was said that before Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2012, Yu was the best known Chinese writer in the Western world.

Yu's most recent novel *The Seventh Day* was released in 2013, seven years after his last novel, *Brothers*. With Yu's reputation, his publisher received over 700,000 orders from bookstores across China by simply forecasting the release of his new book. When it was finally published in June that year, *The Seventh Day* topped the sales charts of amazon.cn within 24 hours. *The Seventh Day* is an absurdist work inspired by the Book of Genesis. It opens with the following inscription in both English and Chinese: "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made." The protagonist of the novel is a middle-aged man named Yang Fei, who was born on a moving train. Lost by his mother through the round hole in the toilet floor onto the railroad track, Yang was adopted by a switchman. The novel tells the story of Yang Fei's experiences in the seven days after an unceremonious death. Being unable to afford the expensive cemetery, he becomes a solitary drifting soul without a burial plot. Yang's life is reconstructed in the novel through flashbacks interspersed between stories.

Material desire permeates the novel. Yang Fei's beautiful wife married him for love, but later divorces him to marry a promising businessman. The moment she hugs Yang Fei goodbye, she tells him, "I still love you". When she meets Yang again after their death, she says similar things, "I married twice, but only had one husband – and that was you". The seemingly ironic reiteration of love in the novel is a powerful accusation of the maddening pursuit of material desire in the real world. In an acquisitive society, material gains transcend life and death. In *The Seventh Day*, the migrant worker nicknamed Mouse Girl "committed suicide by jumping off a building, distressed that her boyfriend had given her a knockoff

iPhone 4s for her birthday instead of the real thing". Even in their afterlife, the deceased are described as vying with each other in their funeral dresses, urns and burial plots.

Not all kinds of insanity in contemporary China can be accounted for in terms of wealth. *The Seventh Day* also describes controversial forced demolitions, corrupted officialdom, rough-and-tumble hospitals, and the wretched living conditions of the underdogs, among others. A love-making couple is removed forcefully from their bedroom to a truck so that their home can be demolished for a development program to go ahead. Another couple is buried alive in their home due to a similar forced demolition scheme, leaving their eleven-year-old daughter behind. Bodies of twenty-seven infants and foetuses are dumped into a river as medical refuse by a local hospital, and the person who reports this to journalists dies shortly after in a mysterious car accident. A husband is sentenced to death for murdering his lunatic wife, but his wife returns home several years later. All kinds of tragic events that have taken place in China in recent years and hit the headlines, are incorporated into the novel in one way or another. So if what I recount here looks fragmentary, that is probably the same impression you may get from *The Seventh Day*.

For that reason, the novel, though widely read, received fierce criticism. Many a critic labelled it a "news skewer", gathering many headline stories into one collection. Indeed, no character in the novel, even the protagonist, is fully developed, if compared with those of Yu's earlier novels such as Fugui in *To Live*. *The Seventh Day* reads more like a series of loosely connected short stories. No wonder some comments held that Yu is overdrawing on the credit earned from his earlier works: the "failed language" of this novel represents none of the cleverness of *To Live*; had the novel been written by a lesser-known author, it would have had no chance of being published. Yu Hua is nevertheless ignoring these criticisms. He defends *The Seventh Day* as the most representative of his overall writing style, adding that he will not read reviews until they get rational.

Despite the accusation of its being "Yu's worst novel", *The Seventh Day* was listed among the "top 10 books of 2013" by *China Daily*, the most influential English-language newspaper in China. I read the book with tears and laughter, because the preposterous stories, told with ingenious sarcasm, are often very real. Yu said that "*The Seventh Day* is a true absurdist novel" and he is surprised that "many Chinese readers consider it a work of realism". Nevertheless, absurdity and realism are not diametrical opposites. The absurdity of the novel is best demonstrated by the author's fantastic design of making a dead man his protagonist, a perspective that enables Yang Fei to align the propagated "truth" in the real world with the first-hand "truth" from those directly involved. The realistic aspect, needless to say, lies in the fact that almost all stories in the novel have their real-life counterparts.

The English translation is admirably crafted by Allan H. Barr, who also translated Yu's debut novel *Cries in the Drizzle*, his essay collection *China in Ten Words*, and his short story collection *Boy in the Twilight*. Barr's translation is lively and sparkling. It reads fluently and smoothly without effacing the Chinese otherness. Expressions such as "the fresh flower gets stuck in a cowpat" and "the scabby toad gets to eat swan meat" are easily comprehensible and memorable in English, but remain authentically Chinese in form and meaning. Not surprisingly, the impression I have from reading the translation is comparable to reading the Chinese original in terms of literary style and emotional effect.

The Chinese original has inscriptions from *Genesis* in both Chinese and English. Considering that not all Chinese readers are interested or able to read English, Yu's inclusion of English may betray that in writing up *The Seventh Day*, the target readership he had in mind includes international audiences. Interestingly, Barr's English translation excludes the inscriptions from *Genesis*, making the connection between the Biblical inspiration and Yu's narrative structure implicit. From the perspective of the target readership, Barr's translation provides a good read to anyone who wants to gain some insights into the tragic life of ordinary people in contemporary China. Barr's translation not only renders the Chinese text accessible to English readers, it also has the potential to improve the rough language in *The Seventh Day*, which Chinese readers find uninspiring. In the same vein, those social events that local readers dismissed as collections of headline stories may be interpreted as super-realistic by an international audience viewing them through a different lens.

Review of Timur Vermes's *Look Who's Back* (trans. Jamie Bulloch)

CHRISTIAN GRIFFITHS
Monash University

Timur Vermes. *Look Who's Back*. Translated from German by Jamie Bulloch. London: Maclehose Press, 2014.

———. *Er ist wieder da*. Frankfurt am Maim: Eichborn Verlag, 2012.

For those of us in the non-German-speaking world, the mass appeal that was central to Adolf Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s remains something of a mystery, for the barrier of language has tended to shield us from the gift for oratory that was reputed to be one of the Führer's most effective weapons. Film footage of Hitler's speeches, such as we find in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) certainly provide us with a material record of its effect, but even if we observe these performances with subtitles, the synthesis of sound and meaning that is at the heart of effective oratory remains absent. Moreover, the mystery of Hitler's appeal is not solely one of language difference; it is also an issue of historical difference, and in this respect even modern Germans might find it baffling, for it is unlikely that any demagogue could win popular support today by speaking, however passionately, on such topics as the worker's struggle, or the glory of the nation. Timur Vermes's controversial comic novel *Look Who's Back*, attempts in part to solve this mystery by considering the kinds of issues a modern Hitler might exploit to win support and facilitate a rise to power. The novel has been recently translated into English by British historian and writer Jamie Bulloch, who extends this aspect of Vermes's project by providing Anglophone readers with a convincing simulacrum of the types of rhetorical strategy that might be used to this end, thereby offering us insight into how the most dangerous demagogues may effect their rise to power.

The novel is presented as a first-hand narrative in the voice of Hitler himself, who has mysteriously come to consciousness in twenty-first century Berlin, with no clue as to how he got there. With characteristic pragmatism, Hitler does not question the means by which this miracle has occurred, but instead accepts it as the hand of fate positioning him to fulfil his destiny by leading Germany to glory. The narrative contrasts Hitler's pursuit of this goal with the critiques of modern German culture that his comically mismatched ideology construes. For example, early in the novel, Hitler, having yet to secure a domicile, takes refuge in a news kiosk. When examining the works of print media that are housed there, with glossy magazines largely taking the place of newspapers, he offers the following observation:

> One would develop an ulcer from reading the scribblings of the syphilitic, degenerate minds within the gutter press who, manifestly freed from all state control, were at liberty to publish the sick and profane view of the world they had dreamed up (26).

Although the comment is fashioned in the rhetoric of a National Socialist ideologue, the context in which it is presented ensures that there would be few modern readers who would not identify to some degree with its assessment of the modern media culture. Through this strategy, Vermes is able to offer more than a simple fish-out-of-water story; by reproducing Hitler's rhetoric and applying it to a modern context, he provides the reader with insight into

precisely the kind of engagements that Hitler's original supporters might have found so appealing.

Similarly, Vermes' feat of historical translation is matched by Bulloch's various feats of lingual translation, which offer the non-German speaker access to a rhetorical experience that may convincingly evoke the character of the original. For example, one of the novel's most effective and sustained set-pieces depicts Hitler's impressions of modern television programming (62–72), and this shows Bulloch's strategies at their most effective. Alone in a newly acquired apartment, Hitler initially mistakes the flat-screen TV in the corner for a piece of (decadent) modern art, and when he finally learns how to switch it on, he is bombarded with light and sound images that force him instantly to withdraw. Yet, concluding that television is one of the most important devices of modern mass-communication (he has, at this point, only the barest inkling of the existence of the internet), he makes a point of immersing himself in it.

Much of what is reported in this passage requires significant decoding, but it is clear that his channel-surfing experiment takes in several cooking shows, advertisements, some reality programming, a courtroom drama, a news program, possibly a soap opera, and (at least I think) *Judge Judy*. Bulloch's translation of Vermes' invective in this passage utilizes a command of diverse vocabulary and deft figures of speech to convey the comically mounting incredulity and dismay of the protagonist. Since the effect relies to a large degree on the cumulative effect of the rhetoric, isolated instances will hardly convey this convincingly, but one example may illustrate. On turning to a news channel, Hitler observes that,

> while the man presented his reports, banners ran across the picture, some with figures, some with phrases, as if what the announcer was saying was so negligible one might as well follow the banners, or vice-versa. What was certain was that one would suffer a stroke if one tried to follow everything […] Mobilising every last ounce of my inner strength, I spent several minutes attempting to grasp what was happening […] On the verge of despair, I crouched in front of the machine and tried to cover the inconsequential swarm of words with my hands so I could concentrate on the spoken word. But more gobbledygook was shifting, constantly, in almost every corner of the screen. The time, the stock prices, the price of the American dollar, the temperature of the remotest corners of the earth […] It was as if the information were being retrieved from a lunatic asylum. (67)

The vocabulary here is diverse, sustaining interest by offering multiple synonyms, but without ever having to rely on obscurity; the syntactic structures match the rhythms of good oratory; and the use of figures of speech is highly developed without ever really drawing attention to itself. The translator's skill is shown here in the degree to which the language has preserved rhetorical effects that can potentially transcend historical and lingual boundaries, resulting in a translation that conceives its transfer from one language to another as the act of building on the work of the author, rather than simply replicating its effects in a new context.

Clearly, one of the key strategies of the novel is its use of humour, and the withering observations on modern culture that this Hitler offers have the effect of making the character oddly sympathetic. Of course, this suggests a more serious purpose to the novel, where it may be interpreted as a warning against our cultural susceptibility to comedy, which may thereby be used by the mechanisms of mass communication to seduce us ideologically. However, comic writing is a rare talent, and the challenge of drawing humour out of a taboo subject is no doubt a significant one; indeed, for Vermes, it is an approach that has attracted considerable approbation. Setting aside the possible ethical questions, the degree to which the

literary feat is accomplished suggests that *Look Who's Back* is the work of a substantial talent. Similarly, while the choice of an educated and experienced translator confirms the cultural importance of the work, the quality of the translation itself, which is able to produce comic effects in the novel for Anglophone readers, and thereby deliver its central controversies to a broader market, suggests that Bulloch is a literary figure of comparable talent.

The Inaugural AALITRA Translation Prize

LILIT ŽEKULIN THWAITES
La Trobe University and Chair of the AALITRA Prize Sub-Committee, 2014

Early in 2014, the executive committee of AALITRA decided it was time for the organization to launch a literary translation prize which would hopefully give a higher profile to the art of literary translation, and give the Association an idea of who was out there (in Australia) "doing" literary translation from a range of "foreign" languages into English. It was finally decided to hold the event every two years, starting in 2014, and to focus on a different language each time. Spanish was selected as the first cab off the rank.

The organization of a new literary translation prize involves many tasks, some straightforward, others more complicated, time-consuming and/or difficult. Think sponsorships, timing, prize money, venue, selection of texts, website organization and monitoring, acceptable restrictions (e.g. who can participate), de-identification of entries to ensure impartial adjudication, (pro-bono) judges...

Selecting the texts to be translated was both straightforward and difficult, in part because of a very short time frame in which to reach a decision. It had been agreed that we would need one very short story and one short poem, and that it would be a plus if we could find texts from both a male and a female writer and that we would look at writers from Spain and from Latin America. Once the AALITRA executive committee had agreed on these broad parameters, the first port of call for me as Chair of the Prize sub-committee in the hunt for suitable texts was fellow AALITRA committee members and various colleagues and friends who were involved in the contemporary Hispanic literary field, and in poetry in particular, as the latter is not my own particular area of expertise. We eventually narrowed the field down to five poems and four short stories – there are surprisingly few short poems and very short stories that present a challenge to potential translators, have not already been translated into English, and for which permission to translate and publish are readily available within a short period of time.

It was then the sub-committee's task to vote for their preferred poem and prose texts, and the final selections were the two texts presented in this issue – "Somos un poema" by José Luis Reina Palazón, and "Antes del almuerzo" by Ana María Moix. Permission to use and publish Reina Palazón's poem proved straightforward and quick, thanks to personal contacts and collaborative ventures between the poet and various members of AALITRA. He indicated he would be delighted to lend his poem to such a venture. Ana María Moix proved more complicated, for a totally unexpected and tragic reason.

I have had considerable contact with Ana María Moix since the 1980s as she is one of the contemporary Spanish/Catalan women writers (poetry, prose, essays – and more recently, also a publisher and editor) whose work I have been researching and teaching throughout my academic career. I had sent her an email asking for her permission as soon as her short story was selected and, contrary to her usual practice, had received no reply. As I was shortly to be in Barcelona, I decided to contact her in person once I got there – but it was never to be. By some quirk of fate which she would no doubt have appreciated, the very day that I sent her my email, Ana María Moix died of cancer, much too young, and not long after her return to writing and publishing following a prolonged absence. I was certain that she would have given us her permission, in part as a way of supporting the aims of AALITRA and this Prize. Both her long-time partner and her publisher, no doubt in recognition of this fact, agreed that using Ana María's story for the AALITRA Prize was a highly appropriate way of

remembering her and her work – and it is for this reason that the inaugural AALITRA Translation Prize, and this issue of *The AALITRA Review*, are dedicated to her.

It remains only for me to acknowledge the impressive number and quality of the entries we received (over thirty in total) and to thank the three other judges who helped to select the prize-winning translations that follow. My fellow judges Chris Andrews, Peter Boyle and Fiona Taler are all acknowledged literary translators with a wealth of experience, and gave freely of their time and expertise as we worked towards reaching final decisions in each of the two categories. I'm sure that once you have read the translations, which appear below along with their respective source texts, you will agree that, while still not sufficiently publicized and recognized, here in Australia literary translation from Spanish into English is in a healthy state indeed.

Antes del almuerzo

ANA MARÍA MOIX
(Spanish > English prose)

Me senté en la terraza del hotel y, en espera de la hora de la comida, abrí el libro y empecé a leer.

Así empezaba el libro que me dispuse a leer sentado en la terraza del hotel esperando la hora del almuerzo.

Apenas había leído unas diez páginas cuando el chico uniformado de gris me alargó un sobre que acababan de entregarle para mí. Fue entonces cuando, al levantar la vista del libro, me fijé en la rubia de verde que daba vueltas a mi alrededor. Traté de no fijarme demasiado en ella y abrí de nuevo el libro. Emprendí la lectura justo en el momento que la rubia vestida de verde daba vueltas alrededor del sillón. La rubia se me acercó por detrás y, con poco disimulo, trató de leer en mi libro. No se impaciente —dijo al ver que iba a hablarle—, yo no salgo hasta la página veintiuno. Dése prisa, antes aún han de salir la sirvienta y el banquero. Atónito leí. Dése prisa —decía— debemos hablar. Debí dejar de leer mucho antes. Ya era demasiado tarde. La puerta giratoria empezó a dar vueltas y apareció el banquero. Ya había empezado. Era preciso terminar pronto, que saliera la sirvienta, el banquero y ver qué significaba la comedia de la mujer de verde. Tal vez después de terminar el libro…

Estaba leyendo estas líneas cuando sentí el roce de la mano del botones en el brazo alargándome un sobre.

Ante la rubia de verde, ante sus palabras, me sentí irreal, leído. Intenté decirle que me dejara en paz, que ya sabía que iba a salir en la página veintiuno. Por lo visto no me tocaba decirlo. Tuve que esperar que saliera el banquero y la sirvienta.

Estoy leyendo, sentado en la terraza del hotel, mientras espero la hora de la comida. Ya he empezado el libro. Es inútil intentar dejarlo. Por el espejo, ya veo al chico uniformado que se acerca con un sobre en la mano, una rubia vestida de verde sale del interior del hotel. Sólo falta esperar al banquero y a la sirvienta, y si el que lee no cierra el libro sabremos en qué termina todo esto.

Moix, Ana María. *El chico pelirrojo a quien veo cada día*. Barcelona: Femino Lumen, 1971 / 1995. 43-44.

Before Lunch

Translated by KEVIN WINDLE
Winner (prose), AALITRA Translation Prize 2014

I took a seat on the hotel terrace to pass the time until lunch, opened my book and began to read.

Thus began the book which I intended to read, sitting on the hotel terrace, passing the time until lunch.

I had read no more than ten pages when the grey-uniformed bell-boy handed me an envelope which he had just received with orders to pass it to me. That was when I raised my eyes from my book and noticed the blonde dressed in green close by, pacing to and fro. I tried not to take too much notice of her and opened my book again. I started reading just at the moment when the blonde dressed in green was walking round my chair. She approached from behind and tried to read over my shoulder, hardly pretending not to. "Be patient," she said, on seeing that I was about to speak. "I don't appear till page twenty-one. Hurry up! The maid and the banker have to appear first." I read on, astonished. "Hurry up," she said. "We have to talk." I should have stopped reading much earlier. Now it was too late. The revolving door was beginning to turn, and the banker emerged. It had started. I had to get to the end quickly, to see the maid appear with the banker, and see what this comedy of the woman in green meant. Perhaps when I finished the book…

I was reading these lines when the bell-boy touched my arm and handed me an envelope.

Confronted by the blonde in green and what she had said, I had a feeling of unreality, of being read. I wanted to tell her to leave me alone, and say that I already knew she would appear on page twenty-one. Clearly it wasn't the right thing to say. I had to wait until the banker and the maid appeared.

I read on, sitting on the hotel terrace, passing the time until lunch. I've already started the book. It's no use trying to stop. In the mirror I can see the uniformed bell-boy approaching with an envelope in his hand, and a blonde dressed in green coming out of the hotel. I have only to wait for the banker and the maid, and if the reader doesn't close the book we shall see how it all ends.

———

Kevin Windle comments…

"Antes del almuerzo" is an unusual and thought-provoking piece, marked by a striking circularity and mutually interpenetrating realities. Túa Blesa has described it as "una representación, y una reflexión, del acto de lectura, por tanto, una reflexión sobre el acto de la escritura" [a representation and a reflection of the act of reading, and therefore a reflection on the act of writing], in which the reader is confronted by an unending series of ever-diminishing mirror images (Blesa 323). The familiar idea of a story within a story is carried further: the "frame" story and the "framed" story flow seamlessly into each other, so that the narrator and reader alike are left querying which world they inhabit, and we the readers,

reading about the reader reading the framed story, wonder who is meant by "el que lee" [the reader, literally "the one who is reading"] in the last sentence.

The circularity of the story is aided by the device of repetition and near-repetition, in apparently plain and simple language, but with careful and precise vocabulary and phrasing. The repetition is clearly important and must be preserved in translation. The lexical simplicity means that a translation might easily have an unwelcome baldness about it, calling into question its literary merit.

Hence the need for careful choices in the target language, which is not to suggest a literal form of translation. Space permits only a single example: the repeated "esperar" with "almuerzo" or "comida" as its object. While "waiting for" is indisputably correct, the context invites consideration of other choices. The narrator gives no signs of desperate hunger, and is not seated at a restaurant table poised to attack his entrée as soon as it appears. On the contrary, "me dispuse a leer" makes clear that he is merely whiling away the time. The phrase which therefore suggests itself, and which will withstand the threefold repetition, is "passing the time".

It is perhaps worth noting one feature of the original which an English translation cannot make explicit, and which the source language cannot conceal: gender agreement in the participles ("sentado", "atónito", "leído") makes clear that the narrator is male. The translation offered gives no indication of the sex of the narrator. This is a recurrent problem in translation into English from Romance languages and many others. Fortunately, in this particular text it does not assume great importance.

My translation presupposes a reader who sees little virtue in the "foreignization" famously advocated by Lawrence Venuti, and prefers a version attuned as far as possible to the norms of the target language, i.e. a "domesticated" version, of the kind Venuti deplores (Venuti 28 and passim). This means that it eschews literalist prescriptions such as those of Vladimir Nabokov, who vigorously rejected "readability" as a criterion. Nor can one accept Nabokov's dubious denial of translatorial responsibility: "Whether [a translation] reads smoothly or not depends on the model, not on the mimic" (Lermontov xiii). Prose which is as carefully crafted as Moix's requires the "mimic" to attempt to relay it with both the precision Nabokov demanded and the fluency he scorned (Nabokov 115).

Blesa, Túa. "La puerta giratoria. Sobre un cuento de Ana María Moix." *Teoría e interpretación del cuento: Estudios*. Ed. Peter Fröhlinger and Georges Güntert. Bern: Peter Lang, 1995. 322-332.
http://ebooks.gutenberg.us/wordtheque/es/aaaskw.txt (accessed 6 January 2015)

Lermontov, Mihail. *A Hero of our Time*. Trans. Vladimir Nabokov in collaboration with Dmitri Nabokov. New York: Doubleday, 1958.

Nabokov, Vladimir. "Onegin in English." *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2010. 115-127.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility*. London: Routledge, 2008.

Before Lunch

Translated by ANTHONY CARTWRIGHT
Runner-up (prose), AALITRA Translation Prize 2014

I sat down on the hotel terrace, and as I waited for lunchtime I opened the book and began to read.

That was the beginning of the book I was about to read while I sat on the hotel terrace waiting for lunchtime.

I had only read about ten pages when the young man in grey uniform handed me an envelope which he had just been given for me. It was then, when I looked up from my book, that I noticed the blonde dressed in green walking in circles around me. I tried not to look at her too obviously and opened the book again. I started reading just at the moment when the blonde dressed in green was walking in circles around the easy chair. The blonde approached me from behind and barely disguised her attempt to read my book. "Don't get impatient", she said, seeing that I was about to speak to her, "I don't appear until page twenty-one. Hurry up, the maid and the banker have to appear first." I read on, astonished. "Hurry up", she said, "We ought to talk". I should have stopped reading a long time before. Now it was too late. The revolving door started to turn and the banker appeared. It had already started. I had to finish quickly, let the maid appear, and the banker, and find out what the antics of the woman in green meant. Maybe after I finished the book…

I was reading these lines when I felt the light touch of the bellboy's hand on my arm, handing me an envelope.

The blonde in green and her words made me feel unreal, read. I tried to tell her to leave me be, that I knew she was going to appear on page twenty-one. Apparently I was not meant to say it. I had to wait for the banker and the maid to appear.

I am sitting on the hotel terrace, reading as I wait for lunchtime. I have started the book. It is useless to try to put it down. In the mirror I see the young man in uniform approaching with an envelope in his hand; a blonde dressed in green comes out from inside the hotel. Now we just have to wait for the banker and the maid, and if the reader does not close the book we will see how all this ends up.

———

Anthony Cartwright comments…

I enjoyed this piece by Ana Maria Moix. The author creates a sense of mystery in a few short paragraphs. "It had already started." What had already started? The reader becomes the character waiting for lunch and for something to happen, and there is an odd feeling of predestination or *déjà vu* as the reader interacts with the other characters in the story. How will it conclude? Who is the blonde in green? We feel compelled to reach the end.

The language is crystal clear and events repeat but without using exactly the same words in Spanish. The translation should attempt to do the same using synonyms. Since I had the time, I went back to it now and again to try to polish it. I also ran it past my most literate friends, who offered helpful advice. I was particularly pleased with the "antics" of the woman in green. I knew when that word popped into my mind that I had found exactly the right translation.

When I came across this AALITRA competition, I never saw myself as a possible winner. However, I decided to enter as, like the reader of Moix's story, the challenge was there and I had no choice. As a long-time translator of Spanish to English, it was something I had to do. I was pleasantly surprised and pleased to be asked to come to Melbourne and join the AALITRA luminaries, meet the Spanish Consul and receive a prize. Anything which raises the profile of translators and translating in even a small way is most welcome, as ours is a peculiar job where the irony is that often, the better the translation the less it is noticed.

¿Somos un poema?

JOSÉ LUIS REINA PALAZÓN
(Spanish>English poetry)

Nunca lo creería. ¿Qué son los versos, las penas,
Alegrías siempre tan ideales que la letra garantiza?
Decir que somos poesía es para morirse de risa
O para llorar, a ciegas por supuesto, en arenas

No lejanas del mar para que éste limpie el alma
De aquellos que creen aún que la o su poesía
Es algo trascendente y que aumenta día a día
Su poder de infinito que al mundo da su calma.

Vamos, vamos, olvidaos del alma y por supuesto
De su poesía, lo que de ambas queda no es tema
Que salve a ningún cuerpo ni a ningún poema.
Hoy el olvido de sí mismo es lo que salva del resto.

José Luis Reina Palazón. "¿Somos un poema?" *La Traductière* 31 (June 2013): 74.

Are we poems?

Translated by DOMINIQUE HECQ
Winner (poetry), AALITRA Translation Prize 2014

I'd never believe it. What are verses, sorrows,
But joys so ideal that the letter holds?
To say we are poetry is either to die laughing
Or weeping, blinded, of course, by the sand

Close enough to the sea so it can cleanse the souls
Of those who persist in thinking that poetry – theirs at least
Is something transcendent growing bigger by the day
Its infinite power to appease the world.

Come on, come on, forget the soul and, of course,
Its poetry, what remains of both is nothing
That would save a body or a poem.
Today forgetting oneself is what saves us from the rest.

———

Dominique Hecq comments…

Translating is a ghostly act. You sit alone with a text, and as you read you entertain, in your head, the ghost of the author. And as you write, you entertain yourself as a kind of future ghost, the one who will succeed in ghosting the voice of the author of the text. This ghosting entails elisions in consciousness and in these elisions are intuitions, affects and rhythmic patterns that, paradoxically, will eventuate in communication.

As I write these words, I can hear the ghost of José Luis Reina Palazón chuckle, for his poetry insists on *presence*: it is the presence of things that gives meaning to the world. This is tacitly expressed in the question mark of "Somos un poema?".

Strangely, then, the question mark was the first difficulty I encountered in translating the poem. How to translate an elision one could call "sentiment", one that in fact gestures towards a much broader understanding of poetics? How to translate, beyond words, the unsentimental approach to poetry that is Reina Palazón's trademark?

In order to convey a persona removed from the cult of personality and the fascination with individuality, I imagined myself in conversation with Reina Palazón. To be more precise, calling upon distant memories, I imagined myself in *disagreement* with him. This ghosting gave me an understanding of the energy at the heart of "Somos un poema?" In turn, this set the tone, register and semantic field of "Are we poems?".

The first draft of the translation is a literal transcription of the original poem. What strikes me now, apart from the fact that it is mainly composed of Anglo-Saxon words, is the up-beat rhythm. Subsequent drafts focused on attempting to convey the equivocality of Spanish words such as "la letra". At times there were interferences from my native French,

which only compounded my rudimentary knowledge of Spanish, as when I looked into alternatives to translating “en arenas”. The last version of the translation focused on rhythm more than it did on meaning. As such, it is faithful to the original ghosting, which bears witness to the material realist inflection of the poem.

The greatest challenge in translating this poem, though, may have been the title. “Are we a poem?”, the most literal translation possible, was inconceivable. A certain tension may have been present, but not the energy, and certainly not the general sentiment spoken in the event of the poem with urgency and wry intent.

are we a poem?

Translated by JACQUELINE BUSWELL
Runner-up (poetry), AALITRA Translation Prize 2014

No way. Why trouble with the line, the scan?
For imagined joy from the world of letters?
It's folly to say we are made of verse, better
to laugh and cry on the dunes, blinded by sand.

May ocean waters cleanse the souls of all
who still believe that poetry transcends,
that its power of the infinite each day extends
and gives its calmness to the world.

Let's see. Forget the soul and of course forget
its poetry too. In all that's left there's no phrase
that could save any body, any poem. Today,
forgetting the self is what saves us from the rest.

———

Jacqueline Buswell comments…

What a task to set myself. The poem begins with questions, the first verb could have first or third person as subject, and the content addresses existential issues such as whether we are poetry. It seems to scorn the very form used to communicate, concluding that we should forget the soul and its poetry too. He must be joking. Is he perhaps talking about god/God? Something transcendent, something with power of the infinite?

The poet himself advises us to forget the poem and forget the self, so I started translating. Firstly I put down lines to transfer meaning, then I looked at structure. In spite of all my qualms about attempting to transfer a poetic rhyming scheme into a target language, I decided to try. Reina Palazón uses an ABBA pattern; at first I didn't try to match that. I enjoy the challenges of poetic form and of course, every change for rhyming purposes involved lots of play with words. Somewhat to my own surprise I ended up with the same ABBA pattern, generally with half-rhymes.

The first line of any text is key to how it flows: "Nunca lo creería. ¿Qué son los versos, las penas…?". The first literal translation of the first part of the line, "I would never believe it" eventually became an abrupt "No way.", which seemed a fair enough rendering of Reina's answer to the question "Are we a poem?".

I tried several versions of the next part of the line: "What are verses and sorrows", and "What's all this with rhyme and metre", but finally used the literal translation of "verso" as "line", transferred the pain of "penas" to the verb "trouble", and decided on "scan" for its rhyme with "sands": "Why trouble with the line, the scan?"

In the last verse, I had to deliberate on how to translate “Vamos, vamos”. I found it impossible to say “let’s go, let’s go”. I settled for “Let’s see”. The phrase seemed to serve as an equivalent linguistic crutch.

I worried I was hovering too close to the source text and kept telling myself to loosen up, to jump to the target language. I worried more when I missed something in translation. For instance, when I threw out the reference to “die laughing”. And when I couldn’t include an enjambment in the line patterns, as I thought this was an important poetic element to transfer.

Thankfully, as translator, I didn’t have to give my opinion on “it’s folly to say we are made of verse” or answer the question, “are we a poem?”. There’s room perhaps for a Cartesian argument about having poetry in our veins and being made of verse...

I was pleased to hear Ramón López Castellano at the awards ceremony readdress our old foe *tradurre tradire* and speak about *tradurre creare*. Indeed, *vamos*!

CONTRIBUTORS

Jacqueline Buswell was born in rural NSW, and completed a Bachelor of Arts at the Australian National University. She lived in Mexico for more than twenty years. Jacqueline has worked as a journalist, teacher of English as a second language, and Spanish-English translator and interpreter. She completed a Master of Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Sydney in 2011. Ginninderra Press published her first book of poems, *Song of a Journeywoman*, in 2013.

Anthony Cartwright was born in England and fell in love with the Spanish language at school at the age of twelve. He went on to study Spanish at Sheffield University (UK), and eventually lived in Barcelona for twenty years. He has worked as a medical translator for a long time, and although he now lives in Tasmania he still returns to Catalonia every two years to catch up with friends and also the general situation in Spain, a country whose geography and people continue to fascinate him.

Christian Griffiths is a teaching associate and PhD candidate in literary studies at Monash University. He has contributed book reviews to *Australian Book Review* and *Colloquy: text, theory critique*. He has recently co-edited a special double issue of *Australian Literary Studies* on the interdisciplinary topic of music and literature, to which he also contributed two scholarly pieces. He also regularly blogs on a range of scholarly topics on *Academia.edu*.

Dominique Hecq is Associate Professor at Swinburne University of Technology. She has a PhD in literature and a background in French and Germanic languages, with qualifications in literary translation and psychoanalysis. She has published in the areas of literary studies, translation, creative writing, psychoanalysis, and pedagogy. She is the author of eleven books of fiction and poetry, the latest being *Out of Bounds* and *Stretchmarks of Sun. Towards a Poetics of Creative Writing* has also appeared recently. Dominique secretly learns Spanish because she wants to read Borges in the original.

Nicholas Jose has published seven novels, three collections of short stories, a memoir and essays, mostly on Australian and Asian culture. He was general editor of the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* (2009). He is Adjunct Professor in the Writing and Society Research Centre, University of Western Sydney, Professor of Creative Writing at Bath Spa University, UK, and Professor of English and Creative Writing at The University of Adelaide.

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Lilit Žekulin Thwaites is an award-winning translator and academic who lives in Melbourne. She specializes in Spanish women writers and the society, cultures and literatures of contemporary Spain. Her translation of Rosa Montero's *Tears in Rain* (AmazonCrossing) was recognised as one of *World Literature Today's* 75 Notable Translations of 2012. *The Immortal Collection* (by Eva García Sáenz, AmazonCrossing) was published in April 2014. She was recently shortlisted for the 2015 NSW Premier's Literary Awards – Translation (Early Career).

Kevin Windle is an Emeritus Fellow in the School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics at the Australian National University in Canberra. His major publications include *The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies* (jointly edited with Kirsten Malmkjær, 2011) and the monograph *Undesirable: Captain Zuzenko and the Workers of Australia and the World* (2012).