

# The AALITRA Review

A JOURNAL OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

No. 5, November 2012



AALITRA

## The AALITRA Review

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# Translating ‘Historia del hombre que quiso parar el mundo’ from the collection *Tanta pasión para nada* by Julio Llamazares

MATTHEW CALLAGHAN

As yet, *Tanta pasión para nada* has never been published as a translation in English. In fact, despite being a recognized author in the Spanish-speaking world, with numerous works published by the major publisher Alfaguara,<sup>1</sup> only one book by the Spanish journalist and author Julio Llamazares has been translated into English. What could the reasons for this be? Charlotte Barslund highlights the fact that some authors’ books may not ‘travel’ well to another language even though it is technically possible to translate them, as they ‘may be deeply rooted in their own culture, and have little appeal to foreign readers, despite being highly regarded in their country of origin’ (2011: 151).

Is this story (and this collection) untranslatable for an English-speaking audience? The concept at its centre is a particularly Spanish one, and one which is unavoidably alien to an Anglo-cultural and linguistic audience. Quite apart from the fact that we simply do not have a vocabulary for the very specific terminology of bullfighting in English (linguistic untranslatability), it is not part of our cultural understanding (cultural untranslatability; Bassnett 2011: 97) and in many cases stirs emotions of outrage and disgust about cruelty to animals. I believe, however, that Llamazares’s story is not only translatable but that there is an inherent value in translating it. The story transcends the confines of its cultural context and has a literary value and a universal significance which can be absorbed and enjoyed by an English-speaking reader. In other words, within the Spanish cultural and linguistic frame there is a meaning which is much wider; the story is not about bullfighting, it is merely the vessel used to express an idea. As Llamazares says of this collection: ‘los protagonistas de estos relatos son muy distintos, pero todos comparten la misma extraña condena: descubrir que la vida es una pasión inútil. Una pasión [...] que nos permite seguir viviendo pese a que conozcamos su inutilidad’ (Llamazares 2011: back cover; ‘the protagonists of these stories are very different, but they all share the same strange fate: discovering that life is a futile passion, a passion [...] that enables us to go on living even though we know it is useless’). This is an idea which applies to all humanity from all cultures and all languages, and is beautifully crystallized in the image of Neme: ‘not knowing that life, unlike the bulls, doesn’t stop for anyone, but charges right on over those who dare to stand before it’ (ll. 259-61).

Nonetheless, translating the story does pose a number of difficulties. I spent quite some time searching for an Anglo-cultural equivalent that would produce an ‘equivalent effect’ (Nida 1964a: 159; qtd. in Munday 2008: 71) for the image of Don Tancredo standing before the bull, but

1. See <http://www.alfaguara.com/es/autor/julio-llamazares/>

I simply could not find one. In any case, I decided that this would violate Tytler's first principle: 'that the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work' (Tytler 1791: 209); replacing the bullfighting image, which in any case is very powerful, would render an incomplete translation, and give rise to the question: why translate this story at all?

However, while the audience may be tolerant of, and even relish, a foreign cultural context, they are far less tolerant of 'foreignness of syntax, grammar and usage' (Grieve 2005: 101). As James Grieve argues, literalism when used as a technique for foreignizing a text 'used to be called bad translation' (2005: 101) and quotes *Guardian* reviewer Paul Davis's comment that 'literalism would force general readers to stop reading', as 'one of the most persuasive arguments against foreignization' (Grieve 2005: 103). I therefore sought some middle ground. Any real equivalence of effect is impossible as the culture of bullfighting is so far removed from Anglo-society that we can never be as familiar with it as a Spaniard. However, there is no reason why an English-speaking writer could not have written this same story in English, setting it in a Spanish cultural context. With this in mind, I decided to maintain what I could of the Spanish elements, both linguistic and cultural, from the Source Text (ST) in the translation, while making the Target Text (TT) language (syntax, grammar and usage) as 'natural' and 'accessible' as possible. I have followed something along the lines of what Rita Wilson describes as 'give and take between these two approaches [domestication and foreignization] – a "negotiation" between author, translator and reader' (2005: 122). This flies in the face of Schleiermacher's warning in his famous essay, that 'no mixture of the two is to be trusted' (1813: 229) as it rejects the polarity of foreignization and domestication, and instead attempts to bring the author and the reader towards each other to meet somewhere in the middle.

I have maintained or used words like '*matador*' and '*fiesta*' in italics. They are words which have entered the English popular vocabulary, and pose little or no difficulty for modern English readers. In fact, '*matador*' does not appear at all in the ST, where the word used to refer to bullfighter is '*torero*'. In Spanish the two words have different implications, but in English we make no distinction between a bullfighter who simply taunts the bull, and one who kills it. The concept of '*fiesta*' is another which I have kept. Most Spanish towns have their own *fiesta* as well as national festivities. As the definition '[i]n Spain or Spanish America, a religious festival; also, any festivity or holiday' (OED) implies, it is a very particular cultural phenomenon, but one with which English speakers are nonetheless comfortable enough. I have opted to maintain '*Plaza de Toros*', (l. 92), as the 'bull-ring' forms as central a part of any Spanish town as its town hall or central plaza, and most English-speaking readers will be able to make the leap from '*Plaza de Toros*' to 'bull-ring' without the need for an explanation. In the same way '*becerrada*' as a particularly Spanish term has been kept with a gloss in brackets (l. 173), where we have no English term for a bullfight with a young bull. While this is perhaps pushing the limits of the readers' patience, with the explanation it presents no great challenge to the reader, yet maintains some of the Spanish flavour of the text

For the same reason, I have opted not to anglicize proper names such as 'Neme', 'Cayo' 'Ozaribeño'; street and place names such as 'Gran Vía Metro station', 'Fuencarral Street'; and other nouns such as '*pesetas*' (l. 236) and '*Metro*' (adding station to the end; l. 218). Translating

them as dollars/euro/pounds etc. and subway/underground respectively would transport the original text out of its Spanish context into a specific American/British context, which would add little value to the translation. In fact I have gone so far as to literally place the reader in Spain: 'a Valencian who emigrated to America and introduced it to *our* beloved Spain in 1889' (ll. 176-178).

However, as I stated above, I have also tried to make the English prose as natural as possible, in line with Tytler's second principle 'that the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original' (1791: 209) – a particularly difficult task given the long rambling sentences which the author tends to utilize. I have done this by using English punctuation (colons, semi-colons, dashes, brackets etc.), breaking some sentences and changing word-order where necessary. As Grieve notes, 'different syntax requires different punctuation' (2005: 101). For example, in the second paragraph of the ST there are three sentences. The first two are very long and punctuated almost exclusively by commas. This works relatively well in Spanish, but in English we tend to get lost. Thus, although I have not shortened the sentences, I have used dashes to clarify digressions from the main idea of the sentence. On other occasions, I have used full stops to shorten sentences where an English reader simply needs a rest, for example in the paragraph on p. 58 of the ST beginning with '*La publicación...*' (l. 153), which contains a single full stop in its 27 lines (though there is a colon and an ellipsis which function as pauses). I have also italicized some words in translation for emphasis, where I deemed this necessary to clarify the rhythm and stress in long sentences (for example: 'Right under my nose I had (I should say I *had* had, as I had known Neme for several months by then' (ll. 96-98)); 'Not only had he done it: he was the last person *ever* to have dared to perform the dangerous 'Don Tancredo'' (ll. 101-103).

Furthermore, I have tried to use English idioms and rhythms in place of their Spanish counterparts in an attempt to match the informal tone of the original, which reads like someone recounting a story from memory. For example, '*los popes de la izquierda provincial*' (l. 15) become the 'movers and shakers of the provincial political left' (ll. 15-16); '*Ante mis ojos*' (l. 96) becomes 'Right under my nose' (l. 96); '*se enfrentó a pecho descubierto*' (ll. 258) becomes 'confronted it head-on' (ll. 258-59); and even '*La suerte de don Tancredo*' (ll. 70; 78-79; 103-104; 175) becomes simply the 'Don Tancredo' (ll. 70; 78; 103; 175), in the same way a tantrum on a tennis court would be a 'John McEnroe' or an eccentric goalkeeping error, a 'Barthez'.

'Historia del hombre que quiso parar el mundo' has never been translated into English. Indeed, despite relative success in the Spanish-speaking world, Llamazares has only had one of his books translated into English to date, which raises obvious questions about his 'translatability'. Although this text presents a number of difficulties – from bullfighting jargon and imagery, to long complex sentences and being deeply rooted in Spanish culture – this story (and indeed the collection as a whole) has a literary value and universal significance which transcend linguistic and cultural roots, and are not beyond translation. With a sophisticated, although by no means specialist, audience in mind, I have opted for a translation method which seeks the 'middle ground' in the foreignization/domestication debate by respecting the Spanish 'flavour' of the text, while simultaneously privileging the accessibility of its syntax, grammar and usage. As Barslund

puts it, ‘a good book is a good book, whatever language it is written in’ (2011: 145). I believe that, despite the difficulties, not only is this a good book in Spanish, but also one which can be enjoyed in its English translation.

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## 1 **Historia del hombre que quiso parar el mundo**

La noticia apareció un verano en el diario provincial perdida entre los sucesos. Era breve. Decía simplemente que un hombre había sido hallado muerto cerca de la vía del tren en las proximidades de un pueblo de la provincia, pero en seguida supe que se trataba de él.

10 Lo había conocido años atrás (bastantes años atrás) en la redacción del periódico para el que yo trabajaba entonces: un semanario de corta vida impulsado y clausurado (cuando se cansaron de él) por los popes de la izquierda provincial. Hablo, claro, de la provincia en la que Neme y yo vivíamos en aquel tiempo.

Apareció una mañana en la redacción acompañado a otro personaje,  
20 un sujeto de gran porte y aires de ejecutivo que, al parecer, venía a ocuparse de la publicidad del periódico, uno de sus puntos débiles debido, entre otros muchos motivos, a la línea editorial de éste, que se compadecía mal con los intereses de quienes, por razones obvias, podían insertar en él anuncios de sus negocios: los empresarios y comerciantes de la provincia. Cayo y Neme se encargaron,  
30 en efecto, de la publicidad del periódico, uno como responsable y el otro como su ayudante, y desde entonces los traté muy a menudo, bien en la sede de la redacción (un piso en el extrarradio de la ciudad), bien en la cafetería del centro en la que tenían establecida su oficina general, en una mesa junto al teléfono, que utilizaban para sus gestiones como si fuera el suyo particular. Por los tiempos de que hablo, todavía no  
40 existía la telefonía móvil.

En seguida me di cuenta de que

## **The Man Who Wanted to Stop the World**

The news appeared one summer in the provincial newspaper, lost amongst other stories. It was short, saying simply that a man had been found dead near the railway tracks on the outskirts of one of the province’s small towns, but I knew at once that it was him.

I had met him years before (a good few years before) in the office of the newspaper where I was working then: a short-lived weekly publication, brought into being and subsequently closed down (when they grew tired of it) by the movers and shakers of the provincial political left. I mean, of course, from the province in which Neme and I were living at that time.

He arrived at the newspaper one morning accompanied by another character, a large man with an executive-type look, who had seemingly come to take care of the advertising side of the newspaper – one of its weak points due, amongst many other things, to the paper’s editorial line, which was at odds with the interests of those who, for obvious reasons, might otherwise place ads in it: the businessmen and salesmen of the province. Cayo and Neme did, in effect, take over the advertising in the newspaper – one in charge and the other as his assistant – and from that point onwards I dealt with them often, whether at the newspaper’s headquarters (an apartment on the outskirts of the city), or in the café in the centre where they had set up their make-shift office at a table next to a telephone, which they used for their operations as if it were for their use alone. At this time, mobile phones were still a thing of the future.

Right away I realised that Neme

Neme era un pobre hombre. Siempre a la sombra de Cayo, que le eclipsaba con su humanidad. Neme era un desdichado que había llegado a su edad (los cuarenta, más o menos, por los años de que hablo) gracias a las ayudas de su familia, que, al parecer, tenía dinero. De hecho, Neme vivía en un hotel, no muy lujoso, es verdad, pero  
50 tampoco de mala muerte como cabría intuir de su situación.

Un día, al cabo de algunos meses, la casualidad hizo que me enterara de su verdadera historia. Siempre en un segundo plano, siempre a la sombra de Cayo, quien, con su frondosa labia y sus trajes impecables, como de gobernador civil, le eclipsaba por completo, apenas me había fijado en Neme salvo para compadecer su aspecto: su calva casi completa,  
60 sus ojos blandos e inexpresivos y su andar bamboleante, como de pato herido de muerte. Fue Cayo, precisamente, el que me reveló su historia: <<Aquí donde lo ves – me confesó, señalando a Neme, un día en la redacción –, estás hablando con la última persona que se ha atrevido a hacer en el mundo la heroica suerte de don Tancredo>>.

Yo no sabía a lo que se refería Cayo. Había escuchado, eso sí, nombrar la suerte de don Tancredo, pero referida al fútbol (cuando un portero se quedaba quieto, sin hacer nada por impedir que el balón entrara en su portería), o a los políticos, cuando también hacían la estatua ante un problema concreto, pero desconocía su significado auténtico. Cayo me lo explicó, pedagógico, orgulloso de sus conocimientos: la suerte de don Tancredo – me desveló mirando a su amigo  
80 – era un engaño taurino desaparecido ya de las plazas de toros por su extremada peligrosidad, ya que consistía en hacer la estatua en el centro del ruedo y esperar de ese modo, subido en un pedestal, la embestida del toro bravo. Al parecer, el bicho, si la suerte se hacía bien, caía en el engaño y se detenía en el último momento, eso sí, bufando y dando derrotes, como corresponde a su condición de fiera, pero  
90 sin embestir a la falsa estatua. Eso, ni más ni menos, era lo que, según Cayo, había hecho su ayudante en la plaza de toros

was an unfortunate fellow. Always in the shadow of Cayo, who eclipsed him as a human being, Neme was a luckless man who had got to his age (about 40 at the time) thanks to the assistance of his family who, it seemed, did have money. In fact, Neme lived in a hotel; as one could gather from his situation, not an overly lavish one, but by no means a complete dive either.

One day, several months later, chance led me to find out his true story. Always in the background, in the shadow of Cayo – who with his able tongue and spotless suits, like a local mayor, eclipsed him entirely – I had never given Neme a second thought except as an object of pity: his almost completely bald scalp, his soft inexpressive eyes and his shaky gait, like a terminally wounded duck. It was Cayo himself who told me his story: “over there where you see him” pointing at Neme, he confessed one day in the office, “you’re looking at the last person in the world to have dared perform the heroic feat of ‘Don Tancredo’”.

I had no idea what Cayo was talking about. I had certainly heard talk of the so-called ‘Don Tancredo’, but referring to football (when the goalkeeper remains still, making no attempt to stop the ball entering his net), or to politicians when they turn to stone when faced with an unavoidable problem, but I was ignorant of its real meaning. Cayo explained it to me, like a teacher proud of his knowledge: the ‘Don Tancredo’ – he revealed looking at his friend – was a bullfighting trick, nowadays almost completely vanished from the bull-rings due to the extreme danger it involved, in which the *matador*, pretending to be a statue, stands in the middle of the ring on a pedestal to await the angry bull’s charge. The idea is that the bull, if everything goes according to plan, falls for the trick and stops at the last moment, snorting and bucking its head as bulls do, but without toppling the fake statue of the *matador*. According to Cayo, that was exactly what his assistant had done in the *Plaza de Toros* of his home

de su pueblo un año el día de la fiesta y todavía vivía para contarlo.

Me quedé impresionado por la revelación. Ante mis ojos tenía (mejor dicho, había tenido, puesto que conocía a Neme desde hacía meses) una gran exclusiva periodística, no sólo de carácter provincial, sino de alcance internacional incluso, y ni siquiera la había intuido. Ahí es nada: la última persona que se había atrevido a hacer en el mundo la peligrosa suerte de don Tancredo. ¿Qué mejor tema para la última página del semanario, que también tenía a mi cargo, como la mitad de éste, puesto que sólo éramos dos periodistas, aparte del director, en la redacción?

Quedé con Neme para entrevistarlo. Me citó en su hotel, como los toreros, aunque a una hora nada taurina: las once y media de la noche. Estaba muy ocupado todo ese día, se justificó.

Llegué al hotel a la hora en punto. El recepcionista no disimuló una sonrisa cuando le pregunté por el <<señor Neme>> (desconocía su nombre completo), pero me indicó su habitación, que era la última de la tercera planta, la destinada, según me dijo, a la servidumbre y a los clientes fijos.

Fue la entrevista más pintoresca que he hecho en toda mi carrera periodística. Allí, en aquella habitación llena de humedades, con la moqueta raída y el papel pintado roto, en la que Neme vivía desde hacía años y que constituía, por ello mismo, toda una exaltación de la soltería (ropa tirada por todas partes, una maleta abierta en el suelo, una lata de foie-gras en un zapato...), el último don Tancredo me contó su heroica hazaña recostado en la cama, en la que ya estaba cuando llegué, embutido en un pijama de color indefinible y fumando todo el rato, mientras yo tomaba notas sentado en la única silla que había en la habitación. Confieso que, por un momento, llegué a dudar de sus intenciones.

Pero todo fue muy honesto. Neme me contó su historia añadiendo algunos datos a los que me había ya dicho su jefe y, luego, a petición mía, me dio dos

town one year on the day of the *fiesta*, and had lived to tell the tale.

I was impressed by the revelation. Right under my nose I had (I should say I *had* had, as I had known Neme for several months by then) a great exclusive, not only at the provincial level, but also of international interest, and I had been oblivious. Not only had he done it: he was the last person *ever* to have dared to perform the dangerous ‘Don Tancredo’. What better topic for the last page of the paper, of which I was in charge (along with half of the paper, there only being two journalists other than the director in the office)?

I organised a meeting with Neme for an interview. He received me in his hotel room, in true bullfighter fashion, but at a very unusual time for a bullfighter: 11:30 at night. He was very busy all that day, he explained.

I arrived at his hotel on the chime of 11:30. The receptionist made no attempt to conceal a smile as I asked for ‘Señor Neme’ (I didn’t know his full name), but he pointed me towards his room: the last one on the third floor, which housed the staff and long-term residents.

It was the most bizarre interview I have done in my whole career as a journalist. There, in that heavily damp room with its threadbare carpet and torn wallpaper, where Neme had lived for years and which, for this very reason, constituted a true celebration of bachelorhood itself (clothes strewn everywhere, an open suitcase on the floor, a can of *foie gras* in a shoe...), the last Don Tancredo told me the story of his heroic feat. When I arrived he had already made himself comfortable, reclining on the bed stuffed into indeterminately-coloured pyjamas and smoking constantly. As I took notes sitting on the only chair in the room, I admit that I did, for a moment, come to doubt his intentions.

But everything was very sincere. Neme recounted his story to me, adding some details to those I already knew, and at my request, he gave me two photos which

fotografías que buscó durante un rato por toda la habitación. Eran bastante borrosas, pero eran lo que tenía. Una recogía el instante en el que la vaquilla aparece por la puerta del toril y comienza su carrera hacia el falso don Tancredo y la otra un  
 150 retrato de éste con la cara enharinada por completo y subido en la peana desde la que consumó su hazaña.

La publicación de aquel reportaje tuvo gran repercusión. Mucha gente lo leyó, sobre todo los amigos y conocidos del pobre Neme, la mayoría de los cuales desconocían su gran secreto, y éste se hizo famoso por unos días para satisfacción de todos, salvo de Cayo, que encajó con cierta  
 160 envidia, pese a haber sido su promotor, la repentina fama de su ayudante: El último don Tancredo, según decía el artículo, del que entresaco ahora unos pocos párrafos: <<Cuando Nemesio X.X., más conocido por Neme entre sus amigos, se despojaba de su máscara de harina en la plaza de toros de su pueblo el 15 de agosto de 1977, desaparecía quizá para siempre una de las más peligrosas suertes taurinas, que  
 170 tuvo numerosos practicantes hasta que, terminada la guerra civil española, fue prohibida por las autoridades ante la gran cantidad de muertos que originaba, salvo en las becerradas y en las fiestas de los pueblos [...] La suerte de don Tancredo, que recibe el nombre de su inventor, un valenciano emigrado a América que la introdujo en nuestro país en 1889 (al parecer, se la vio hacer en La Habana a un  
 180 mexicano apodado El Ozaribeño), consiste, según Cossío, en esperar al toro en medio del ruedo, a pie firme en un pedestal, vestido completamente de blanco, con la cara y las manos cubiertas de harina o de otro producto blanco y remedando en la pose y en la apostura la pasividad de una estatua, ya que se basa esta suerte en la experiencia de que los toros no rematan, si es que acometen, sobre figuras  
 190 inanimadas...>>.

Neme, que, al parecer, la hizo a la perfección (según relataba él mismo, sufrió sólo un revolcón sin mayores consecuencias y ya al final de su actuación y, además,

he found upon a brief search through his room. They were fairly blurred, but they were all that he had. One captured the moment as the bull appeared in the door of the pen to begin its charge towards the fake Don Tancredo, and the other was of him, his face completely whitened with flour, standing on the platform on which he would earn his place in history.

The publication of the article caused quite a reaction. It was read by many people, not least by friends and acquaintances of poor Neme himself (most of whom had been unaware of his great secret), and made him famous for a few days to the great delight of everyone except Cayo, who despite having been his promoter, harboured a certain envy of his assistant's sudden rise to fame as The Last Don Tancredo, as the article, from which I will now quote a few paragraphs, was titled: "When Nemesio X.X., better known as Neme to his friends, stripped off his mask of flour in the Plaza de Toros in his home town on the 15th of August 1977, one of the most dangerous practices in the sphere of bullfighting disappeared, perhaps forever. It was widely practised until the end of the Spanish Civil War, when it was prohibited due to the high number of deaths which it produced, except in the *becerradas* (bullfights with calves), and in the *fiestas* of each town [...]. The 'Don Tancredo' was named after its inventor, a Valencian who had emigrated to the Americas and introduced it to our beloved Spain in 1889 (apparently he saw it performed in Havana, by a Mexican nicknamed Ozaribeño). It involves, according to the bullfighting Bible, the Cossío, waiting stoically on a pedestal in the centre of the bull-ring, dressed entirely in white with the hands and face covered in flour, or some other whitening product, and mimicking in terms of pose and grace, the passivity of a statue - given that this technique is based on the experience that bulls do not gore or trample inanimate objects, even if they do charge them..."

Neme, who it seemed had done it to perfection (as he told it, he suffered only a slight tumble with no further ado, and at that, it was brought on by himself towards

provocado por él mismo para divertir al público), vivió a partir de entonces de aquella hazaña, que, si bien no le produjo dinero, sí le sirvió por lo menos para ganarse el respeto de todos sus conocidos, incluido, supongo, el recepcionista del hotel en el que vivía. Incluso, tiempo después de aquello, cuando lo encontré en Madrid, me volvió a hablar del artículo, que guardaba doblado en la cartera como si fuera un recordatorio.

Fue al cabo de varios años, quizá diez, o tal vez más; los mismos, en cualquier caso, que yo llevaba en Madrid después de abandonar mi ciudad de origen tras el cierre del periódico en el que apareció su artículo (un cierre al que, por cierto, contribuyó decisivamente su jefe, el famoso Cayo, al fugarse con el dinero de la publicidad de dos o tres meses y dejar el periódico – y al propio Neme, de paso – más en la bancarrota de lo que ya vivían). Un día, yo salía de la estación del metro de la Gran Vía y me lo encontré de frente. Era Neme con algunos años más, pero con el mismo aspecto: la misma calva redonda, los mismos ojos saltones y quizá hasta el mismo abrigo. Me contó su vida en pocos minutos. Al parecer, en efecto, el desfalco de su jefe, al que nunca volvió a ver (al parecer, huyó de la ciudad sin dejar rastro), le había dejado en la calle (donde ya estaba realmente, sólo que ahora sin ocupación) y, durante algunos años, había sobrevivido gracias a los amigos y a la familia hasta que, desaparecida ésta, se había venido a Madrid a buscarse la vida como tantos, sólo que él ya con cincuenta años. Vendía máquinas de escribir, me dijo, aunque no le iba muy bien por culpa de los ordenadores, que comenzaban ya entonces a sustituir a aquéllas. Le di quinientas pesetas, pero no la dirección (alegué para no dársela una inminente mudanza que no era cierta), y me perdí por la calle de Fuencarral mientras él seguía parado junto a la boca del metro de la Gran Vía estorbando a los que entraban y salían a aquella hora de la mañana. ¿A quién estaría esperando?

A nadie, seguramente. Seguramente llevaba allí varias horas

the end of his performance, more to amuse the audience than anything else), lived off that accomplishment from that point onwards, if not in terms of financial gain, at least in terms of gaining the respect of his friends and acquaintances (including, I suppose, the receptionist at the hotel where he lived). What's more, when I met him in Madrid some time afterwards, he spoke again of the article, which he kept folded in his wallet, as one does with a reminder.

It was many years later, perhaps ten or maybe more; at any rate, the same number of years that I had spent in Madrid, after leaving my home town when the newspaper in which the article was published closed down (a closure in which, by the way, his boss the famous Cayo had played a decisive role when he took off from the newspaper with two or three months of the advertising money, leaving it – and coincidentally Neme as well – in even more dire bankruptcy than before). One day I found myself face to face with him, as I was coming out of the Gran Vía *metro* station. He had a few more years under his belt, but in every other way, it was the same Neme: the same round bald-spot, the same bulging eyes, and perhaps even the same coat. He updated me on his life in a matter of minutes: it would seem that the embezzlement of the advertising funds by his boss, whom he never again set eyes upon (apparently he had left the city without a trace), had left Neme in the street, where he essentially had been anyway, only now he had no job. For several years he had survived thanks to friends and family until, once they were gone, he had come like so many others to Madrid to make a life for himself, only he was already in his fifties. He said he made a living selling typewriters, but struggled to compete with computers, which were already beginning to take their place. I gave him 500 *pesetas*, but withheld my address (giving the excuse that I was soon to be moving house, so as to avoid giving it to him), and bid him farewell, disappearing down Fuencarral Street as he remained standing at the entrance to the metro station, blocking the passage of the patrons who came and went at that time of the morning. I wondered who he was waiting for.

Most likely no one. No doubt, he had been there for several hours watching

viendo pasar a la gente, como, por otra parte, venía haciendo toda su vida.

La siguiente noticia que tuve de él fue ya la de su fallecimiento. Apareció un verano, ya dije, en el periódico provincial y, aunque los datos eran escasos, en seguida  
250 intuí que se trataba de él. E imaginé lo que, mientras tanto, habría sido su vida: un continuo deslizarse hacia la nada, hacia la pasividad total, hacia la estatua que siempre fue, no sólo ante las vaquillas que lidiaban en las fiestas en la plaza de toros de su pueblo, sino en la vida, a la que siempre se enfrentó a pecho descubierto, tan grande fue su valor, sin saber que la  
260 vida no se detiene como los toros y pasa por encima de quien se atreve a enfrentarse a ella.

the world go by, as in some respects, he had done his whole life.

The next news I had of him was that of his passing. It appeared one summer, as I said, in the provincial newspaper, and although there were few details, I knew at once that it was him. And I imagined what had become of him in the meantime: his continuous slide towards nothingness, towards complete passivity, towards becoming the statue that he had always been, not only when facing the bulls that raged in the Plaza de Toros in his home town, but in his life in general. He always confronted it head-on, such was his bravery, not knowing that life, unlike the bulls, doesn't stop for anyone, but charges right on over those who dare to stand before it.

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# Translating Beyond Languages: The Challenges of Rendering Taiwan's Visual Concrete Poems in English

CI-SHU SHEN and YI-PING WU

## Abstract

This article offers an experimental translation of three representative concrete poems written by Zhang Bing, Chen Li, and Lin Yao-de in Taiwan. The major problem found in rendering in English the manifold appearances of a concrete poem is the inevitable loss of hieroglyphic characteristic in Chinese and its calligraphic manifestations that present a distinctive image form. To offset the loss of visual potential and part of its meaning during transfer, we resort to the visual possibility of English, a phonogram, by turning the Latin alphabet into symbols so that the poems in question can be read as interplay between form and content. By elaborating different types of approach our translations illustrate ways to deconstruct and exploit various possibilities and mechanisms inherent in the English language.

'Concrete poetry,' as the Brazilian poet-translator Augusto de Campos defines it, is a 'real "concrete," "verbivocovisual" entity – i.e., an entity composed of meanings, sounds and shape [...] connected with both conceptual and natural reality' (qtd. in Jackson 1996: 23). The 'verbivocovisual' essence employed in concrete poetry uniquely constructs 'language heard and seen' (Merritt 1969: 113). A concrete poem with visual effects is also called an altar poem or pattern poem which, according to J. A. Cuddon, 'has lines arranged to represent a physical object or to suggest action/motion, mood/feeling; but usually shape and motion' (1999: 651). This definition is somewhat similar to that of Taiwan's concrete poetry, which exploits the ideogrammatic features of Chinese characters to 'form a particular shape that produces some concrete effects or to be symbolically indicative of a poetic activity' (Ding 2000: 1, our translation).

Experiment with poetic form has a long history in the Chinese culture. Chinese is a hieroglyphic language, with lots of characters portraying nature, objects or human behaviors. Therefore, each character can be considered a picture. Such a feature was once employed in the writing of ancient poems selected in *Shi Jing* [詩經] (Book of Odes). For example, in the poem 'Ting Zhe Fang Zhong' [定之方中], a vivid depiction of lush trees goes 'shu zhi zhenli, qitong zihshu, yuanfa qinse' [樹之榛栗，椅桐梓漆，爰伐琴瑟]. James Legge (1991) rendered the lines as 'He planted about it hazel and chestnut trees, / The yi, the tong, the zi, and the varnish-tree, / Which, when cut down, might afford materials for lutes' (81). In the Chinese original, the radical part 'mu' [木] (literally: the

wood) is repeated seven times. The ancient form of ‘木’ is ‘𣎵’, which resembles the shape of a tree bulk. Hence, the repetition of the radical part creates ‘an image of dense woods’ (qtd. in Ding 2000: 11-12, our translation). This distinct hieroglyphic feature, however, is lost in translation. Since *Shi Jing* is a collection of folk songs and ritual chants, ancient Chinese readers could savor both auditory and visual feasts at the same time. This special attribute gradually became less noticeable as the Chinese characters underwent several modifications. Nonetheless, ancient Chinese poets sometimes engaged in experiment with poetic form and composed patterned poems such as palindromes and pagoda poems, but this kind of writing was always taken lightly by writers and scholars. Therefore, almost no serious attempt had been made before the concrete poetry movement began in Taiwan.

Starting in 1955, Lin Heng-tai, influenced by Guillaume Apollinaire’s concrete poetry and Ji Xian’s ‘Modernist Movement’, released numerous renowned concrete verses along with supporting theories to initiate a new trend in modern poetry writing. In a 1988 interview, Lin argues that ‘hieroglyphic Chinese in itself is Cubism [...] Therefore, Chinese language quite suits Baudelaire’s symbolism’ (qtd. in Ding 2000: 43, our translation). He promoted the writing of Symbol Poetry, a sort of concrete poetry composed by ‘minimizing the reliance on “semantic meaning” and transforming every word into a “being”’ (qtd. in Ding 2000: 45, our translation). The poetic movement was also supported by Bai Di and Zhan Bing, whose renowned concrete poems manifest their artistic endeavor to promote this special poetic genre. Together, the three pioneers paved the way for the development of concrete poetry in Taiwan. Later, critics like Zhang Han-liang and Luo Qing established a more solid theoretical ground, on which quite a few poets devoted themselves to making this poetic genre fully fledged. According to Ding’s categorization, the modern concretists can be divided into three generations: ‘the First Generation (born in or before 1940, including poets such as Luo Men and Luo Fu), the Middle Generation (born between 1941 and 1960, including poets such as Siao Siao, Luo Qing, Su Sao-lian, Du Shi-san, Chen Li, Luo Zhe-cheng, Chen Jian-yu), and the New Generation (born after 1961, including poets such as Lin Yao-de and Yan Ai-ling)’ (2000: 86, our translation).

When it comes to translating concrete poems, most works are deemed untranslatable. Chen Li’s concrete poems can be taken as good examples. Among all his poems, thirty-two poems are identified by the poet as concrete, but only a few have the English version. Moreover, the translator of Chen Li’s works, Chang Fen-ling, decided not to translate into English Chen’s most celebrated concrete poem ‘Zhanzheng Jiaoxiangqu’ (A War Symphony). She reasons that “much of its charm will definitely be lost in the process of translation” (Chen 1997: 20). That is to say, she only translated the title of ‘A War Symphony’ and presented the Chinese original as its translation, with a belief that ‘those Chinese characters [...] and the verse form with special visual effects [will] speak for themselves’ (Chen 1997: 20).

In contrast to Chang’s approach, we attempt in this paper to experiment with the English translation of Taiwan’s concrete poetry. The decision is made for two main reasons. Firstly, not every concrete poem can be presented as translation. Foreign audiences who do not know the Chinese language can appreciate the graphic layout of the

source text but lack sufficient understanding of the ideogrammatic features of Chinese characters. Since concrete poetry is a ‘verbivocovisual’ entity, presenting the original as its translation may merely deliver the visual effects of such an intricate work to the target audience. Secondly, very few attempts have been made to explore the feasibility of English translation of Taiwan’s concrete poetry. Even though there is ample research on concrete poetry in Taiwan, the principles and strategies for translating these concrete works have not been carefully studied.

Concrete poetry is a distinct literary genre in Taiwan, but it has enjoyed a rather limited international readership. Given its significant literary status in the history of modern poetry in Taiwan, Taiwan’s concrete poetry deserves a wider readership and should be promoted overseas through translation. Although concrete poetry appears untranslatable to most translators, our assumption is that such unconventional pieces can be translated—not in traditional ways but by using innovative means. To verify this assumption, we will probe the following two questions: What stylistic features and unconventional techniques are employed in the writings of concrete poetry? What creative approaches can be applied to translate concrete poetry into English? It is hoped that experimental translation that aims at exploring the ideogrammatic potential of English will produce a successful result and that our translation of Taiwan’s concrete poetry will help Western readers to appreciate the concrete poems composed in Taiwan.

In what follows, we will first categorize Taiwan’s concrete poetry into three types and discuss their stylistic features. Given the limited scope of this paper, we have selected three visual poems for translation and discussion, and our main focus is to explore the visual possibilities of the English translation of concrete poetry. The selected poems include Zhan Bing’s ‘Shuiniutu’ (The Portrait of a Buffalo), Chen Li’s ‘Zhanzheng Jiaxiangqu’ (A War Symphony), and Lin Yao-de’s ‘Muxing Zaochen’ (The Morning in Jupiter). We will then conduct experimental translation of the three concrete poems and offer some self-commentary. Translation principles and strategies will then be inferred from the result of the experimental practice.

### **Stylistic Features of Taiwan’s Concrete Poetry**

Concrete poetry, as Mike Weaver described it, can be categorized into three kinds: ‘visual (or optic), phonetic (or sound) and kinetic (moving in a visual succession) poems’ (Solt 1968, Sec. ‘Introduction’). Defined as a ‘constellation in space’ by Eugen Gomringer, the visual poem is characterized by a ‘sense of simultaneity and multidirectionality—a spatial order—[that] inhibits a successive, phonetic response to the verbal units’ (qtd. in Barnstone 1953: 60). A visual poem, as opposed to traditional poems, may be arranged or appreciated in any possible direction. Traditionally, Taiwan’s modern poetry is written in right-to-left and vertical order, but an optic poem can be composed in an unconventional manner. For example, Bai Di’s widely studied poem, ‘Liulangzhe’ (The Wanderer), a superb illustration of a solitary traveler, exhibits the ‘simultaneity and multidirectionality’ of the visual poem. The excerpt below is taken from the first two stanzas of the poem:



In terms of the stylistic features of concrete poetry, Janet Larsen McHughes pinpoints three major traits of the genre. First, concrete poems establish ‘a new poesis of space’ with skillfully manipulated literary forms (1977: 169). According to McHughes, the ‘full incorporation of the dimension of space into poetic art is the greatest achievement of concrete poetry’, which innovatively break the linear and successive flow of thoughts and syllables (1977: 169). In concrete poetry, grammatical and syntactical rules are replaced by the special arrangement of words and space. For instance, in Chen Jian-yu’s ‘Guanyintu’ (The Painting of Bodhisattva), the poet scatters words and phrases to form a sketchy figure of the goddess rather than relying on verbal description. Second, concrete poetry has the feature of ‘ultimate linguistic reduction’, meaning that ‘materials of concrete poems are words reduced to their syllabic structure, or even stripped to the letters and (occasionally) the graphic lines that comprise their letters’ (McHughes 1977: 170). One may either appreciate these components of language as separate signs or combine them into words or phrases for semantic comprehension. The reduction feature is shown in ‘A War Sympathy’, in which the poet decreases the strokes of one Chinese character—from ‘兵’ to ‘𠄎’ or ‘𠄎’ and to ‘丘’. Third, some concrete verses are characterized by ‘sheer repetition’ to ‘assume a position of increased prosodic significance’ (McHughes 1977: 171). In other words, certain words or phrases are reiterated several times to lay great emphasis on the pattern and sound of the poem.

### **Poems Selected for Translation**

In this section, the stylistic and linguistic features of three concrete poems are analyzed with an attempt to explore their innovative writing methods. The poems will be presented in chronological order according to the year of birth of the author. Zhan Bing, Chen Li, and Lin Yao-de come from different generations and therefore represent respective phases. The concrete works composed by Zhan Bing, Chen Li, and Lin Yao-de are chosen for translation because those poems pose challenges to a translator. The following analysis will present the characteristics of the three concrete poems and why they are particularly difficult to translate into English.

Zhan Bing (1911–) is considered the first concretist in the modern literature of Taiwan and therefore belongs to the First Generation. In 1943, he performed poetic experiments to test whether literary works can be ‘universally acceptable as painting or music’ (Ding 2000: 24, our translation), and the result was a series of modern concrete verses. His well-known concrete poem ‘The Portrait of a Buffalo’, published in 1986, has been ubiquitous in high school textbooks because it well instantiates the genre of concrete poetry. Lines in the poem are organized in the figure of a buffalo, with a head, a body, a tail and limbs. The most impressive and acclaimed part of the poem is the depiction of the buffalo’s head:

角 角  
黑 (Luo 1978: 265)

Moreover, the poem corresponds to the poesis of space, arranging unrelated characters to

constitute the profile of a buffalo. The three finely positioned words effectively create the image of the buffalo's head.

In terms of technical innovation, Zhan takes advantage of Chinese's hieroglyphic nature to produce photographic details. The ancient form of the Chinese word 'jiao' (角, literally: a horn) is '𧇧', which shows a hard substance with one sharp tip and two grains. The visual features of the original shape, after so many centuries, are still traceable in its modern form. Moreover, the word '黑' (hei) (literally: black) is an illustration of the buffalo's face. As Ding comments, 'The upper part of the character with two strokes in two boxes looks like two eyes. The vertical line in the center represents the snout while the two horizontal lines stand for the mouth. Four strokes at the bottom resemble the beard of the creature' (Ding 2000: 33, our translation). Furthermore, the character '黑' is enlarged and bold-faced to emphasize the size and especially the color of the animal. The hue of the buffalo's face, as Luo Qing indicates, is similar to the darkly tanned skin color of Taiwanese farmers. Therefore, the buffalo 'symbolizes the diligent rice-growers who toil under the scorching sun' (1978: 237). The translation problem in this case arises from the fundamental difference between Chinese and English, with the former being a pictographic and the latter a phonographic language.

Chen Li (1954–), a dominant player of the Middle Generation, is hailed as 'one of the best representatives of contemporary poetry in Taiwan' (Chen 1997: 13). Michelle Yeh even regards Chen's concrete poem 'A War Symphony' as a work that 'transcends existing modern literary modes' (Wang 2002: 167-168, our translation). Being the most renowned concrete work by Chen, this poem has been selected in several overseas publications. In an interview with Pai Shin Yu, the author offers his own elaboration and interpretation of the poem. The abbreviated version of the three stanzas of 'A War Symphony' is provided below, and each is followed by Chen Li's explanation:

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 兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵兵

(Chen 1997: 286)

'In the first "movement" of the poem, sixteen perfect ranks of the Chinese character for 'soldier' (兵, pronounced 'bing') are presented as if in battle array' (Pai 2007: para. 11).



an outstanding poet of the 1980s. In ‘The Morning in Jupiter’, the poet refers to Odin by means of a Chinese character ‘yan’ (literally: an eye), which constitutes a line tucked between two lines of space to create a powerful illustration of the one-eyed god:

拉長 緊繃 斷裂	韌帶與神經 與飛濺的 血管	眼	挖起一枚	不猶豫地 用勁指 插入眼眶	天帝奧丁 為了整個 世界的 存在
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One of the three stylistic features—integration of space—is clearly demonstrated in this piece. The vertical lines on the right-hand side resemble the figure of the deity who stands upright, with the phrase ‘tiandi Aoding’ (literally: Odin the Lord of Heaven) placed in the position of his head. One row of space separates the word ‘眼’ from the previous lines, breaking the train of ideas and accentuating the enormous sacrifice the god makes. The character is suspended in the air, as if he puts the freshly-plucked eye in his hand and willingly stretches out the arm, generously giving up his one eye in exchange for wisdom. Instead of offering detailed depiction, the poet employs spatial arrangement to showcase Odin’s movement. Furthermore, the visual potential of the Chinese hieroglyph ‘眼’ is exploited by the poet to vividly represent the eye Odin plucks out. How to preserve the hieroglyphic image of the eye becomes a challenge in translation.

The works of concretists from three generations are chosen to outline the evolution of concrete poetry in Taiwan. The First Generation exploited pictographic features of Chinese and composed verses in imitation of nature. However, they rarely dissected one word into segments—although they rotated Chinese characters or changed their font. Concrete poetry of this era was criticized for its inability to express ‘narrative themes, abstract ideas or extremely intricate thoughts’ (Luo 1978: 70, our translation). Nevertheless, critics and writers in this period initiated various poetic experiments, established well-thought-out principles, and enshrined concrete poetry in Taiwan’s modern literature. After the 1970s, new concrete verses frequently appeared, and many were extremely creative. By this time concrete poetry had become a mature poetic genre with diverse styles.

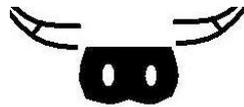
### **A Translation Experiment**

Despite the fact that the fashion for concrete poetry in Taiwan has subsided, Taiwan can claim to have the most fruitful achievements in Chinese concrete poetry. Yet the visibility of Taiwan’s concrete poetry in the world is limited, in part due to a lack of translations. There is a need to introduce Taiwan’s concrete poetry to Western readers via English translation. In what follows we will discuss the problems that emerge during the process of translating these three visual concrete poems and the attempt to find corresponding

solutions. The complete renditions of the three concrete poems are provided in Appendices 1, 2 and 3.

In translating ‘The Portrait of a Buffalo’, one can succeed in duplicating the poesis of space by simply imitating the original pattern. The first and foremost challenge, however, is to find the semantic and visual equivalent in English to render the two Chinese symbols, ‘角’ and ‘黑’. In practice, we chose two English letters, ‘H’ and ‘B’, to undertake our task. For two reasons: first, they are the initial characters of the words ‘horn’ and ‘black’ (or ‘buffalo’); second, the two letters, with some typographical modifications, can indicate the appearance of a buffalo’s head.

It can be easily observed that Zhan bold-faces the character to stress the colour of the buffalo’s face. Since the poet deliberately changes the shape and size of characters, we decided to follow his example and derive our translation strategy from his creative technique. The result is the following translation:



The shape of the character ‘H’ is moderately distorted to form the buffalo’s curved and pointed horns; meanwhile, the character ‘B’ is bold-faced and turned clockwise 90 degrees to represent the animal’s crown and two eyes. This is a simple illustration, in which English characters are used as symbols and bear reference to two words – horn and black. When this picture is combined with the body-shaped stanza, one can easily recognize the pattern as the buffalo’s head. Nonetheless, most of the exquisite details of ‘黑’ are lost because the English translation ‘B’ only offers a rough depiction.

Unlike the concrete poetry of the First Generation, ‘A War Symphony’ showcases complex graphic sophistication and makes the first foray into reducing language, which creates pleasure as well as problems for translators. Our translation is an attempt to duplicate in the target text the degree of enjoyment felt by the source readers as well as the creativity of the source text. When one renders the poem, the prime difficulty is to represent the word ‘兵’ (literally: soldier) with a proper linguistic symbol, which can either be reduced or distorted to depict injured combatants. To solve the problem, we resorted to the creativity of Siao Siao, a contemporary writer of Chen. In a poem entitled ‘Ni yu Wuo—Zhishishi’ (You and I: An Ideogrammatic Poem), the poets orchestrate a philosophical word-play of English characters. Transforming the Latin alphabet into a collection of signs, he uses the character ‘i’ to signify a person, because the dot can stand for the head and the vertical line the body. The ‘i’ is ‘an individual self, an insignificant self’ in the vast universe (Ding 2000: 265). Given the connotation of this innovative symbol, we utilize ‘i’ to translate “A War Symphony”.

In the first stanza, 384 elongated ‘i’s are arranged in a square formation, with an emphasis on the individuality of each unimportant yet unique fighter. With the assistance of the title, a reader can recognize the ‘i’s as soldiers in great numbers. We distort the symbol into ‘j’ and ‘l’ in the second stanza, to delineate combatants made lame or

wounded by the stormy battle. Eventually, all the soldiers collapse and perish, leaving innumerable bodies, and so we bend the character into ‘∩’. Reading the symbols separately, one might find the distorted character similar to a dead body in an agonized posture. Yet, when a reader reads the myriad bodies together, s/he will discover a massive graveyard packed with tombstones. This rendition gives the foreign reader a chance to explore the possibility of treating English as an ideogrammatic language. Nonetheless, the scene of lame soldiers is not as daunting as the ranks of handicapped fighters. Almost all the audio effects are lost in translation. The only compensation is that the character ‘i’ can be the vowel indicating a series of verbs suggestive of warfare: stride, fight, lie down and die, sequenced as the scenario in the three stanzas.

In the realm of concrete poetry, the writing and reading habit can be altered and a phonogram in English can be used as a pictograph. To maintain the distinct features of spatial arrangement, one must consider differences of writing convention between English and Chinese. In Taiwan, poetry is often written in a right-to-left, vertical order. Since most English poems are composed in horizontal order, a translator may be forced to translate the source text horizontally. However, the spatial dimension of poetry has significant implications and should not be neglected or altered. In rendering “The Morning in Jupiter”, the vertical order of Chinese is indispensable to illustrate the upright posture of Odin, the deity standing fearlessly before the fate of Ragnarök. We cannot present the translated version in a horizontal position lest the suggestive pattern of the original be omitted. As stated before, concrete poetry defies poetic traditions, and so some poems are written in such a way that they can be read horizontally or vertically. Therefore, in rendering experimental works like concrete poetry, a translator must not be strictly bound by literary conventions and should possess certain degrees of freedom to exert creativity. Firm in this belief, we translate the poem vertically to maintain the towering figure of Odin. The translation of the excerpt is shown in Appendix 3.

Also, at a glance, one may deem it unfeasible to carry across an ideogrammatic word such as ‘眼’ to English. The Chinese pictograph is more effective as a vehicle with which the concretists can express ideas. For instance, ‘moon’ in Chinese is ‘月’ in its ancient shape and ‘月’ in its modern form, both resembling a crescent moon. It may seem impossible for an English phonogram to do something similar, but English concretists’ creative approaches add more possibilities to English poetry. According to concrete poet Ronald Johnson, English characters can be used as symbols. Johnson suggests that “‘O’ can rise, like the real moon, over the word “moon”” (Barnstone 1953: 52). e. e. cummings also employs the same technique—transforming English letters into visual symbols.

The(oo)is  
 IOOk  
 (aliv  
 e)e  
 yes

(Webster 2001: 110)

Cummings extrapolates that ‘oo’ stands for the ‘wideopen eyes’, ‘OO’ for ‘intense stare,’ and ‘(aliv/e)e/yes’ for ‘alive eyes which say yes’ (qtd. in Webster 2001: 110). This interesting representation can allow a translator to transform phonographic English into a pictograph. Like Cummings’ ‘e)e’, the English word ‘eye’ carries a picture of a nose and two eyeballs. In rendering the Chinese word ‘眼’ into English, we translated it as ‘e Y (e)’ and bold-face our translation, using ‘e’ to represent the visual organ and isolating the letters with a parenthesis. This pattern is indicative of the Norse deity who digs out one eye for the well-being of the universe.

### **Translation Principles and Strategies**

On the basis of our experimental translations, we would suggest that translating concrete poetry is possible if a translator is allowed to deviate from linguistic conventions. Simply put, a translator, when translating concrete poems, should deploy certain degrees of ‘linguistic freedom’ and ‘typographic freedom’. Useful translation strategies can be developed from these two types of freedom. If linguistic freedom is granted, a translator can exploit the potential of the target language. S/he may turn English’s phonographic characters into visual symbols whenever necessary. For example, our experimental practice shows that ‘e’ can be used as a pictograph to represent an eyeball, while ‘i’ can stand for an individual or a soldier. In addition, words can be reduced or distorted to preserve a special intention of the author. The strategy can be applied to the translation of ‘A War Symphony’. The letter ‘l’ is changed into ‘j’ and ‘k’ and finally ‘^’ to symbolize the progression of the battle and the tragic fate of the soldiers.

Additionally, typographic freedom enables a translator to reproduce the dynamic and volatile nature of the original. S/he can alter the shape, position or size of words as the author does. During the process of translating ‘The Portrait of a Buffalo’, we deformed English letters to recreate the image of the creature’s head. More importantly, a translator can even change the writing sequence of the English translation from left-to-right, horizontal order to right-to-left, vertical order – as we have done in the translation of ‘The Morning in Jupiter’. Since the concretists liberate themselves from the linguistic and typographic traditions to generate innovative works, a translator of concrete poetry should also be free from limitations. In fact, learning from the innovative procedures of concrete poets means learning the ways they transgress linguistic and literary conventions.

### **Conclusion**

Inasmuch as the concretists employ creative approaches to break away from conventions and express their thoughts in ingenious ways, concrete poetry is a profound and intriguing genre. Basically, concrete poetry can be divided into the visual poem, the phonetic poem and the kinetic poem. It has three distinct stylistic features: artistic layout of space, extensive use of repetition, and deconstruction of languages. All three features are showcased by our examples. While these characteristics enrich the content and form of concrete poems, they pose enormous challenges to translators who attempt to transplant them into a foreign environment.

Accordingly, some may hastily conclude that these pieces are untranslatable.

However, our translation experiment demonstrates that concrete poems are translatable. To present the peculiarity of the original, we derive translation strategies from Western concrete poets to resolve problems encountered in the translation experiment. From these innovative measures, we infer two concepts: linguistic freedom and typographic freedom, which allow translators to exert their creativity. All our translation experiments are grounded in two beliefs. First, presenting the original as its translation may hinder foreign readers from appreciating its semantic aspect. Second, since only a scanty amount of literature has been devoted to translation of Taiwan's concrete poetry, a study of the subject can help explore the translatability of this special genre. It is also our sincere hope that a worldwide readership may be gained through English translation.

Regardless of the differences between English and Chinese, we have demonstrated that a new universality can be discovered if a translator closely scrutinizes the stylistic features of concrete poetry and the creative measures used by concrete poets, especially those who violate linguistic and literary conventions. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher points out two directions for practitioners of translation: a translator may 'yield to the original text or conquer it, whether he will stop at acknowledging the differences between languages or whether he will move toward possible rapprochement of styles between languages' (Schulte 2002: 15). This study takes the second path and proves that it is always possible for translators of concrete poetry to make the untranslatable meaningful in another language. Finally, we suggest that future studies of concrete poetry in translation may incorporate other language pairs and cover the phonetic and kinetic aspects of the genre, so as to raise international awareness of Taiwan's concrete poetry and discover creative measures for concrete poetry in other languages.

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**Appendix 1: 'The Portrait of a Water Buffalo'**



as a buffalo shakes his **B**-shaped face  
the concentric ripples continue to expand then extend  
upon all those parallel waves  
the summer sun and leaves are doing The Twist Dance  
he is sitting in paddy's water but  
knows no Archimedes' Principle.  
amidst the tiny horny parenthesis  
the breeze of thoughts is blowing.  
atmospheric clouds in eyeballs  
regurgitated solitude in stomachs  
listening to men's songs, cicada's and soundless sound  
he forgets the burning heat and  
time and himself and is perhaps silently waiting for  
the being that never comes  
just  
waiting, waiting and waiting!



**Appendix 3: 'The Morning in Jupiter' [Excerpt]**

Extended	Ligaments	e Y @	Gouging	Stuck	Odin
	and		out	his	the
strained	nerves		one	talons	Lord
	and			into	of
split	gushing			the	Heaven
	blood			ocular	
	vessels			socket	for
	that				the
					sake
					of
					the
					entire
					creation

# The Translation of *La Dame aux Camélias* and Chinese Popular Culture in the 1890s

YING LIANG

## Abstract

Lin Shu's translation of *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas  *fils* played an important role in the popular culture of his age. This study concludes that his deviations from the original text would not necessarily be factors affecting the popularity of his translation. The essay considers in detail three kinds of tension in the field of popular culture: classical versus vernacular languages, traditional versus Western, and 'elevating' versus entertaining. Through his translations, Lin Shu showed the Chinese audience that the novel could be much more than a vehicle for propaganda and education; and *La Dame aux Camélias* helped the Chinese to think about the role of Confucianism in a modernizing state. Although Lin Shu's choices concerning what to include and what to exclude in the translation reflects a part of China's response to the West, it reflects, more significantly, the translator's primary concern with bringing Western fiction into the Chinese literary tradition on Chinese terms. And that explains the popularity of his translation.

The greatest impact on modern Chinese culture and literature made by the greatest late Qing dynasty translator Lin Shu 林纾 (1852-1924) came from his translations (of which there were more than two hundred) of Western novels. Working with the collaboration of intermediaries - Lin himself could read no foreign language - he produced stylistically elegant versions of the works of a staggering number of Western writers, ranging from Dumas  *fils* and Balzac to Dickens, Scott, Defoe and Swift, from Shakespeare, Homer and Tolstoy to H. Rider Haggard and Arthur Conan Doyle.

He first came to national prominence in 1899 as the translator of *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas  *fils*. The bibliographical information for the book includes: Original work: *La Dame aux Camélias*; Author: Alexandre Dumas  *fils*; Lin Shu's Assistant: Wang Shouchang; Translated from: French; Published: Su-yin shuwu, 1899. Wang Shouchang read and translated the French text orally and Lin Shu wrote down what he heard in his own elegant classical style. The work was an immediate success. It was Lin's best-known translation of a foreign novel, and China's first successful translation of a Western novel. It assured Lin of a place in the world of Chinese literature as one of the pioneers in the introduction of Western fiction into China.

There are two general stages in the history of translation of Western fiction in China. According to Robert Compton, 'The first stage might be called the Sinicization of Western literature. In this stage, Western fiction was looked upon as an addition to China's own tradition of fiction writing; in the Chinese translations, traditional values and attitudes prevailed' (1971: 30). The translator himself determined what and how he would translate. If problems were encountered in the process of rendering foreign ideas or concepts into Chinese, it was the foreign ideas and concepts that were changed or remoulded to suit the Chinese form.

The Chinese translator had confidence in his own judgment and ability as far as literature was concerned; he knew what was good or bad, and he knew what he wanted to do. To quote Compton again: ‘Generally speaking, this first stage is marked by the recasting and modification of Western fiction to bring it into accord with, and to make it an integral part of, the Chinese tradition of fiction’ (1971: 31).

Well before the Revolution of 1911, however, a change began to take place. As more and more people came to have a deeper understanding of the West – in particular the young people who had studied abroad – there developed in China a recognition that Western literature possessed value in itself. Many of these young people, who were able to read foreign literatures, reached the point of appreciating the true worth of Western literature. As they turned towards careers as translators, they brought this appreciation with them. Thus a second stage in the history of translation of Western fiction was attained. In contrast to the preceding stage, this stage might be called, in Compton’s words, ‘the Westernization of Chinese literature’ (1971: 32).

Lin Shu was representative of the first stage. He was not primarily concerned with the question of faithfulness. Faithfulness and accuracy become a concern of the translator only when he assumes that the original work has more value than his rendition of it. Lin seems to have had little hesitation in deviating from the original wording in the translation of *La Dame aux Camélias*, though the basic story is preserved and the Chinese version is quite readable. His prefaces made clear that he considered himself to be primarily an innovator within the bounds of traditional Chinese literature, adding new plots and stories from foreign materials. And in his free adaptation, he never lost his faith in the values of traditional Chinese literature. In fact, immediately after *La Dame aux Camélias* was published, the book started to be justified and examined in terms of the traditional political or social messages it supposedly contained. Lin Shu also strategically adapted in order to make the novel attract public attention. For example, the original title of the book *La Dame aux Camélias* does not contain the word ‘Paris’ or *Yishi* 遺事 (‘deeds of those now dead’), but Lin Shu added them in the translation. The changes in the title reflect conventions in Chinese literature about phrasing a title for a love story.

However, many critics have been skeptical about Lin Shu’s free translation. This study therefore examines the role his translation played in the popular culture of his age and concludes that deviations from the original text would not necessarily be factors affecting the popularity of his translation. Although Lin Shu’s free translation and, especially, his choice of what is included and what is left out reflects a part of China’s response to the West, it reflects even more the translator’s primary concern with bringing Western fiction into the Chinese literary tradition on Chinese terms. And that evidently explains the popularity of his translation. As ‘a form of human communication, translation is always already over-determined by historical contingency’ (Wang 1997: 3). Lin Shu used translations to serve emotive and ideological goals inconceivable to the original author.

I include in this study a consideration of the three types of tension in the field of popular culture: classical versus vernacular languages, traditional versus Western, and ‘elevating’ versus entertaining. All translations and back-translations from Chinese are my own. I will quote from the English translation of the original and from Lin Shu’s Chinese version.

### **The tension between spoken and classical Chinese**

Typical of the second stage aforementioned is a growing concern about the suitability of classical Chinese for translation purposes. For a long time the spoken and literary languages in China had been turning their backs on each other. Certain late Qing translators concluded that

if the literary medium was not suitable for producing literal and exact translations of Western works, then the medium, rather than the material, would have to be transformed:

[A] certain group of translators [...] insisted that the fundamental rhetorical and grammatical construction between the Chinese and Western languages was an almost insurmountable barrier. In order to be faithful to the original, we must remodel the Chinese language in exact accord with the rhetorical texts and grammatical order of a Western language.

(Compton 1971: 183)

In the eyes of Lin Shu and most other first-stage translators, this would undoubtedly be tantamount to rebuilding one's house to suit the fancy of a foreign guest. In fact one reason for the success of Lin's translation seemed to lie in its rendition of the French text into elegant classical Chinese. Lin never seems to have been tempted to use the vernacular to gain greater accuracy. It is interesting to note that he is a pioneer of translating Western literature, but he upholds the *wen yan* 文言 ('the classical Chinese'). Since Lin knew no foreign languages, he had to be assisted by bilingual friends who orally translated into colloquial Chinese while Lin simultaneously transcribed into *wen yan* classical prose.

Zhou Zhecong comments: 'The style of Chinese prose was in some instances adjusted to utilitarian purposes. Examples were the translations of Yan Fu [严复] and Lin Shu' (qtd. in Compton 1971: 19). The more respectable classical language would raise the literary quality of their efforts and make their works more acceptable in traditional literary circles. The famous translator Xu Nianci 徐念慈 (1875-1908), writing in the early years of the twentieth century, explained the popularity of Lin Shu's translations as follows: 'the majority of readers were of the lettered class and found Lin's impeccable classical more palatable than a vernacular style' (Hanan 1981: 214).

In an essay published in 1908, entitled 'My Views on Fiction', Chueh Wo, Wo (qtd. in Lee and Nathan 1987: 381) argued that fiction was a product rather than a progenitor of society; it reflected tendencies of existing society as it combined art with life in order to meet the demands of readers. Chueh Wo presented a series of statistics as the basis of his surveys: 80% to 90% of the works published in the previous year were translations. Fiction written in classical Chinese sold better than that in vernacular Chinese because '90% of those who purchased fiction were persons from a traditional background who were later exposed to new learning' and 'those truly educated in the [new] schools who had ideas and talent and welcomed new fiction constituted no more than one percent' (qtd. in Lee and Nathan 1987: 381). Lee and Nathan thus conclude that 'The popularity of the medium takes precedence over seriousness of intention; only after the medium can reach the widest possible audience can the communicative potential of fiction be fully realized' (1987: 382).

Interestingly, Lin Shu also used colloquial languages and foreign words in the translation. Examples include 钥匙 (key), 宝石 (jewel), 别墅 (villa), 香水 (perfume), 小狗 (puppy) as well as objective and attributive clauses and even Europeanized sentence structures. Therefore the masses could also welcome Lin Shu's translation as something Western and stylish.

### **The tension between tradition and the West**

So, does the popularity of Lin Shu's translation reflect a general embrace of the West or even make a bow in the direction of change from the West? Or were the masses drawn by the traditional elements such as the love story variety that always characterizes popular fiction?

Lin Shu was actually skeptical about the West and maintained a considerable distance from it. In fact, his basic preferences clearly drew upon Chinese far more than Western tradition. He once said in the introduction to one of his translated novels: ‘The bad customs of the people in the time of semi-civilized England are here clearly revealed under our very eyes’ (Lee ‘Lin Shu and His Translations’ 1965: 171).<sup>1</sup> Traditional Chinese novels normally use third person narratives while the original *La Dame aux Camélias* uses the first person, thus Lin Shu changes ‘I’ into ‘the author’ in the translation. Words such as Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were still quite foreign to the Chinese reader at the time, thus Lin Shu used, for instance, ‘the 22<sup>nd</sup> day in February’ instead.

Yet the interest in Western fiction in Lin Shu’s time was a part of China’s response to the West. In cultural terms, the ‘new’ versus ‘old’ distinction correlated with a ‘Westernized’ versus ‘traditional’ distinction. Lin seemed eager to spread the Western currents of science, anti-superstition, women’s rights, and so on. By introducing Western cultural values through his translations, Lin Shu helped to lay the groundwork for the iconoclasm of the May Fourth period<sup>2</sup> and thus contributed to the collapse of the Confucian order he had wanted to restore.

The original novel contains various narrative techniques that are totally new to the Chinese reader, such as descriptions about natural scenes and psychological states. Lin Shu omitted some, such as where the female protagonist Marguerite Gautier lives, her room’s furnishings and furniture (though he kept the descriptions about china vases, pottery, silk carpets and quilts, which were familiar to the Chinese reader), and the auction details (which the contemporary Chinese rarely heard of). However he also kept some natural scene descriptions and interior monologues, such as when the male protagonist Armand Duval sees Marguerite when she is ill, and the landscape description after Marguerite dies.

The subsequent history of Chinese popular culture may be seen as further development of this dual legacy. There was, on the one hand, the more serious ideology of popular culture, which sought to redefine the nation in terms of the ‘people’, to carry out mass education, and to uplift the people through culture sponsored from above. This is the legacy that persisted in the May Fourth Movement and Yan’an periods<sup>3</sup> as exemplified in the discussions of ‘proletarian literature’, ‘mass education’, and chairman Mao Zedong’s ‘Talks at the Yan’an Forum’. This ideology was accompanied by the less serious, but perhaps more pervasive, legacy of popular culture and literature as diversionary and escapist enjoyment, which was castigated by most May Fourth thinkers as ‘traditional’ or ‘traditionalistic’. This legacy is admittedly harder to assess but, in the opinion of most Chinese literary historians, led directly to the ascendancy of the ‘Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’ school of popular urban fiction.<sup>4</sup> It also provided the justification for the May Fourth Movement, in which the importance of reaching and edifying

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to *David Copperfield*, quoted in and translated by Leo Lee.

<sup>2</sup> The May Fourth Movement (1919) was the first mass movement in modern Chinese history. On May 4, about 5,000 university students in Beijing protested the Versailles Conference (April 28, 1919) awarding Japan the former German leasehold of Jiaozhou, Shandong province. Intellectuals identified the political establishment with China’s failure in the modern era, and hundreds of new periodicals published attacks on Chinese traditions, turning to foreign ideas and ideologies. The movement also popularized vernacular literature, promoted political participation by women, and educational reforms (<http://www.reference.com/browse/May+Fourth+Movement>).

<sup>3</sup> Yan’an is a city in Shaanxi province, P. R. China. Yan’an became the centre of the Chinese Communist revolution from 1936 to 1948.

<sup>4</sup> The term originated in the 1910s as a disparaging reference to classical-style love stories, usually the troubled romance of a poor scholar and a beauty. In the 1920s it was applied to all forms of popular old-style fiction, including love stories, knight-errant novels, scandal novels, detective novels and many others.

the people through serious literature was again championed with great fanfare (Lee and Nathan 1987: 388).

The failure of the Cultural Revolution and its *Geming Yangban Xi* 革命样板戏 ('model revolution works') showed once again that it is harder to create mass culture than the cultural designers, such as reformer Liang Qichao 梁启超, and chairman Mao Zedong admitted. In crucial respects, popular tastes seem to have changed little through decades of reform and elevation. The mass culture designed by the elite has consistently been too polemical, too idealistic, too propagandistic and too simplistic for an audience who wanted variety, excitement, and fun. 'How to design a wholesome culture for the masses was again the topic of writers' congress and official speeches. In that sense, the agenda of cultural issues for [the] twenty-first century bore a remarkable resemblance to the agenda of the late Qing' (Lee and Nathan 1987: 395).

### **The tension between elevation and entertainment**

Prior to Lin Shu's age, fiction had generally been looked upon as a *xiao dao* 小道 ('minor way') at best. In his age, this traditional antipathy towards the novel was beginning to break down. Lin's translation made the novel genre a serious literary form in the eyes of Chinese readers. Coincidentally, about the same time that Lin's first translation was made, Liang Qichao and others were beginning to discuss the political and social influence which the novel had had in the West and suggested that it could perform a similar role in China. Liang advocated the use of the novel as a tool for political and educational propaganda. As seen in the 'Preface to *Oliver Twist*', Lin Shu also shared with Liang Qichao a wildly optimistic view of the power of fiction to reform society. In fact, it has been argued that the interest in the novel as a medium for political propaganda and social reform was the primary reason for the sudden appearance of both original novels and Western translations in the late Qing:

The vast amount of translation of literary works is probably motivated by the demand for political and social reforms rather than merely for entertainment. Literature as a popular medium of reading has been considered by many modern Chinese intellectuals as the best instrument for educating the great mass of people. As early as the end of the last century, translation of fiction has been suggested as a political weapon [...] It is no wonder that the great importation of Western literature has become an effective medium for advocating reform.

(Compton 1971: 19)

A. Ying 阿英 gives an account of the development of translation in China along generally similar lines:

Generally speaking, in the initial period of the translation of fiction, the objective was solely political propaganda. Therefore the reputation of the so-called *Zhengzhi Xiaoshuo* [政治小说 ('political novel')] was very high [...] Only later, after the simple objective of political and educational [needs was met] was there any attention to literary value. At the very end, a side road also developed with the production of a large batch of translated detective stories.

(Qtd. in Compton 1971: 20)

Sun Zhili 孙致礼 (2002) has also commented that in the late Qing dynasty, literary translation was used as a vehicle to reform society. Translators looked for the yuan shi 怨世 ('complaining'), di shi 诋世 ('castigating') and xing shi 醒世 ('alerting') possibilities, instead of literary or aesthetic values, in the original works. They naturally put a much more stress on domestication and adaptation than loyalty to the original. Methods such as rewriting and recreation were often used.

But Lin Shu went much further. Through his translations, he showed that the novel could be much more than a vehicle for propaganda and education. *La Dame aux Camélias* helped the Chinese to think about the question of the role of Confucianism in a modernizing state. For instance, it reinforced changing concepts of the role of women from the late Qing. Most of the conditions of women's life in nineteenth century China - arranged marriage, limited opportunities for education, lack of independent occupation - derived from their subordination to the family unit. With variations, this mode of social organization had held sway for over two thousand years. Now it was time for change. In traditional Chinese literature, popular romances are often of the 'scholar-meets-beauty' variety, while *La Dame aux Camélias* tells a true and holy love story that features a prostitute. Traditional Chinese popular romances usually end with happy endings, whereas *La Dame aux Camélias* portrays a realistic love story that ends tragically.

However, in late Qing woman's importance was still that of mother, and although it was felt that she should receive higher education, it should be of a kind befitting her different endowments and purpose in life. Therefore the ideas of women's role imported into China in the last years of the Qing dynasty are, on the one hand, woman as good wife and mother, her compassionate disposition complementing the active disposition of the male; on the other, woman as independent actor, mistress of her own fate, demanding to do whatever men did. Thus the goal in Lin's age was still to improve the condition of Chinese women within the framework of traditional domestic virtues.

And Lin Shu trusted his judgment in pointing out messages or morals for the reader. For instance, the original text states that Armand is not one of those who frequent brothels whereas the translation merely implies that he has not been a lover of Marguerite's. Lin Shu was very careful about anything that did not fit in with the conventions of contemporary Chinese society. The description of Marguerite as leading a voluptuous life was omitted in the translation. Many intimate details were omitted. The kissing details were kept, though Lin Shu explained in the notes that this is a typical Western way of greeting. The fact that Armand has a mistress even when seeing Marguerite was also omitted. Once Marguerite says to Armand that she might one day become his mistress, he is bound to know that she has other lovers, and yet in the translation Marguerite says that it was not reasonable to ask her be loyal to him before she meets him.

Even a decade after the popularization of Dumas' novel, contentious subjects such as arranged marriages were not touched on. The media which shaped public opinion were not daring. Early issues of *Funü zazhi* 妇女杂志 (Women's journal), a periodical founded in Shanghai in 1915, concentrated instead on such acceptable subjects as women's education or the improvement of family life. Articles covered the best age for marriage, family size, child care, hygiene, and home nursing, but rarely touched on contentious subjects. The journal *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志 (The Eastern Miscellany) mentioned 'free marriage' in a 1917 article, only to dismiss it: the pursuit of love would waste young people's energies on pretence, jealousy, and decadence. Even if they were allowed to mix more freely, they should strive to keep love at bay through judicious observance of Confucian morality.

The reign of Confucian morality came to an end in the 1910s. Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 attacked the blind veneration of chaste widowhood, the segregation of the sexes, and the power of parents to interfere in their children's lives, and asserted in their place the enlightened customs of Western society, in which women run their own lives and men and women could even dance together without being accused of dissipation. A decade after the popularization of *La Dame aux Camélias*, fighting against the feudal values that were debased in the novel started to take effect in China.

A further look into the novel shows it calling for a release of individual energies for the good of the nation. Chinese people did not confine the story of the female protagonist Marguerite to the triviality of women's lives, but connected her life to broader themes of national survival and the anti-imperialist struggle. Why the state deploys the category of women for political mobilization is a fascinating topic.

Lin Shu lived in a world of tremendous change, a complex, diverse, changing popular culture. Nearly every political, social and economic institution was undergoing revolutionary upheaval. Lin was not at the centre of all this change but he was influenced by and involved in most of it. Two currents continued to interact with each other throughout the first half of the twentieth century: 'the serious intellectual 'crest' ran over the less serious 'undercurrent' of 'popularized' literature - which was a commercialization and vulgarization of the very values of the 'crest' culture' (Lee and Nathan 1987: 388). This dilemma of elevation versus popularization never dies.

### Critical responses

According to Chen Yu 陈瑜 (2012: 67), within three to four years of the release of Lin Shu's translation, five editions appeared. Poet Chen Yan 陈衍, literary critic Qiu Wei'ai 邱炜夔, young revolutionaries and poets Li Junmin 黎俊民 and Gao Xu 高旭 are all familiar with this book. According to Fang Hao 方豪, educator and revolutionary Ying Lianzhi 英敛之 finished the novel from cover to cover in one sitting, and Ying wrote in his diary that 'This is such a powerful and crushing tale. I never imagined Western literature can also be so exquisite and delicate' (qtd. in 方豪 1974:319). Novelist Bao Tianxiao 包天笑 also wrote in his memoir that 'we used to believe that foreigners have shallow or short-lived affections and now we know that this book is *The Story of the Stone* in a foreign land' (包天笑 1971: 171). Many famous writers of the twentieth century admitted that it was Lin Shu's translation that led them to discover Western literature. These include Lu Xun 鲁迅, Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Zhou Zuoren 周作人, Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书, Bing Xin 冰心, Zhu Ziqing 朱自清, Lu Yin 卢隐.

Differences, such as errors or deviations from the original text, would not necessarily be factors affecting the popularity of certain translations. A popular work often reinforces traditional morality, at least at some point. The average reader, unfamiliar with the original language and having no particular interest in the original work, was far more interested in a readable and interesting story. In Lin Shu's case, Western fiction was primarily a source of new materials for plots and stories, and the translator could draw on it to enrich and broaden the existing Chinese tradition of fiction. A rough parallel might be drawn between the attitudes of these translators and those of modern compilers of collections of fairy tales of other cultures for children: the plot and the story is the main thing; an exact rendering of the original version is not of primary importance. Those who might complain that a translation was a poor one on the grounds that it deviated from the original text or contained errors do not appear to have been typical of readers in the years of Lin's career or this novel at least.

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# Translation and Ambiguity: Towards a Reformulation

ANDREW BENJAMIN

## Abstract

That there can always be more than one translation of any work is a commonplace. However, harboured within it is the truth of translation, namely that what is essential to any work is its 'translatability'. Translatability, however, never yields just one outcome. Here the idea of translatability, having been located in the writings of Walter Benjamin, provides the basis for a reflection on the relationship between translation and ambiguity.

## 1.

With ambiguity there is always another point of departure. Rather than allow its presence to be assumed, the existence of ambiguity could be denied. It would be taken as lacking necessity. Henceforth, and working within the ambit of this disavowal, there wouldn't have been ambiguity. Or, were there to be, it could be quickly resolved. Beginning in this way, a beginning structured by either the refusal or the posited dissolution of ambiguity, raises two interrelated questions. What is being denied? What would have been dissolved? For the most part answers to these questions equate ambiguity with the semantic. Given that equation, ambiguity can be overcome by resolving either a founding lack of clarity in the first instance, or, in the second, addressing and eliminating contestation posed on the level of meaning. Resolving ambiguity, absolving the proposition that a given formulation is ambiguous, would be carried out therefore in the name of meaning. And yet, while possible, (indeed there is a genuine inevitability in this regard, since ambiguities need to be resolved) a question remains. What still endures is an account of the interplay between ambiguity's founding presence and an envisaged resolution. Such an account would not begin with meaning, but with the already present possibility of semantic ambiguity. To start with ambiguity as though it were simply present would be premised on having neglected the interplay between possibility and resolution. Moreover, simply positing ambiguity would have conflated an account of its founding presence with the pragmatic necessity for the state of affairs deemed ambiguous to be resolved. That resolution needs to be understood as a determination of what is initially indeterminate. Taking this complex of concerns as a point of departure means that the question that has to be posed at the beginning is the following: What is happening with ambiguity? Clarity is essential even with a question of this nature. What is taking place with ambiguity – its happening – does not occur in the abstract. Once ambiguity can be repositioned such that it enacts, or more accurately is already the enacting of the relationship between the indeterminate and the determinate, the latter is of course finitude, then what is being addressed cannot be reduced to the vagaries of meaning. The indeterminate becomes an ontological condition that necessitates determination. The link between the two has the structure of a decision. A clear instance of this movement is the act of translation.

Before taking up the opening that the connection to translation allows, it is vital to return to the interplay outlined above between the originality of ambiguity and its necessary resolution. Two points need to be noted. The first is that the original position, while continuing

to appear semantic in nature, has a more complex presence. Semantic ambiguity needs to be understood symptomatically. It is an after-effect of an original condition. The second point is that the resolution of ambiguity, an instance of which is the act of translation, starts with the symptom. In other words, it starts with the semantic. However, as has already been intimated, neither ambiguity nor translation, understood in terms of their happening and thus as the move from the indeterminate to the determinate, are purely semantic. The reduction of ambiguity, or translation, to the semantic would fail to engage either with what allows for their possibility, or for the occasioning of a resolution. (This ‘occasioning’ involves a set-up in which translation, formally, can itself be understood as the resolution of a founding ambiguity.)

In order to develop an answer to the question of ambiguity, the track to be followed here, as has been indicated, stems from what could be described as the founding connection between ambiguity and the project of translation. (Rather than considering translation in the abstract, its presence will be worked through one of the central formulations given to it in the writings of Walter Benjamin.) Defining translation in terms of a ‘project’ is intended to underscore the supposition that translation, as with the resolution of ambiguities, is a process. Any process involves movement. Moreover, what has to be presupposed is that intrinsic to the founding object is the potentiality that allows the process to occur. Evoking the projective nature of translation necessitates a redefinition of the object. That which is given to be translated or a founding ambiguity that is there to be resolved are to be characterized as having that potential. The project of translation therefore is the identification of potentiality. Recourse to potentiality will form part of an account of what allows translation to happen. The happening of translation taken in conjunction with potentiality refers to the quality of language. Moreover, the formulation language’s ‘quality’ identifies what it means for language to be language and therefore what can be more accurately described as the ontology of language.

Such an approach, involving an interconnection between ambiguity as a site of philosophical exploration and translation, while not the only way in, is nonetheless demanded by the nature of the exigencies within translation itself. While there will always be an imperative to strive for accuracy, the complicating factor, which establishes the connection between the project of translation and the development of a philosophical understanding of ambiguity, is that the point of departure for any translation, the initial text, is itself ambiguous. The status of this claim is straightforward. Precisely because the meaning of the original formulation, the one to be translated, is not singular, translation begins with the ‘ambiguous’. That beginning, once ambiguity is understood in terms of its happening and thus as a process of enactment, will always take the form of the semantic. And yet, what can never be eliminated is the creation of a site in which further decisions (interpretations, perhaps even further translations) are possible and may even be necessary. What has to be retained however is the recognition that the act of translation is already a move that resolves the presence of a founding ambiguity. In addition, this resolution, by taking the form of a decision, allows for a conception of judgment that is positioned beyond simple relativities. Moving therefore from the semantic as a point of departure to the semantic as an after-effect of an original ontological condition, demands the addition of an apparently new term within discussions of ambiguity and translation. What this involves is the following: once emphasis moves from semantic overdetermination, where the semantic is taken as an end itself, to that which occasions it, then within the realm of translation the term that becomes necessary is ‘translatability’. This term does not just identify a quality of language: more importantly, it identifies potentiality as inherent to that quality. *Translatability* is a potentiality. Understood in this sense, the use of the term ‘*translatability*’ signifies that the after effect of ambiguity within translation does not stem from an intrinsically ambiguous semantic condition but from the condition of language itself.

The founding state of indeterminacy is commensurable with language's intrinsic translatability. Indeed, the argument will always have to be that translatability and the indeterminate are terms that are essential to identify the quality of language. While its surrounding vocabulary will differ, 'translatability' is one of the terms central to Benjamin's contribution to an understanding of what has already been identified as the happening of translation.

## 2.

As a point of departure it is important to note that in discussions of translation Walter Benjamin's is one of the names that almost inevitably appears. His introduction to his own translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*, the text known in English as 'The Task of the Translator', has acquired, and rightly, an almost canonical status. Translation endures within his work. Its presence is central to one of his early papers on the nature of language 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man'.<sup>1</sup> Benjamin had a range of concerns. Rather than offer a summation of the arguments of both papers, if only because this task has a certain endlessness attached to it, the project here is to develop an approach to one of the concepts central as much to his work on language as it is, though in a slightly altered form, to his writings on criticism, painting and literature, and which will work to open up the project of thinking ambiguity as an original ontological condition. Here it is vital that a distinction be drawn between a conception of language that gestures towards an ontological set-up which, while it shows itself in the work of language, the field of language points beyond itself and thus to the ontological. And one in which ontology identifies the quality of language itself. (This position is compatible with Benjamin's conception of 'translatability' and in addition underscores the general argument being advanced here.) While an account of that quality will have recourse to the relationship between the infinite and the finite, a relation that is operative in domains that are not delimited by language, what is in play nonetheless is an account of the work of language. In this context language is at work within translation and is integral to ambiguity's resolution.

The term central to the realization of this project, precisely because it begins to delimit the ontological quality of language, is 'translatability' (*Übersetzbarkeit*). One of the central passages in Benjamin's writings in which it occurs is the following:

Translation is a form. To comprehend it as a form one must go back to the original, for the laws governing the translation lie within the original contained in the issue of translatability (*Übersetzbarkeit*).

(GS. IV.1.9/SW. 1.254)

Rather than comment directly on the passage as such, though it will be important to return to its concerns in the guise of a conclusion, what follows needs to be understood as a more general reflection on translatability and ambiguity. In order to respond to the challenge posed by Benjamin's conception of 'translatability' it is best to start with a slightly more direct approach.

Translation, as has been noted, has a pragmatic dimension. Translations take place. Translation is both possible and in certain instances direct, if not instant. Translation happens. The act can be assumed. The question of translation therefore does not inhere in the pragmatic act. What matters is what happens. And yet, what it is that actually happens is of course the question. As such, the question of translation, as with ambiguity, has to be linked to what grounds the fact of its occurrence. In other words, the question of translation does not so much concern its reality as it does its possibility. To make the point in a slightly different way, it can

be argued that the inevitability of translation is translation's least interesting aspect. Of greatest interest is the fact that language allows it. This allowing is already the gesture towards the quality of language; a gesture that inscribes potentiality at the heart of any concern with translation.

Linking translation to its possibility will automatically distance a conception of translation explicated in terms of substitution or equivalence. Such an understanding of the process of translation is based on a conception of language as a neutral medium. Its posited neutrality, and thus transparency, would allow it to identify and thus present the 'same' objects. Working with such a conception of language and translation defines the operative dimension within translation in terms of finding the word in a specific language for this 'same' object in the world. Hence, there would be an apparently unproblematic move from '*kitab*' to '*livre*' to '*Buch*' because in each instance what is involved is the material object identified in English as a 'book'. While such a conception of translation is limited, it does contain a residual truth; namely that movement between languages is possible. This is the insistent reality of translation. However, the limitation of such an account emerges because the basis of that movement - what allows it to be possible - then becomes a quality of the world and not language. The world would have acquired a type of universality, or if the world were not to have it directly then the objects comprising such a world would. Language, while having its own relativities, would as a consequence only ever name that world of universal objects.

No matter how attractive such a theory may be - and it would only exert a hold because it makes both language and the world straightforward and thus easy to understand and therefore would obviate the need for any reflection and any consequent need for judgment on the way these elements combine - it is nonetheless constructed on an omission. What is missed is what is already there, namely the complexity of language and the detail of the world. While this limitation opens up important problems, what such a conception of translation cannot account for is the way that two translations of the same text may be accurate and yet significantly different. The accuracy of a translation does not stem from the relationship between world and word. Two different translations of the same source may be given and yet both are correct. In addition to being correct, each could capture a different aspect of the original. On the level of word for word substitution two different translations of a work of poetry may be accurate (accurate despite difference) and yet the fact that one may be in verse and the other in prose repeats the original; and it needs to be emphasized that the original is in fact repeated, in significantly different ways. To concede the presence of both a sense of accuracy that incorporates differences (difference without relativism precisely because there could not be only one exact equivalence) and to allow genre and style to play a foundational role within translation - to allow, for example, the difference between prose and verse to be significant for translation - is already to have recognized the impossibility of substitution as a basis for a theory of translation. And yet translation takes place. The happening of translation demands more than would have been provided by the relationship between word and world.

Drawing on part of the argument presented so far, two elements are central. The first is the possibility of differences between two translations of the same text in which accuracy is maintained despite those differences. The second is that style and genre are able to form part of what is translated. Each of these points needs to be addressed. Starting with style and genre, two things, at the very least, need to be noted. The first is that part of what comprises a work is the presence of its generic determination. The second is that the presence of one literary style, in differing from another connects a work's reality and thus its power as literature to stylistic considerations. Indeed, style would then become a way of describing the economy of a particular literary work.<sup>2</sup> These considerations are not therefore general. Style is for the most

part particular. And yet within the happening of translation additional elements are in play. Neither style nor genre is absolute. Within translation there may be a fidelity to genre and equally a fidelity to style. In the case of the translation of poetry it is possible to capture even the verse structure of the original (for example, the sonnet form) in the translation. However, it is also possible to refuse it. An instance here is essential. While an example from the texts in question will be taken up at a later stage of my argument, it may be noted immediately that differing translations of Homer's *Iliad* (Book 1), one in prose (by E.V. Rieu) and the other in verse (by John Dryden) are nonetheless both translations.<sup>3</sup> Both bring a concern with accuracy to the fore. While a given reader may prefer Dryden to Rieu, it cannot be argued that the former is accurate while the latter is either wrong or inaccurate merely because he fails to repeat the literal generic determination.

A consideration of style and genre opens up the general question of accuracy. (In part they open it up because neither style nor genre determine the appearance of a given translation.) It can never be denied that errors occur within translation. Certain translations can be inaccurate, if not straightforwardly wrong. The interesting point however is that even though error is possible it can take as many different forms as those taken by accurate translations. In other words, in the same way as a range of differing errors may be at work in translations - for example, missing a nuance, *faux amis*, a direct misunderstanding - differing possibilities of accuracy will also be evident. The difference however is clear. In the case of error the source text is not present, in the precise sense that its repetition is not taking place. In the case of accuracy it is present. The concession, which incorporates a concern with both style and genre, is that there is no single exact form in which it is present. (This latter point is, of course, borne out by the history of the translation of Classical literary and philosophical texts.)

There is therefore an opening that emerges here that needs to be noted. Error and accuracy can be reformulated in terms of differing relations to repetition. As such what has to be introduced is the connection between repetition and possibility. If the project of translation's relation to accuracy can be redefined in terms of repetition, then one of the ways in which potentiality needs to be understood is in terms of repetition. Two aspects need to be noted. The first is that potentiality is not to be defined in terms of a conception of the new that occurs without relation. Equally, repetition is not to be understood in terms of the reiteration of sameness. Linking repetition and potentiality means that what emerges, as another translation, will be a conception of the new that is marked by the interplay between the unpredictable and the already related.

The second aspect is that there is a founding relation between potentiality and repetition. In addition, the fact that the original already has the potentiality for it to be repeated means that the actualization of that potential does not depend upon the retention of the original's founding style or generic determination. What it is dependent upon is language's inherent quality. What the translator works with therefore is as much the content that is given to be translated as the original's potentiality.

### 3.

In sum, what can be concluded thus far is that the presence of the original, while central, is not the issue if it is taken as an end in itself. The more significant element, as has been noted, concerns the relationship between repetition and potentiality. Translation is a modality of repetition. However, it is not a repetition positioned within identity. Rather, what occurs is a form of repetition in which sameness and difference both obtain. (The relative existence of each becomes of interest in relation to specific translations.) Repetition becomes one of the terms with which to account for translation understood as a form of movement; translation's

happening. Translation (as *translatio*) is a ‘carrying over’ (*Übersetzung* as *setzen über*). And yet, on its own this is not sufficient; it is merely to remain at the pragmatic level. What needs to be incorporated is an additional element, an element inhering in language. In order to develop this quality, the difference between the two following translations should be noted: the context is the opening of the *Iliad* Book 1. Chryses is attempting to retrieve his kidnapped daughter. In their own way the translations recount this event.

Chryses had come to the Achaean ships to recover his captured daughter. He had brought with him a generous ransom and carried the chaplet of the Archer-god Apollo on a golden staff in his hands. He appealed to the whole Achaean army, and most of all to its two commanders, the sons of Atreus.

E.V. Rieu

For venerable Chryses came to buy,  
 With Gold and Gifts of Price, his Daughters Liberty.  
 Suppliant before the Grecian Chiefs he stood;  
 Awful, and arm'd with Ensigns of his God:  
 Bare was his hoary Head; one holy Hand  
 Held forth his Laurel Crown and one his Scepter of Command.  
 His Suit was common; but above the rest,  
 To both the Brother-Princes thus address'd.

John Dryden

In both translations what occurs after these lines is Chryses' address. Thus the continuity of the translations follows the original. As instances of writing they occur within the determinations of style and genre. Moreover, they will appeal to differing sensibilities. Moreover, questions of accuracy and fidelity can be left to one side insofar as there is an accord and thus a relation of sameness between the two translations. They are therefore both repetitions of the original. What is remarkable about them - the first published in 1950, the second in 1700 - is not their difference *per se*, but that both are possible. In other words, possibility incorporates both their difference and their sameness

Prior to taking up the question of their possibility, what needs to be noted is that what both translations indicate - by the nature of their difference - is that the next translation of this passage from the *Iliad* could not be predicated in advance. Neither the original nor the history of its translation provides an adequate ground for determining beforehand the particularity of any future translation. This is the case because translation cannot be accounted for in terms of the meaning of the words in the passage, nor by insisting on the singularity of ideational content. The impossibility of predication does not mean however that any translation is possible. As I have already suggested, within a translation the original has to be repeated. Both passages cited above have to be understood as repetitions. Repetition's possibility - translation as repetition - inheres in the original as a potentiality. Repetition evidences language's potentiality. And it should be added that repetition is also an essential element in both structuring and providing the ground of judgment. To the extent that these points concerning repetition are conceded - and it can be argued that the history of translations indicates that they should be - then what has to be argued in addition is that any adequate account of language (language as inherently translatable) has to begin with the proposition that the semantically overdetermined evidences the original interconnection between potentiality and repetition. It is not enough merely to assert that translation occurs. Nor is it enough to argue that any one

translation breaks the hold of an original context. The reason why context does not determine either a work's meaning or predict the forms of its translation is that decontextualization – understood as either interpretation or translation – releases a work's potentiality for decontextualization.<sup>4</sup> Dryden's translation of Homer gives to the original a quality it could never have had and yet it is a translation in the precise sense that it is the original's repetition. Were it not for language's potentiality for a future, it would have been lost to its original setting.

The original setting is of course the past of historicism. However, there is another dimension that inheres in any discussion of an original setting. Any discussion of translation will always be set against the possibility that translation has only become necessary because of a fall from the singular language to the multitude of languages. A 'fall' articulated as the myth of Babel. Equally that 'fall' brings with it a related possibility. Multiplicity may entail an eventual reconciliation. A unity, in other words, that recalls a founding past and projects a future. Benjamin was acutely aware of this possible argument. Indeed his formulation of what he termed 'pure language' (*die reine Sprache*), precisely because it is held apart from linguistic determinations, i.e. the play of natural languages, could be interpreted in this light. However, close attention to its formulation indicates that this would be too hasty a judgment. Towards the end of 'The Task of the Translator', in a long and important passage, Benjamin argues the following:

In all language and linguistic creations there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated; depending on the context in which it appears, it is something that symbolizes or something symbolized. It is the former only in the finite products of language, the latter in the evolving of the languages themselves. And that which seeks to represent, indeed to produce itself in the evolving of languages, is that very nucleus of pure language; yet though this nucleus remains present in life as that which is symbolized itself, albeit hidden and fragmentary, it persists in linguistic creations only in its symbolizing capacity. Whereas in various tongues, that ultimate essence, the pure language, is tied only to linguistic elements and their changes, in linguistic creations it is weighted with a heavy alien meaning. To relives it of this, to turn the symbolizing in to the symbolized, to regain the pure language fully formed in the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation. In this pure language – which no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages – all information, all sense and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished.

(SW. 1. 261/GS IV.1.19)

In this difficult and demanding passage the key elements in the formulation 'pure language' are, firstly, the attribution to it of a capacity ('pure language' therefore needs to be understood as generative or at least productive) and, secondly, its identification as 'expressionless and creative Word'. 'Pure language' persists without expression.<sup>5</sup> Present as that which 'cannot be communicated'. While persisting in this way, its field of operation is language. As a result, 'pure language' does not point beyond language. However, it is neither reducible to any one natural language nor is it simply linguistic. Resisting these reductions is what allows 'pure language' to figure within language. The nature of the separation does not involve mere distance nor an eventual form of connection. The separation is an allowing, i.e. is a set-up that creates possibilities and is to be thought in terms of production and therefore in relation to

potentiality. If there is access to ‘pure language’ then it occurs not as access to an original language, let alone to a final language of reconciliation, but to its having been regained in the act of translation. What is regained is what allows language’s work. It allows for it. It is part of what happens even though ‘pure language’ remains ‘expressionless’. If the translator, in Benjamin’s words, liberates ‘the language imprisoned in a work in his recreation of that work’ what this entails is that ‘pure language’ is only ever present as possibility and thus as the original potentiality. Pure language does not figure as though it could be merely given content. Not having content, it provides content’s continual reforming at the point where potentiality and repetition interconnect. That interconnection is the expression of the next translation; a repetition whose possibility is of necessity expressionless.

In a number of differing contexts Benjamin writes of a work’s ‘afterlife’. However, its having one is grounded in what has to be described as the quality of language. Any other description would understate what is at play. That quality is at work in allowing for repetition. ‘Translatability’, Benjamin’s demanding term, needs to be understood as the quality of language that occasions translations; a quality to be explicated in terms of potentiality and repetition. Even though the form of any one translation cannot be predicted, this is of course the anti-utopian gesture of refusing the future an image in advance; the future understood as an act of translation will always have language’s inherent potentiality as its ground.<sup>6</sup> As with language so with the present; both contain the potentiality for their own radical transformation. A transformation held beyond the oscillation between the apocalyptic and the utopian because the present – both a historical moment and as work – is the locus of potentiality.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The references to Walter Benjamin’s texts are to both the German edition and the relevant English translation; page numbers will be given in the text. In the case of the German, reference will be to the *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Herman Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980-1991). In regard to the English, reference for the most part will be made to the *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996-2003).

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed presentation of style as providing a work’s productive economy, see Flaubert’s letter to Louis Colet dated 16 January 1852; Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*. Choix et presentation de Bernard Masson (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> The two translations of Homer’s *Iliad* Book 1 that will be looked at are by E.V. Rieu and John Dryden. The first is Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. E.V. Rieu (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950). Dryden’s translation, published 1700, formed part of his *Fables, Ancient and Modern*, published in *The Poems and Fables of John Dryden*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). The page numbers of the two citations are 23 and 660 respectively.

<sup>4</sup> These comments need to be read as part of an engagement with Derrida’s central paper ‘Signature, événement, contexte’ in *Marges de la philosophie*. (Paris: Minuit, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘expressionless’ marks not only Benjamin’s debt to Hölderlin but also the link between the ‘expressionless’ and the caesura as a form of production. I have taken up this connection in much greater detail in my *Philosophy’s Literature* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> I have addressed this question in my ‘The Illusion of The Future: Notes on Benjamin and Freud’, in Andrew Milner and Robert Savage (eds.), *Imagining the Future: Utopia and Dystopia, Arena*, 25-26 (2006): 193-205.

# Shadows Over the Bush: A Voyage Through the Italian Translations of Four Short Stories by Henry Lawson

IDA GIACCIO

## Abstract

Bookstores' shelves are full of translated works performed by practitioners motivated by different reasons: professional translators, bilinguals who want to experience the practice of translating, scholars who wish to translate their favourite author, etc. How and to what extent does their reading of the Source Text influence the creation of the Translated Text and readers' understanding of it? This article aims to demonstrate how an extemporaneous practitioner performed the translation into Italian of four short stories by Henry Lawson and what consequences her interventions produced. A comparative analysis of the STs and the TTs explored the contexts of culture and situation (life in the Australian bush in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: its inhabitants, namely the first settlers, their language, habits and feelings). The results of the analysis are described through the most relevant examples, grouped in four categories: calques, proper names, cultural words and contextual information. The issues highlighted in each example are discussed with reference to Antoine Berman's 'deforming tendencies', and more appropriate translations are suggested. Back-translations reinforce the analysis.

'Henry Lawson is the voice of the Bush and the Bush is the heart of Australia,' stated A.G. Stephen in *The Bulletin* in 1895. With these words Stephen recognized Lawson as one of the first writers able to give a voice to rural Australia. The Bush and its inhabitants are described through the pen and eyes of a perceptive observer. Lawson's characters, with their habits, attitudes, feelings and values, powerfully portray the weirdness of life in the lonely Bush. In fact, his stories have historical value, for they document the life of the first settlers/inlanders and their everyday struggles. They do so on two levels: 1) the struggle against an unknown, unpredictable and threatening environment still inhabited by its original peoples, and 2) the settlers' feeling of national identity generated by their sense of being foreigners in the land where they were born.

The type of language used is that of story-telling put into written words through the literary form of the 'short story' or 'sketch'. Lawson sought to combine the tradition of oral yarns and folkloristic tales with the structures of a written form, using devices such as blistering and informal dialogue, monologues, the use of the first person to establish a relationship with the reader, questions to the reader, comments by the narrator to establish his presence as a teller, together with narrative techniques such as analepsis, prolepsis and digressions. Also, through the vividness of his descriptions he tried to communicate the gestures, body language and

movements typical of verbal speech in order to adjust the transcription of life in the bush to the framework of a written story. Lawson's language is the vernacular, he lets his characters speak their everyday language, the only language they know. In doing so, he gave academic status to Australian English, which is a mixture of English, Irish dialect and Aboriginal loans, differentiating it from British English. Lawson's style and language were undoubtedly shaped by his poor education and the speech of the people around him. Nevertheless, his ability to impregnate words with colours, flavours, and emotions, and his mastery of humour and irony, allow him to create witty metaphors, parallels, and powerful images, which lets the reader leap into the Bush and feel part of it. Humour underlies all of his short stories, even the more dramatic, since, for Lawson, humour characterizes the Bush people who need to play down the toughness of their life. However, it is a bitter humour, intentionally producing the opposite reaction.

The Australian readership of the time received a portrait of an Australia in which they could easily identify the peculiarities of their land: the affirmation of the settlers' national identity through recognizable and typified Bush characters. Similarly, Lawson's stories appealed to a foreign readership, giving it an insight into the newborn country. Lawson was well aware of this; in fact he wrote: 'From the age of seventeen, until now, with every disadvantage and under all sorts of hard conditions, I have written for Australia, and all Australia, and for Australia only. I was the first to introduce the Bushman to the world. I believe that I have done more than any other writer to raise the national spirit and the military spirit in Australia' (Lawson 1916: 239).

From the analysis above, it is clear that the difficulties of translating Lawson are twofold: culturally bound words and the language used. Words referring to Australian flora and fauna, artefacts, food, clothes, houses, towns, transport, work, leisure and organizations need to be conveyed in the light of the concepts and the values they carry. The language, bare, stripped-down, but so impressive, hides the *non-dit* behind the words, which communicates more than the words actually written; the rhythm of the narration that appeals to readers, making them curious and keeping them reading, needs to be preserved. In light of all this, the translation approach and the translation strategies to adopt in transferring meanings should be able to cope with the language used, the innovative style, and the culturally bound words presented in the texts.

Few works by Henry Lawson have been translated into Italian. Most of them are gathered in a collection entitled *Gente del Bush*, published by Tranchida Editore in 1992, edited and translated by Giuliana Prato, and containing translations of 'The Bush Undertaker', 'The Union Buries Its Dead', 'Telling Mrs Baker' and 'Hungerford'. Prato has also translated 'Water Them Geraniums', published by Tranchida in 1992. The translation of another short story, 'The Drover's Wife', appears in a collection entitled *Cieli Australi*, published by Mondadori in 2000, edited by Franca Cavagnoli and translated by Silvia Fornasiero. For reasons of space, I will assess the accuracy only of the four translated short stories contained in *Gente del Bush*. Before accompanying my readers through the texts and the translation

issues, I will introduce the publisher and the translator of the collection analysed.

Giovanni Tranchida Editore is a publishing house established in Milan in 1983. The personal story of its founder, Giovanni Tranchida, strongly reflects the choice of the books he chooses to publish. The publishing house was founded after a long period of cultural ferment in which Giovanni Tranchida was involved as an activist, editor and publisher. The years 1970-1980 in Italy were the so-called 'Anni di Piombo' ("years of lead") when the political dialectic was driven to extremes, resulting in street violence, armed struggle and terrorism. The 'Anni di Piombo' overlap with the years of the cultural movement led by students and intellectuals. This is the context in which, around 1970, Giovanni Tranchida started his activities as editor, collaborating with the few publishing houses engaged in what was known as the "counter-culture": *Filrosso* publishing dealt with essayists, *La Scimmia Verde* publishing with politics, feminism and education. Accused of being the brains behind a legendary organisation known as 'O' or the 'April, 7' case, he spent four years in high security imprisonment plus a year and a half of house arrest and two trials lasting another four years. But, according to Tranchida himself, the real reason why he was persecuted was because of his activity as an 'editor of a news-magazine called *Rosso*, and of a hundred other journals and pamphlets' (<http://www.tranchida.it/storia.php>). In a conversation with Cinzia Sasso, Tranchida summarizes the spirit and the orientation of his publishing house as follows: 'I'd always believed that true publishing houses were those which identified themselves with their editors, a figure who had to provide the thought behind a body of work, a decisive element, someone who brought together intellectual resources yet who gave the organization its character, direction and style. If there is no such role, a publishing house doesn't really exist, other than as an industrial structure which goes on whatever happens, as is the case with all those depersonalized, large editorial firms' (<http://www.tranchida.it/storia.php>). In keeping with this statement, Tranchida's commitment as a publisher is to rehabilitate classic works that, for different reasons, have been censored or neglected by critics, in particular works by famous writers never translated into Italian, and contemporary western works that are in some way peripheral to dominant ideologies or patterns of thought. It is clear now why Lawson, as the writer of the *Bush* and an innovator in terms of literary style, appears among Tranchida's titles.

The translator and editor of *Gente del Bush*, Dr Giuliana Prato, is a prominent scholar in Social Anthropology. Committed to ethnographically based analysis, she has carried out fieldwork mainly in urban areas in Italy, Britain and Albania. Over the years, her research interests have included religious practice in relation to theological debates on death, sin and expiation, political representation and political change, and the impact of economic policies and environmental activism, hunting with hounds, governance and legal reforms in post-socialist Albania, a mainly Muslim country. She has carried out extensive historical research on the political significance of Albanian migration to Italy and the integration of Albanian communities into Italian society. More recently, her research has addressed the relationship between social, political and economic change and global processes, such as

the politics of immigration and transnational power relations. Dr Prato is also a lecturer. She has taught Political and Economic Systems, Ethnicity and Nationalism, and An Introduction to Social Anthropology. She has cooperated with bio-physical anthropologists, contributing to conferences and research projects, and jointly supervising research students. During her career, she has written three books about urban anthropology (<http://kent.academia.edu/GiulianaPrato>). It is curious, though, that her list of publications does not include her translation of Lawson's short stories. The reason for this may be that it is not pertinent to her research. Despite her brilliant and respected work as a scholar in the field of Anthropology, Dr. Prato does not appear to be a professional translator. My research has not produced any information about any background she may have in translation studies.

In her introduction to *Gente del Bush*, Prato gives the readers a comprehensive and detailed picture of the Australian outback in Lawson's time. In fact, she includes information about the country's history, literature, language, geography and demography through clear and exhaustive examples contained in the preface and six footnotes in the main text. These help the reader to better understand culture-specific terms. Her description of Lawson's characters is impressive, making the distinctive features of the Bush's inhabitants emerge vividly. In addition, she does not neglect the gender issue, underlying the role of women in that context. Her introduction also contains an analysis of Lawson's style and language and its impact on the reader. Finally, to give the reader a complete picture, she directs attention to criticism of Lawson during and after his life, stressing his importance as one of Australia's foremost creative writers .

This kind of introduction is typical of the Italian translation of foreign classics. It is part of the paratextual strategies that canonize foreign works into the Italian literary polysystem. Translated classics occupy a peripheral position in the Italian literary polysystem due to the conservative forces at work (Even-Zohar 1978/2004). Therefore, as classics, Henry Lawson's works fall into that peripheral space the Italian literary polysystem assigns to canonized foreign work.

As clearly stated in the introduction, the intended audience of the translated volume is the general reader. In fact, the final purpose of the translator/editor and the publisher is to contribute to Italian readers' image and knowledge of the part of Australia narrated by Lawson, unfamiliar to the Italian general public.

The role of the translator is to facilitate the transfer of message and meaning from one language to another and create an equivalent response in the receptors. The message in the source language is woven in a cultural context and this has to be transferred to the target language (Nida 1964: 13). Thus, the *intentio auctoris* (Eco 1990) of giving a voice to the Bush's characters (as described above) both to Australia and the world should be reflected in the translations of his works into any language. Indeed, I would argue that in the case of Lawson's short stories the *intentio operis* (Eco 1990) can't be interpreted otherwise by the translator, since the author himself clearly explains his purpose, giving the readers instructions on how to read his works. Hence, the ability of the language to make meanings

independently of the intention of the author is here reduced to its minimum. The only way to avoid this restriction is to ignore the author's instructions by using Lawson's texts for personal purposes, reading them only for inspiration or amusement. But, again, this can be the case for readers, but not for translators, whose aim is to produce an equivalent effect to that produced by the original text in its target readers.

One might assume that Prato's awareness of the author and the text's intentions and her broad knowledge of Australian culture would have allowed her to produce a consistent translation. Surprisingly, the translations do not meet these expectations; and I will explain how and why the original texts are not appropriately represented in the target texts, and therefore are not enjoyable to read. I suppose that the main reason for the failure lies in Prato's apparent lack of knowledge of translation studies. Indeed, I could not find a consistent translation method or strategy in her translations. It seems that she translated Lawson 'by sense'. The 'by sense' approach leads her to translate only at the textual level, which is the first level of translation, the level of the literal translation and translationese: the translator intuitively and automatically transposes the source language (SL) grammar into its ready target language (TL) equivalent, into the sense that appears immediately appropriate to the context of the sentence (Newmark 1988: 22). According to Newmark, accuracy "represents the maximum degree of correspondence, referentially and pragmatically, between, on one hand, the text as a whole and its various units of translation (ranging usually from word to sentence) and, on the other, the extralinguistic 'reality', which may be the world of reality or of the mind" (Newmark 1988: 30). In fact, he identifies, within the textual level, three other levels of translation, which I will shortly describe, since I will refer to them in discussing the translations. The second level of translation is the referential level, the level of the sign, in which the real world, the image of the real world, matches the language, the signified matches the signifier. The third level is the cohesive level: through conjunctions, reiterations and lexical chains the author creates underlying conceptual or signifying relations which reflect his stream of thoughts and moods. The fourth level is the level of naturalness from a grammatical and lexical point of view. This is the level of interferences between the SL and the TL since it concerns word order, syntactic structures and collocations. All these levels are interconnected and need to be considered to produce a sound translation. The emphasis on the textual level only produces serious repercussions on the other three levels, seriously compromising the production of the target text. Upon reading and analyzing them, as I do below, it becomes clear that Prato, by following only her intuition, translates freely, interprets and re-writes. The result is a failure in communication. The translations seem to have no soul because they are referentially and pragmatically inaccurate. Moreover, the naturalness of the TL is often lost due to interferences producing grammatical mistakes and awkward syntactic structures that prevent the reading from being enjoyable.

Owing to space constraints, I will limit my discussion to the inaccuracies resulting in the failure to transmit Lawson's depiction of Australian rural life. Through the comparison of examples from the source text (ST) and the target text (ST), I will demonstrate to what

extent the ‘by sense’ translation approach leads the translator to work at the textual level only, which produces distortions in the transmission of cultural knowledge and contextual information. The examples are grouped into four categories: calques, proper names, cultural words, contextual information.

**Calques** – The case of the translation of ‘rabbit pest’ (Lawson 2009: 198) is clearly an interference, a calque from English. It has been translated as “la peste del coniglio” (Lawson 1992: 60), back-translated: ‘the plague of the rabbit’. This implies that, during Lawson’s time, rabbits suffered from a plague, which is not true. The correct information to communicate is that rabbits were a menace for crops, like locusts. I would translate it as ‘la piaga dei conigli’ (back-translated: the plague of rabbits).

Another distortion that can be attributed to the use of a calque lies in the translation of ‘there was very little grass on the route or the travelling-stock reserves or camps’ (Lawson 2009: 197). The phrase ‘travelling-stock reserves or camps’ has been translated as ‘depositi o campi di riserva per il bestiame viaggiante’ (Lawson 1992: 58), back-translated as “‘storage or spare fields for the travelling stock’. The calque ‘di riserva’ is associated with ‘campi’, which is a calque in its turn, since Prato attributes to it the meaning of ‘field’ instead of ‘camping area’. This chunk is not clear even to an Italian reader; ‘campi di riserva’ does not really mean anything in this context, though it does in the context of soccer. It is thus hard for the reader to figure out its contextual use. I would translate it as ‘nelle riserve destinate al bestiame in viaggio, né negli accampamenti’, back-translated as ‘in the reserves assigned to the travelling stock, nor in the camps’.

The translation of the term ‘stranger’ (Lawson 2009: 41) shows clear interference of the Italian language. It has been translated as ‘straniero’ (Lawson 1992: 23), which means ‘foreigner’, a person who comes from another country. The interference comes from the fact that ‘stranger’ and ‘straniero’ have the same root. A more appropriate translation of the term ‘stranger’ is ‘estraneo’, which is actually a direct equivalent. In fact, ‘estraneo’ is someone who has any kind of relationship with the speaker, not necessarily belonging to another country.

**Proper names** – ‘Gulf Country’ (Lawson 2009: 196) is the name given to the region of woodland and savanna grassland surrounding the Gulf of Carpentaria in north-western Queensland and the eastern part of the Northern Territory on the north coast of Australia. This has been translated as ‘zona del golfo’ (Lawson 1992: 56), back-translated as ‘area of the gulf’, with lower case letters. The consequence is that the reader will never know that it is actually a geographical name. ‘Gulf Country’ is an endonym. According to my research, an Italian exonym for it does not exist. Exonyms are created for places significantly relevant to the speakers; places which are familiar to the speakers because of relationships that countries have developed throughout the centuries (trade relations and historical alliances, for instance). This can explain why Australian toponyms have no translation into Italian, except for very

few cases. Consequently, I would leave “Gulf Country” untranslated.

How should ‘Bananaland’ (Lawson 2009: 46) and ‘Maoriland’ (Lawson 2009: 47) be translated? These are nicknames for, respectively, Queensland and New Zealand. The information carried by the nicknames is obviously related to the main features of the two colonies. In fact, Queensland was famous for the bananas plantations and New Zealand for its indigenous people. ‘Bananaland’ has been translated as ‘the state of Bananas’, leading the reader to think that Bananas is an Australian state. ‘Bananalandia’ would have been a more adequate translation. The compounds of –landia in Italian are a calque from English, meaning ‘state’: it is a direct equivalent which preserves the touch of irony proper to a nickname. Maoriland has been left untranslated (Lawson 1992: 52). For the reason stated above I would translate it as ‘Maorilandia’.

**Cultural words** – The translations of ‘pub’ and ‘shanty’ (Lawson 2009: 197) are also confusing. They are both translated as ‘osteria’ (Lawson 1992: 57). But all three words have different referential meanings. I feel that ‘osteria’ is the closest equivalent to pub. Pub and ‘osteria’ have a common origin and function. Both were created in Roman times on commercial and travellers’ routes as refreshment places for travellers. Soon they became places for locals to meet up, gossip and drink alcohol. But while ‘osterie’ provided and provide mainly wines, pubs offered and offer mainly beers; moreover, the food served is different because of the differences between the two national cuisines. When an Italian reader thinks of a pub, they imagine a place with a very long bench and stools around, carpet on the floor, a very strong smell of beer and Anglo-Saxon food. Likewise, when they imagine an ‘osteria’, they see people seated around few tables drinking wine, playing cards and tasting cured meat and cheese. The interior is different, the smell is different, even though the social function is the same. Also, ‘pub’ is translated as ‘bar’ as well as ‘pub’ (Lawson 1992: 69) in the translation of the narrative of the same event, referring to the same place. The term ‘bar’ in Italy refers to a quite different place compared to the same word into English. In Italy a bar is basically a place where coffee, alcoholic and soft drinks, as well as sweet and savoury snacks (*pizzette, panini, croissants*) are sold. In Anglo-Saxon culture a bar essentially serves alcohol. We can notice here, not only that the inappropriate lexical choices produce a failure in transmitting a cultural word, but also the use of two different concepts (pub and bar) to indicate the same place. I would leave ‘pub’ untranslated, as it has now gained a global currency as a social place where alcoholic beverages are sold, while I would translate ‘shanty’ as ‘bettola’, which is a disreputable sort of tavern. According to the Collins Australian Dictionary and Thesaurus, a shanty is ‘a public house, especially an unlicensed one’.

Prato omits the translation of the cultural word ‘bushman’. The section ‘The dead bushman’s name...’ (Lawson 2009: 43) has been rendered as ‘the name of the deceased’, hence only with a qualifier, neglecting the cultural value of the word ‘bushman’. I would translate it as ‘il nome dell’uomo del bush deceduto’ (back-translated: the name of the man of the Bush deceased) or I would leave the cultural word untranslated, as a foreignizing

strategy.

The translation leaves ‘mulga’ untranslated (Lawson 2009: 45). This is largely justifiable, as it is a cultural word, but the footnote Prato provides is not comprehensive. She writes: ‘Aboriginal term used for indicating various species of acacia, in particular the *Acacia Aneura* (red mulga)’ (Lawson 1992: 47). To give the actual image of ‘mulga’ to the Italian reader, to whom it is alien, I would have written: ‘Any of a number of small acacia trees, especially *Acacia aneura*, forming dense scrub in dry inland areas of Australia’ (<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/mulga>). The adjective ‘dense’ here is needed for the contextualization of the word in the author’s description of the area surrounding Hungerford.<sup>1</sup>

The translation of the story ‘*Hungerford*’ contains one more imprecise footnote about the cultural word ‘doughboy’ (Lawson 2009: 27). Doughboy here is used to denote a meal. Prato leaves the word untranslated, as I would have done, explaining the meaning in a footnote: ‘A roll of dough filled with jam or fruit, wrapped in a cloth and boiled in water’ (back-translation). It actually can be filled also with meat or vegetables and deep fried in fat. In fact, later in the story the character says that it is a pity not to have enough fat to ‘make the pan siss’. This incomplete information tends to confuse the reader.

**Contextual information** – In ‘*Telling Mrs Baker*’ the translation of ‘the new country round by the Gulf of Carpentaria’(Lawson 2009: 196) has been rendered as ‘le campagne intorno al golfo di Carpentaria’(Lawson 1992: 56), back-translated: the countryside surrounding the Gulf of Carpentaria. This translation, omitting the adjective ‘new’, which is a marker, hides from the reader the fact that Australia was a new country to inhabit, where lands were still under exploration. I would suggest translating this phrase as ‘le nuove terre intorno al Golfo di Carpentaria’ (back-translated: the new lands surrounding the Gulf of Carpentaria).

The story ‘*Hungerford*’ starts with this phrase: ‘One of the hungriest cleared roads in New South Wales...’ (Lawson 2009: 45). In this story, Lawson narrates the founding of a city christened Hungerford by the explorers who founded it, and the government’s project to pave the way to the city. The contextual information is that Australia was a land under exploration, where road infrastructures and facilities were necessary for new urban settlements, such that the qualifier ‘cleared’ is to be considered a marked adjective. The translator chooses to render ‘cleared roads’ as ‘strade carrozzabili’ (Lawson 1992: 47), back-translated: carriageable roads. It is a direct equivalent but it does not reflect the propositional meaning, that is to say, the relation between the item and what it refers to, as conceived by the writer. In fact, an Italian reader will get the idea that there were few carriageable roads in New South Wales, but not that works were in progress to create passages through the wildness of the Australian environment and that it required very hard work to penetrate the Bush and to free the path from trees and scrub. I would suggest translating it as ‘strade rese praticabili’ (back-translated: roads made practicable). Here, again, we can notice how the literal translation compromises

<sup>1</sup> After checking the accuracy of the definition from Wiktionary and comparing it to the definitions contained in authoritative dictionaries, I would refer the reader to Wiktionary where they can find images and even more detailed information.

the function of the language used. A few lines down, the same expression ‘to clear the road’ is translated as ‘to blaze a road’, again, it does not give the idea of creating a road penetrating the wilderness.

The case of ‘submitted a motion of want-of-confidence’ (Lawson 2009: 45) is another loss of contextual knowledge. It has been completely misunderstood by the translator. Here Lawson is saying that a past ministry ordered the road to Hungerford to be cleared, which was not worth it, according to the narrator. The workers, who were exhausted and had run out of rations, submitted a motion of no confidence, which was lost by the government. This fact is not indicated by the translator, who translates the phrase as ‘avendo ormai perso ogni speranza’ (Lawson 1992: 48), back-translated: ‘having lost all the hopes’, mixing up all the other information contained in the paragraph. Consequently, the paragraph is nonsense for an Italian reader, not to mention that the contextual information that Australian workers could claim rights is lost through the acrobatic ‘by sense’ strategies adopted by the translator. I would translate it as ‘inoltrare una mozione di sfiducia’, which has exactly the same meaning as the English expression.

Giuliana Prato’s art of re-writing, re-interpreting and re-telling can be best seen in *Hungerford*. Here Lawson is ironic about the actual usefulness of the rabbit fence, saying that it only works as the utmost fun experience for rabbits which play leap-frog over it, besides the ‘Pasteur and the poison and the inoculation’ (Lawson 2009: 45). The contextual information that the rabbit fence is a means to protect crops from rabbits, and that they are often poisoned and made infertile (hence the reference to Pasteur), has not been transmitted in the TT. Conversely, the translation mentions ‘la periodica vaccinazione a ricordo di Pasteur’ (Lawson 1992: 48), back-translated: ‘the periodical vaccination in memory of Pasteur’, which misleads the reader, making them think that Australian farmers used to immunise rabbits. The translation of ‘leap-frog’ is also lost, even though there is a direct equivalent in Italian (‘giocare alla cavallina’). Besides, there is no trace of Lawson’s irony in the translation.

Here, through the story of a man who hates colonies, Lawson transmits an insight into the world of drovers and the unfair agreements they sometimes had to accept to earn their living. The man accepted the job as a drover on these conditions: ‘25 shillings per week and also find your own horse. Also find your own horse-feed, and tobacco and soap and other luxuries, at station prices’ (Lawson 2009: 47). The translator renders the phrase as, back-translated, ‘25 shillings per week, including horse. Including horse-feed, tobacco, soap and other luxuries at the price of the ranch’ (Lawson 1992: 53), exactly the opposite of what Lawson wrote. The reader not only receives the wrong information, but also the coherence of the narrative is lost, for the reader will not understand why the man is angry, given that the job conditions are so good that they even include luxuries. Again, the contextual information is distorted because of the translator’s misinterpretations.

‘*The Union buries its dead*’ is the true story of a union member who was driving some horses along the bank of a river and drowned in the attempted crossing. A union membership card was found in his pocket, so the union decided to arrange a funeral for

him, though nobody knew the man personally. Henry Lawson participated in the funeral and narrated it from the point of view of an observer, reporting the event and the conversations he heard. In this context, the word ‘unionism’ is charged with a feeling of sympathy which has been very well captured by the translator. In fact, she translates it as, back-translated, ‘unionism’s solidarity’. In the phrase: ‘Presently someone said: “There’s the Devil.” I Looked up and saw a priest standing in the shade’ (Lawson 2009: 42), the parallel between the priest and the devil is clear. Nevertheless, the translator could not reproduce it, translating ‘There’s the devil’ with an idiomatic expression totally out of the context, as follows: ‘The Devil’s hand must be in it’ (back-translation), failing to transmit the connection between the priest and the devil. This is strange, though, since she mentioned this relationship in the preface to the book. For a deeper analysis, I can say that the parallel can be considered as contextual information. Considering that all Lawson’s characters are representatives of the Bush, its values and habits, the association of the devil with the priest can be interpreted as the feeling of the unionists towards the Church. In fact, this feeling of aversion to the Church and its devotees runs sarcastically through the story. I would translate it simply as ‘Ecco il diavolo’, back-translated: ‘Here’s the devil’. Prato also omits the translation of ‘outback’ (Lawson 2009: 43). The word refers to any remote and usually sparsely inhabited inland regions of Australia. This is a totally unjustified omission. The word gives the reader further information about the peculiar Australian geography. I would translate it as ‘entroterra’, back-translated: ‘inland areas’, possibly adding more information in the introduction.

In ‘*The Bush Undertaker*’, Lawson gives the epithet of ‘the hatter’ to the weird character of the story’ (Lawson 2009: 27). A ‘hatter’, based on the English saying ‘mad as a hatter’ is a person who prefers to be solitary and appears to be eccentric, if not actually crazy. Artisans used mercury in the process of making hats, which seriously affected their mental health. The translator preferred to translate it as ‘the shepherd’, skating over the textual reference. Another piece of misinformation is the translation of the phrase ‘he washed up the tinware in the water the duff had been boiled in’ (Lawson 2009: 28). The translator has distorted the information, rendering it as ‘he washed up the tinware in the water mixed to ash’ (back-translation), and so rewrites the phrase. Probably, Bush people used to reuse water for different purposes since the water supply was scarce because of the arid environment. This is the contextual information Lawson is giving the reader, who unfortunately, because of the free re-writing of the translator, does not receive the message.

All in all, the writer’s and translator’s aim to introduce to the world the rural Australian’s peculiar way of life, and the writer’s innovative style and language, are betrayed by the translator’s numerous inaccuracies, misinterpretations, misreadings, odd syntactic structures, grammatical mistakes, inadequate lexical choices, inappropriate register, disrespect for graphic effects, additions, omissions that are hard to justify, and distortions. All that is accompanied by a re-writing and a re-interpretation of the texts which I have discussed and illustrated above.

The essential aim of translation is the diffusion of cultures and knowledge. The

translator should be able to catch meanings in the contexts of culture and situation and transfer them as intended by the author. In the words of Gregory Rabassa, 'translation is a form of writing' (1984: 21). I have referred several times to Prato's choices in terms of creativity, free-interpretation and free-rewriting. I want to make a remark about creativity, which is a growing issue in translation studies. According to Loffredo and Perteghella (2006: 9), 'creativity is still regarded as a spontaneous process readily associated with a special individual and a sort of freedom, which is sustained by an individualistic conception of authorship'. Indeed, the translator, as a creative writer, once having discovered the essence of an original text, can decide to reproduce the meanings in a new form (Levine 1991). This does not mean that the translator can arbitrarily omit and distort contextual knowledge, affecting the coherence of the original text and misleading the reader, as occurs in Giuliana Prato's translations. It means, rather, giving a new shape while still respecting the content of the original text. What Prato does, is change information and meanings at will, to the extent that free interpretation and free rewriting are more appropriate terms to address her work. The same applies to her 'by sense' approach to translation. Some outstanding translators, such as Rabassa, John Felstiner and Margaret Sayers Peden, claim that they follow their instinct for what is right, that their work is intuitive and that translators must listen to their ear or hear the voice of the source text (Munday 2008: 150). Here again, they all refer to the rhythm of the narration, to the sound of the language, not to the meanings which must be preserved. Prato's translations also pose an ethical issue. Translators have responsibilities towards authors and readers; they must be able to explain their choices consistently, in order to justify the inevitable loss that occurs during the transfer of meanings, and describe the translation method adopted to meet the author's intention and the reader's expectations.

Giuliana Prato betrays her own aim to transmit to an Italian readership Henry Lawson's representation of rural life in nineteenth-century. The image she shapes of the Australian outback seriously affects the knowledge the reader acquires through her translations. This is not the way translators should claim visibility.

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# **Delphine and Hyppolyte** **(‘Femmes Damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte’)** **by Charles Baudelaire**

TRANSLATED BY JAN OWEN

Charles Baudelaire, born in Paris in 1821, was one of the greatest nineteenth-century French poets. He was a key figure in European literature, with a far-reaching influence—an example, in his life and in his poetry, of what it means to be modern. He was also a highly original writer of prose poems, a discerning art critic, and a pioneering translator of Edgar Allan Poe.

*Les Fleurs du Mal*, his major work, was influenced by the French romantic poets of the early nineteenth century; it is formally close to the contemporary Parnassians, but is psychologically and sexually complex. Baudelaire’s is a poetics of the imagination, blending irony and lyricism, intellect and feeling. He had an urban sensibility and was a *flâneur* and dandy, an admirer of the artificial as opposed to the natural; his fascination with horror, sexual perversity, death and decay is balanced by a sensitivity to beauty and suffering which invests many of his poems with a subversive spirituality.

Much of the literary world of the time was outraged by his work, and he and his publisher and printer were successfully prosecuted for obscenity, with six of the poems being suppressed in France until 1949. One of the condemned poems was ‘Femmes damnées: *Delphine et Hippolyte*’. This is one of two poems with the same main title and which has been variously translated as ‘Lesbians’, ‘Condemned Women’, ‘Women Accurst’, ‘Women Cast Out’, ‘Women Damned’, or in the case of the longer poem simply as ‘Delphine and Hippolyta’. The nineteenth-century negative moral attitude towards lesbianism now poses something of a problem for the translator, particularly with the title, and also with the last five stanzas which were a late addition to placate the censor – unsuccessfully, as it happened. I have side-stepped the issue a little with my translation of the title but have, of course, been as true as I could to the text of the final five stanzas, which are at least softened by the last line.

In translating Baudelaire, I have kept to traditional verse form because rhythm, musicality and pace are intrinsic to Baudelaire’s poetry, but I settled for iambic pentameter rather than alexandrines, which can seem laboured in English. Since rhymes are harder to come by in English than in French I have often opted for half-rhyme, and in fact I feel this somewhat muted effect can sometimes better serve a particular poem’s ambivalent tone.

Though persevering with traditional verse form is time-consuming and frustrating, translation does bring a sense of camaraderie—when I faced a difficult choice of words, was out on a limb for a rhyme or was struggling to keep the suppleness of the French syntax, it helped to imagine Baudelaire as a somewhat sardonic presence behind my left shoulder.

## Femmes damnées

A la pâle clarté des lampes languissantes,  
Sur de profonds coussins tout imprégnés d'odeur  
Hippolyte rêvait aux caresses puissantes  
Qui levaient le rideau de sa jeune candeur.

Elle cherchait, d'un oeil troublé par la tempête,  
De sa naïveté le ciel déjà lointain,  
Ainsi qu'un voyageur qui retourne la tête  
Vers les horizons bleus dépassés le matin.

De ses yeux amortis les paresseuses larmes,  
L'air brisé, la stupeur, la morne volupté,  
Ses bras vaincus, jetés comme de vaines armes,  
Tout servait, tout paraît sa fragile beauté.

Etendue à ses pieds, calme et pleine de joie,  
Delphine la couvait avec des yeux ardents,  
Comme un animal fort qui surveille une proie,  
Après l'avoir d'abord marquée avec les dents.

Beauté forte à genoux devant la beauté frêle,  
Superbe, elle humait voluptueusement  
Le vin de son triomphe, et s'allongeait vers elle,  
Comme pour recueillir un doux remerciement.

Elle cherchait dans l'oeil de sa pâle victime  
Le cantique muet que chante le plaisir  
Et cette gratitude infinie et sublime  
qui sort de la paupière ainsi qu'un long soupir.

→Hippolyte, cher coeur, que dis-tu de ces choses?  
Comprends-tu maintenant qu'il ne faut pas offrir  
L'holocauste sacré de tes premières roses  
Aux souffles violents qui pourraient les flétrir?

Mes baisers sont légers comme ces éphémères  
Qui caressent le soir les grands lacs transparents,  
Et ceux de ton amant creuseront leurs ornières  
Comme des chariots ou des socs déchirants;

Ils passeront sur toi comme un lourd attelage  
De chevaux et de boeufs aux sabots sans pitié...  
Hippolyte, ô ma soeur! tourne donc ton visage,  
Toi, mon âme et mon coeur, mon tout et ma moitié,

## Delphine and Hippolyte

Softly bathed in the lamp's declining light,  
Hippolyte lay on cushions thick with scent,  
reliving all the pleasures of the night,  
her candour vanished and her freshness spent,

and searching out with stormy troubled eyes  
an innocent world already far away,  
as a traveller casts a lingering last gaze  
towards the blue horizon of yesterday.

Her heavy eyes, wet with tears of ease,  
her broken look, her sad voluptuousness,  
her vanquished arms flung out, of no more use,  
all enhanced her fragile loveliness.

Spread out beside her feet, replete with joy,  
Delphine watched over her with smouldering eyes  
as a brooding lioness will guard her prey,  
having first tooth-marked that helpless prize.

The strong beauty, kneeling before the frail,  
proudly, sensuously, with each breath drank  
the wine of triumph, then in mute appeal  
stretched out close to Hippolyte for thanks.

Pleasure's a canticle that needs no word;  
she searched her pallid victim's half-closed eyes  
for the heavenly and infinite gratitude  
that lifts from lowered eyelids like faint sighs.

'My Hippolyte, what do you say of this?  
Tell me, do you understand at last  
you need not waste the gift of your first flowers  
on rough winds that would wither them to dust?

These kisses light on you as damselflies  
skim over a shining lake at close of day;  
those of a man would furrow you like ploughs  
or carve deep ruts like carts in muddy clay.

They'd drive across you like an oxen team  
churning their hooves, pitilessly cruel.  
O Hippolyte, my sister, turn from them,  
you, my heart and soul, my twin, my all.

Tourne vers moi tes yeux pleins d'azur et d'étoiles!  
Pour un de ces regards charmants, baume divin,  
Des plaisirs plus obscurs je lèverai les voiles,  
Et je t'endormirai dans un rêve sans fin!»

Mais Hippolyte alors, levant sa jeune tête:  
→«Je ne suis point ingrate et ne me repens pas,  
Ma Delphine, je souffre et je suis inquiète,  
Comme après un nocturne et terrible repas.

Je sens fondre sur moi de lourdes épouvantes  
Et de noirs bataillons de fantômes épars,  
Qui veulent me conduire en des routes mouvantes  
Qu'un horizon sanglant ferme de toutes parts.

Avons-nous donc commis une action étrange?  
Explique, si tu peux, mon trouble et mon effroi :  
Je frissonne de peur quand tu me dis: «Mon ange!»  
Et cependant je sens ma bouche aller vers toi.

Ne me regarde pas ainsi, toi, ma pensée!  
Toi que j'aime à jamais, ma soeur d'élection,  
Quand même tu serais une embûche dressée  
Et le commencement de ma perdition!»

Delphine secouant sa crinière tragique,  
Et comme trépigant sur le trépied de fer,  
L'oeil fatal, répondit d'une voix despotique:  
→«Qui donc devant l'amour ose parler d'enfer?

Maudit soit à jamais le rêveur inutile  
Qui voulut le premier, dans sa stupidité,  
S'éprenant d'un problème insoluble et stérile,  
Aux choses de l'amour mêler l'honnêteté!

Celui qui veut unir dans un accord mystique  
L'ombre avec la chaleur, la nuit avec le jour,  
Ne chauffera jamais son corps paralytique  
A ce rouge soleil que l'on nomme l'amour!

Va, si tu veux, chercher un fiancé stupide;  
Cours offrir un coeur vierge à ses cruels baisers;  
Et, pleine de remords et d'horreur, et livide,  
Tu me rapporteras tes seins stigmatisés...

Fix on me, instead, those azure eyes  
whose starry depths can bless me like a balm.  
I'll lift the veil on darker joys than these  
then cradle you in a sleep of endless dream.'

Hippolyte raised up her youthful head,  
'I'm not ungrateful. No, not in the least,  
but I feel sad, Delphine, and so afraid,  
as if I've shared some sinister night feast.

Terror's cast on me its leaden weight  
and scattered ghosts are gathering in black hordes  
to lead me down a treacherous shifting route.  
Blood-red horizons loom on either side.

Have we done wrong, does shame now share our bed?  
Tell me, if you can, what are these fears?  
You call me 'angel' and I shake with dread  
yet straight away my mouth is drawn to yours.

Don't look at me like that, my dearest thought,  
you whom I love more than a sister. Even  
though you may be the snare in which I'm caught,  
the means by which I'll fall away from heaven.'

With flashing eyes, Delphine threw back her hair,  
shaking like the oracle on her stool,  
and cried in a harsh despotical voice, 'How dare  
anyone in love's presence speak of hell?

I curse forever the first fatuous fool  
who got caught up, in his stupidity,  
with an insoluble problem, sterile, null—  
no one can square off love and honesty.

There is a mystical accord, some claim,  
that marries night with day, shade with fire,  
but those poor paralytics never warm  
their limbs in the red sun we call desire.

Go give your virgin heart to some dull man,  
see for yourself how cruel his touch will be,  
then sick with shocked remorse, try, if you can,  
to bring your branded bosom back to me.

On ne peut ici-bas contenter qu'un seul maître!›  
Mais l'enfant, épanchant une immense douleur,  
Cria soudain: – «Je sens s'élargir dans mon être  
Un abîme béant ; cet abîme est mon cœur!

Brûlant comme un volcan, profond comme le vide!  
Rien ne rassasiera ce monstre gémissant  
Et ne rafraîchira la soif de l'Euménide  
Qui, la torche à la main, le brûle jusqu'au sang.

Que nos rideaux fermés nous séparent du monde,  
Et que la lassitude amène le repos!  
Je veux m'anéantir dans ta gorge profonde,  
Et trouver sur ton sein la fraîcheur des tombeaux!›

– Descendez, descendez, lamentables victimes,  
Descendez le chemin de l'enfer éternel!  
Plongez au plus profond du gouffre, où tous les crimes,  
Flagellés par un vent qui ne vient pas du ciel,

Bouillonnent pêle-mêle avec un bruit d'orage.  
Ombres folles, courez au but de vos désirs;  
Jamais vous ne pourrez assouvir votre rage,  
Et votre châtiment naîtra de vos plaisirs.

Jamais un rayon frais n'éclaira vos cavernes;  
Par les fentes des murs des miasmes fiévreux  
Filtrent en s'enflammant ainsi que des lanternes  
Et pénètrent vos corps de leurs parfums affreux.

L'âpre stérilité de votre jouissance  
Altère votre soif et roidit votre peau,  
Et le vent furibond de la concupiscence  
Fait claquer votre chair ainsi qu'un vieux drapeau.

Loin des peuples vivants, errantes, condamnées,  
A travers les déserts courez comme les loups;  
Faites votre destin, âmes désordonnées,  
Et fuyez l'infini que vous portez en vous!

You serve one master here or none at all!  
But the young girl, in her anguish, blurted out  
'It feels as if a hungry, gaping hole  
is opening up in me; that hole's my heart,

a fiery, seething crater deep as the void!  
And it's insatiable, a moaning beast  
that shall be torched to the last drop of blood,  
for nothing will satisfy the Furies' thirst.

At least this weariness may bring us rest;  
far from the world, here in our curtained room,  
I long to lose myself against your breast  
and sense against your skin the chilly tomb.'

—Go down and deeper down, my piteous ones,  
towards eternal hell, here is the path.  
Plunge to the very lowest depths where sins  
whipped on by winds from neither heaven nor earth

howl like a raging gale, spin pell-mell.  
Run the gamut of passion, grasp in vain  
for final peace; even as you fulfil  
each new desire, fresh punishment is born.

Clear rays of light will never reach your caverns;  
filtering in through fissures in the walls,  
sick miasmas flaring up like lanterns  
will bathe you in a perfume that appalls.

Your bitter sterile joy will turn to dust,  
will torture you with thirst, will seam and sag  
your weary skin as the raging wind of lust  
slaps your flesh about like a drooping flag.

Far from the tribes of men, condemned by all,  
Run, like wolves, the desert of your sin.  
Make your own destiny, disordered souls,  
and flee the infinite you bear within.

# Christopher Brennan's 'Piae Memoriae': a Translation

MICHAEL BUHAGIAR

PIAE MEMORIAE  
PRAECEPTORIS DILECTISSIMI  
R. P. PATR. KEATING S. I.  
DISCIPULUS MAERENS  
C. B.

TO THE SACRED MEMORY  
OF A MOST BELOVED TEACHER  
REVEREND FATHER PATRICK KEATING S.J.  
FROM HIS GRIEVING DISCIPLE  
C. B.

Εἴ τιν' επιχθονίων χρῆν μὲν τραφέντ' ἐν  
παντοδαπαῖς ἀρεταῖς  
Μοισᾶν θ' ἀπαλαῖς βοτάναις ἐσλοῖς ὑπο  
τερπνᾷ νεότατος ἐν ὥραι προσπελα-  
σθέντ' ἀγλαίαις ἀταλαῖς  
ὑμῶν χάριν σπένδειν γλυκεῖαν μὴ κακὰν  
τιμὰν ἐπ' ἀποικομένοις εὐεργέταις  
ἀμφοδὸν δειξαντ' ἀφ' οἴων ἐξέβλασταν·

τῷ καὶ ἐγὼ σέ, πάτερ, ψυχᾷ τὸ θεῖόν  
μοι καταθέντα ποτέ  
θρηνεῖν ἐθέλων ὑπὲρ ὧραν αἶρομαι  
μὴ δὴ δακρύων ἔτι λοιβὰν προφρόνως  
αἶνον δὲ ταφαῖς ἐρατὸν  
κρατῆρος ἀφνειᾶν ἀοιδᾶν ἐκχέαντ-  
α ξυνὰ φιλοφροσυνᾶν εὐηράτων  
τᾶν πάρος μναμεῖα θέσθαι καλλίνικα

εὐσεβῆς, θαητὸν εἶδος  
καὶ φρέν' ἀκοινοτέραν  
ἦπιον τ' ἀρχῆς τρόπον ἄμμι πιφαύσκων  
ἐξ ὁσίων ἠθέων,  
οὐ θάνατος σὲ δαμαῖ-  
μνήμην τε γὰρ ἐγκατέλειπας φιλτάταν  
στήθεσιν ἠθέων,  
ἔργοις δ' ἐνίκησας τ' ἀρεταῖς τε τεαῖς  
τὸν βροτῶν πάγκοινων αἰπὺν δέκτορ' Ἄιδαν.

If fate should ordain a man from among mortals  
to grow rich on manifold  
finenesses, and be brought by mentors in the joy-  
ful time of youth to the rich fields of the Muses,  
at length to pour for your sakes  
sweet unflawed honour in innocent beauties on  
the great authors of old, then in revealing them  
without disguise he would show whence he had sprung.

So I too, wishing to sing a lament for you,  
Father, who once implanted  
perfection in my soul, take up, though indeed not  
zealously, this offering of tears and, pouring  
out loving praise at your graveside,  
the rich song of the bowl, dedicate to you, sir,  
the beautifully victorious memories  
that we all share, too soon, the warm radiance of

lovely things. And as I summon  
your striking form, your rare mind,  
your gentle manner of authority to us,  
from a hallowed time of youth,  
death does not overcome you.  
For having left a most beloved memory  
in the hearts of youths, you have  
conquered by your deeds and virtues the steep recept-  
ive Hell that is the lot of common humanity.

Christopher Brennan's lament for Father Patrick Keating, his first teacher of Greek, was first published in *Alma Mater*, the yearbook of St. Ignatius College, Riverview, in 1913, after Keating's death on 22 May of that year. A. R. Chisholm and J. J. Quinn later included it in their landmark *The Verse of Christopher Brennan* (1960: 234). In neither instance, however, was it accompanied by a translation; and, given the heartfelt depths from which it was composed, and the importance of the Greek tradition to Brennan's inner life, I thought it worthy of being rendered broadly appreciable by Brennan's admirers and scholars.

Consequent on the early formative experience of encountering Father Keating at Riverview ('easily the most distinguished personality that I have ever met, a standard whereby to test and judge all others') (Clark 1980: 18) in 1886, at the age of fourteen, Brennan pursued for several years a scholarly fascination with Aeschylus, widely acknowledged as the greatest dramatist of the Classical age, which culminated in the publication in the *Journal of Philology* (1894) of his paper 'On the manuscripts of Aeschylus'. However, he would temporarily abandon this allegiance in 1894, shortly before the inception of his quest for the esoteric wisdom of the Hebrew goddess Lilith, with the Gnostics, William Blake, and moderns such as Swinburne and Mallarmé as his mentors. This quest would reach its fruition in *The Forest of Night* (1898-99), the central and longest movement of his magnum opus *Poems 1913*. The period of his renunciation of the Classics would last for approximately seven years, until the turn of the century. Axel Clark has demonstrated the resumption of Brennan's Classical interests at about this time (1980: 186); and I have shown elsewhere (2012) that *The Wanderer*, a significant portion of which was completed in 1902, is written entirely in a Greek lyric metre, as an expression of his return to materiality as a basis for the metaphysical quest, under the influence of the philosopher F. C. S. Schiller. Brennan's deeply emotional reaction to Father Keating's death (he broke down in tears at the graveside), and his dedication of this Greek poem, in the style of Pindar, to his mentor's memory, support the conclusion that Greek did in fact remain important to him, at least until 1916, in spite of his formal position at Sydney University being in German. *The Wanderer's* epigraph '1902—' is consistent with this scenario. Brennan candidly acknowledges in the fact that threnody to Keating the definitive influence of that adolescent experience on the *Bildung* of the adult man. Given the centrality to *Poems 1913* of Brennan's response to Greek, as I have shown, (Feb. 2012) this confession is of significance.

In translating this poem I had three aims: to replicate precisely the syllabics of the original; to translate every word that Brennan wrote; and to produce of it respectable English poetry. This triangulation promised, if successful, to lead to a worthwhile rendering. I can say that I succeeded completely in the first aim, and almost completely in the second. My canny selection of the word 'respectable' instead of, say, the suicidal 'inspiring', gave me a certain margin of error in the third aim. Undoubtedly it reads a little stiltedly in parts; but loosening it up would have impacted on the second aim, and I chose faithfulness to Brennan's words as being more important. I omitted only one word of the original, namely εὐσεβής, *eusebes* ('pious') (line 17). I felt that the cost to the harmony of the translation of including it would

have been quite high, and the benefit low, as Brennan's piety toward his subject is strongly implied in almost every line of the poem.

**Some notes on the translation:**

1. In line 5, I have translated ἀγλαίαις ἀταλαίς, *aglaiais atalais*, as 'in innocent beauties'. Interestingly, Brennan mentions in an essay on Mallarmé: 'The instinctive innocent soul (ἀταλαὶ φρένες, *l'anima semplicetta che sa 'nulla'*) knows nought of the ills of life: it must have been "stung with the splendour" of a higher sphere.' (1962: 362).
2. In line 6, I take ὑμῶν, *hymon* ('your'), to refer to the readers of *Alma Mater*, namely the boys of Riverview.
3. In line 8 I have translated ἀμφαδὸν, *amphadon*, as 'without disguise', to convey the sense of removing by translation the mask of obscurity from a foreign language.
4. In line 9, the strict meaning of τὸ θεῖόν, *to theion*, is 'divinity'. I have rendered it as "perfection", which was the divine (Greek rather than Christian) quality that Brennan most associated with Father Keating. Clark tells us that 'In Brennan's descriptions of Father Keating, his 'perfection' is emphasised more than any other characteristic' (18).
5. In line 16, the memories are καλλίνικα, *kallinika* ('beautifully victorious') because they conquer death, as Brennan will affirm again in line 21.
6. The technique of enjambement can look facile and lazy in English poetry, but it was a staple of Greek. I have used it (lines 3 and 24) sparingly and I hope judiciously, as did Brennan (lines 4 and 14).

*I am indebted to my friend Dr. John Scahill, formerly Professor of English at Keio University, Japan, and an exceptional Greek scholar, for his helpful suggestions, which greatly benefited the untangling of Brennan's unusually challenging syntax.*

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