

Translation for the Stage: Product and Process

1

‘We have here indeed what may very probably be the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos’.¹ I.A. Richards’ famously hyperbolic description of literary translation derives from his view of works of literature as ‘vastly complex systems’, a view that in turn, of course, informs the approach of the New Critics that his work pioneers.² Richards’ sense of the rich connotative functions of language and of the multiple textures of its constituent elements led him to consider the extent to which given translations enable the ‘interanimation of words’ to be transferred from one language to another.³ The practice of mapping translated onto original texts that, accordingly, he advocates in his 1953 essay ‘Toward a Theory of Translating’ was to prove singularly unhelpful in that it encouraged generations of reviewers to pin what is inevitably their own version of a ‘perfect understanding’ of the complexities of the source text onto a target text that they view as duty bound to reformulate exactly that understanding. There is an authoritarianism in this, as there is probably in any close-reading model, to the extent that inherent in it is the pre-supposition that only one interpretative line is valid, that there is a single correct response to the complex conundrum of what a literary text is communicating.

¹ I.A. Richards, ‘Toward a Theory of Translating’, in Arthur Wright (ed), *Studies in Chinese Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp.247-262.

² I.A. Richards, ‘Art and Science’, *Complementarities. Uncollected Essays* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1976), pp.3-6.

³ I.A. Richards, ‘Semantics’, *Complementarities*, pp.98-107. See also John Paul Russo’s Introduction, esp. pp.16-17.

James Joyce had reason to resent more than most any spurious claim to absolute objectivity. His work throughout constitutes an onslaught on the sort of linguistic fundamentalism that at one moment of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* he voices through the ten-year old Stephen Dedalus:

God was God's name just as his name was Stephen. *Dieu* was the French for God and that was God's name too; and when anyone prayed to God and said *Dieu* then God knew it was a French person that was praying... still God always remained the same God and God's real name was God.

The implications of this for translation are interesting. The possibility of exact linguistic equivalence is established, only to be demolished by its immediate association with what Stephen Bonnycastle refers to as Stephen's 'appealing simplification of the world', meaning that what our language allows us to see provides the inevitable standpoint from which we judge, understand and, just as frequently, misrepresent and reject the other.⁴ The problem with any system that allows the possibility of what Richards calls 'complete viewing', a God-like perspective, is that, while all equivalences are notionally equal, the one that comes clothed in our own language system tends to assume the quality of original truth.⁵

Much theoretical work since Richards has continued to interrogate his key assumptions of equivalence and the univocal nature of 'correct' reader response, calling into question the security of the bases from which his view of the translated text derives.⁶ Edwin Gentzler is

⁴ Stephen Bonnycastle, *In Search of Authority* (Ontario: Broadview, 1996), esp. Chapter 1.

⁵ Richards, 'Toward a Theory of Translating'.

⁶ An early example is Willard Quine's *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960). More recent and more concise is Roger Bell's 'Equivalence and Fidelity: Of What, to What or to Whom? Some Pseudo-Problems of Translation Theory', in Malcolm Coulthard and Patricia Odber de Baubeta (eds), *The Knowledges of the Translator* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Mellen, 1996), pp.31-52.

particularly swingeing in his view that Richards' essay reads 'as a desperate play to retain power within the institution in light of new theoretical developments'. Such power was rooted in the control of language itself, a control that in the specific context of translation maintained itself through an inter-textual paradigm of clear subservience. In contradistinction, empirical evidence suggests that, as Genzler observes, translations tend to respond to 'laws that are unique to the mode of translation itself',⁷ and in doing so they open up new heterogeneous perspectives that breach the barriers of our linguistic and cultural homogeneity. If we move away from translation as product, as the sort of linguistic big bang so admired by Richards, and think of it instead in terms of process, as a process of understanding and writing the other, then its central relationship with alterity, with otherness, asserts translation as one of the central methods of our times, a compelling paradigm of our modernity.

2

In *Translations* (1980), Brian Friel put translation centre stage, both as a dramatic device for exploring the mapping of one culture's political and military power over another, which of course translation is well equipped to do, but also – in the wake of his seminal reading of Steiner's *After Babel* – as a paradigm for an Irish modernity that would recognise Irishness without being constrained within it. In 1980, of course, many of us who lived in the North invested the history around us with the force of an ineluctable tragic destiny, a chain of seismic events erupting along the fault-line of cultural and religious difference, force-

⁷ Edwin Genzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001), p.15.

marching us towards ever-wider conflict. At a time when hope had grown mechanical and the historical imagination myopic, Field Day, the theatre company set up by Brian Friel and the actor/director Stephen Rea specifically to stage *Translations* in Derry's Guild Hall, urged us explicitly to 'imagine alternatives', and over the next ten years, through a programme of plays that included an unusually large number of translations, brought different perspectives and challenging visions from outside to bear.

A core conviction of the Field Day project was that theatre and translations offer important opportunities for intercultural activity. One of the reasons for accepting the cultural basis of much recent translation theory is because we recognise, as Gentzler implies, that plays acquire new meanings and new frames of reference as they migrate across time and space.⁸ There is a whole body of epistemological linguistics, however, that supports both Steiner the theorist and Friel the artist in their informing sense that it is a community's deep appetite for maintaining rather than sharing its secrets that is the shaping contour of individual languages and cultures. In confronting Ireland's particular Babel – which is surely the dyadic myth of ethnic opposition – *Translations* proposes a process of understanding the other, of moving outwards from a 'linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of fact', as the hedge-school teacher Hugh O'Donnell puts it. Tellingly, at the end of the play Jimmy Jack warns Maire, who wishes to marry the soldier Yolland, of the difficulty of escaping from the heartland of a culture, of crossing boundaries:

⁸ One of the most fascinating phenomena of the Irish stage of the last couple of decades, by way of example, is that between 1984 and 1997 there have been over a dozen major adaptations of classical Greek plays, profiling a period which has seen some of the most remarkable changes in the recent history of the island – socially in the Republic, politically in the North.

Do you know the Greek word *endogamein*? It means to marry within the tribe. And the word *exogamein* means to marry outside the tribe. And you don't cross those borders casually – both sides get very angry. Now, the problem is this: Is Athene sufficiently mortal or am I sufficiently godlike for the marriage to be acceptable to her people and to my people? You think about that.

But this is offset by Hugh O'Donnell's willingness to teach Maire English:

We'll begin tomorrow. But don't expect too much. I will provide you with the available words and the available grammar. But will that help you to interpret between privacies? I have no idea. But it's all we have. I have no idea at all.⁹

The teaching of English in the hedge school marks a moment of what old-fashioned Marxists might call dialectic shift, of what cultural theorists are more likely to refer to as paradigm change. Historically, it is the recognition of a time of transition, of the need to understand otherness.

But the question remains: how do we interpret between privacies, between and across different belief systems and cultural assumptions? This is where Steiner emphasises the importance of the hermeneutic motion – a hermeneut being an early ecclesiastical interpreter whose task it was to translate and promote understanding across the great religions of the medieval world. The Sephardic philosopher Maimonides wrote in a letter in 1199:

The translator must, above all, clarify the development of thought in the original, then write it, comment upon it, and explain it so that the same process of thought is clear and comprehensible in the new language. That is how Hunain ben Ishaq translated Galen and his son Ishaq translated Aristotle...¹⁰

⁹ Brian Friel, *Translations*, in Seamus Deane (ed), *Friel: Selected Plays* (London: Faber, 1984), p.418.

¹⁰ Quoted in Miguel Angel Vega (ed), *Textos clásicos de teoría de la traducción* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1994). My translation.

This is the early spirit of the Renaissance. It is an acknowledgment of the lessons – in this case, medical and poetic – that may be learned from varied experience. In this sense, an act of translation, of which the staging of a play is a particularly sophisticated example, is the paradigm for the new possibilities of relationships between cultures, holding out the hope of transcending the specificities of history, race, language and time. It is a recognition that, from that point on, identity would be increasingly forged through diaspora and difference.

3

The hedge-school in *Translations* provides a forceful image of what a university can and should be. Under Hugh O’ Donnell’s stewardship it is a group of people in search of disinterested learning across a variety of disciplines, most particularly through a network of linguistic encounter; disinterested but not unconnected, necessarily alive to the shifting patterns of the cultural landscape that is being re-mapped and re-named around it. The play ends with an image of looking outwards from the cultural matrix. In a recent essay, the French translator Jean-Charles Vegliante refers to translation as ‘mon Eurydice’, a suggestive image that reminds us that, no matter how comforting the backward glance, no matter how compelling, translation is only genuinely possible when it keeps its gaze resolutely fixed on the crossings still to be negotiated.¹¹ Yet in many of our universities we continue to dwell behind the frontiers drawn up by nineteenth-century philology, so that translation is still abused in many of our language classes in the search for linguistic equivalence. This post-

¹¹ Jean-Charles Vegliante, ‘Traduction et traductologie’, in *Les écrivains italiens et leurs traducteurs français* (Press Universitaires de Caen, 1996), pp.55-70. Quoted by Peter Broome, in ‘Translating the Untranslatable’, in Christopher Shorley and Maeve McCusker (eds), *Reading Across the Lines* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2000), p.70.

Richards degradation of translation into an act of interlingual photocopying, in which the sole issue at stake is that of fidelity, (challenged over 800 years ago by Maimonides, the first among many others), has led to translation being seen as a mechanical rather than creative activity. This is a view that still holds much sway. The fact that we talk most commonly about *doing* translations, rather than *making*, *writing* or *creating* them, implies the relegation of translation to a subset of writing.

The word ‘creating’ may require some explanation in this context. Among translation practitioners there is a perceptibly growing impatience with systems theorists, principally because many propose inflexible paradigms of text and of the relationship between text and translation, tending to derive from simulacra rooted in the unusual, the relatively rare occurrence, the margins of process. This is to ignore the default activities of translation, and in doing so it gives a blank cheque to those who choose to prescribe theory from a particular perspective or a specific body of knowledge. In reality, translation theory spans a number of disciplines – from applied linguistics via reception aesthetics to comparative literary and intercultural theory – and the translator brings a series of different knowledges to his or her work – linguistic, metalinguistic, textual, contextual, generic and world. In Nicholas Round’s memorable metaphor, translation emerges from ‘interlocking the voids’ between these knowledges; in other words, of not allowing the potentialities of language in the source text to fall between the gaps.¹² In this crucial sense, to refer to the creative struggle of everyday

¹² Nicholas G Round, ‘“Interlocking the Voids”: The Knowledges of the Translator’, in Coulthard and Baubeta, *Knowledges*. In another way, of course, Round’s telling phrase already speaks of the way in which

literary translation does not imply untrammelled translator subjectivity; rather, it describes a complex series of analyses to which translators subject the original work so that they can create similar solutions and achieve similar effects within the constraints of their own language system, as well as providing a standpoint from which to judge the validity and efficacy of inevitable *trouvailles*. It is perhaps not unlike creativity in theoretical mathematics, where the speculative and imaginative exist in constant dialectic with the accepted patterns and propositions of current theorems. Certainly this brings a new perspective to bear on Wittgenstein's view that 'Translation from one language into another is a mathematical task, and the translation of a lyrical poem, for example, into a foreign language is quite analogous to a mathematical problem'. It is not simply a question of applying a consistent set of principles because, as Michael Cronin has noted in this specific context, 'there are undecidable propositions, statements or cases outside the remit of theory'.¹³ But a different interpretation of Wittgenstein's otherwise apparently naïve assertion is that it re-frames the relationship between creativity and constraint in the process through which thought is translated into words, and texts translated across languages.

4

Guillermo Cabrera Infante's maxim that 'writers rush in where translators fear to tread' reflects the Cuban-born novelist's impatience with traditional New Critical approaches to the translation of literature. Of course, the evangelical origins of these words have

practising translators frequently resort to metaphor in order to accommodate in their theorising the various universes of discourse through which they travel in their praxis.

¹³ Michael Cronin. 'The Anatomy of Chaos: Translation Theory and the Trainee Translator', *Teanga: The Irish Yearbook of Applied Linguistics* 11 (1991), pp.66-67.

encouraged many academic translators to see in them a defence of philological caution, but Cabrera Infante's meaning is characteristically subversive. He is fundamentally concerned to establish creativity as central to the translation process and, through that, to highlight the renewing effect that translations may have on both the writer and the receiving culture. At its best, translation is at once a refusal to accept that we are born into and live in little worlds of our own that border only on silence, as well as a celebration of that journey towards otherness that lies also at the heart of the experience of theatre, perhaps above all other forms.

Writing for performance signifies that the translator is, in this sense, a writer and at every stage of production process must function as a writer. In the case of theatre, the creativity of the writer, or translator *qua* writer, is not limited to the prior preparation of a blueprint for performance, but instead is more consistently and certainly more wholly engaged in the interactive practice of theatre-making which, like all interactive practices, is subject to a continual process of cultural re-evaluation. This takes us into the heart of the difference between the philological translator, whose work is essentially literary, and the theatre translator, whose endeavour is geared specifically towards the *mise-en-scène*. In some ways, this is a difference that can be boiled down to product and process. Philological translation fixes upon the result, while the theatre translator, like the playwright, is at least as aware of the process that has led to this result. Translation study that ignores the difficulties of writing (rather than doing) a translation runs the risk of prescribing the fruitless, indulging in what Dürrenmatt called the 'obstinate proclamation of laws which are no laws'.¹⁴

¹⁴ Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Writings on Theatre and Drama* (London: Cape, 1976), p.61.

It is at this point, of course, that the process of translating for the stage parts company from other forms of literary translation, to the same degree as indeed playwriting differs, for example, from the writing of prose or poetry. The translator who is concerned to rescue Eurydice from the netherworld of incommunication and bring her to the other shores of live performance will, of necessity, develop strategies and engage in negotiations that might well be more difficult to justify in other branches of literary translation.¹⁵ Translators, as well as directors, tend to love the plays they are preparing for performance. Very often, however, the act of translation, no less than the act of staging a play, requires a marked degree of irreverence – a gaze that tends more to the outwards and onwards. As Iris Murdoch wrote in one of her last novels, *The Sea, The Sea*:

In the other arts we can blame the client; he is stupid, unsophisticated, inattentive, dull. But the theatre must, if need be, stoop and stoop until it attains that direct, that universal communication which other artists can afford to seek more deviously and at their ease.¹⁶

Murdoch's use of the word 'client' is striking here. On one hand, of course, it is an ironic echoing of consumerist discourse. But this does not invalidate the truism that lies at the heart of the words that, in her novel, are attributed to a successful theatre director. 'Client', rather than the metonymic 'spectator', brings an irresistible echo of *Skopos* theorists, whose functionalist insistence on translation for a purpose implies what is tantamount to a

¹⁵ That is not to say that prose translation somehow requires less creative input from the translator. John Rutherford, for example, has every right to consider himself as playing second-writer to Cervantes. But the strategies employed will vary considerably.

¹⁶ See my article 'The Clothing of Words: the Verbal and the Paraverbal in the Translation of Drama', in *Donaire* 8 (London: 1997), 23-32.

contractual relationship with the ‘initiator’ of the translation.¹⁷ In the case of the stage translator, the initiator is the commissioning director/company/group of actors and the receiving audience, both of whom bring to the process a horizon of expectations (the ‘other shores’) that the translator must reach, indeed surpass, if the play is to be judged ‘successful’.¹⁸

5

There is, therefore, a different degree and range of involvement in the work of the theatre translator. The complex series of analyses, referred to above, that the translator undertakes as part of his or her creative struggle acts as an axiom of frames, each of which informs the next, each of which engages with all of the different knowledges of the translator, and which taken together form a filter of analysis through which the ultimate performability of the piece is ensured.¹⁹ There is an important pedagogical dimension to this, which is not to say that good translating, like all creative writing, does not have its own component of idiolectic style and mystery. But it is certainly true that there is also an underlying technique that can be discerned, and that such a technique may illuminate the mysteries of the original text and of the expressive potential these mysteries excite in the translator’s native language.

In many ways this balance between inspiration and technique is immediately reminiscent of actor training. Both actor and translator, at the most general level, are part of a

¹⁷ See, for example, Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation*, p.73.

¹⁸ The very useful concept of the ‘horizon of expectations’ of the audience was first used by Hans-Robert Jauss. See Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. pp.142, 156.

¹⁹ See also my article ‘Language and Stage-Language’, in Sonia Bravo (ed), *Encuentro Internacional de la Traducción* (Las Palmas: Universidad de Las Palmas, 2002). Electronic publication.

collaborative project which itself takes the form of a number of translational interactions and exchanges processes which are both intra- and inter-lingual, moving as they do within and across the various languages which together constitute the discourse of performance. In the case of actor and translator alike, this axiom of frames configures a paradigm of performance, which, in the case of stage translation, means – perhaps to state the obvious – that the central objective of the translator is to communicate the experience of theatre encoded into the original playtext rather than the letter of the text itself. This translator works to a ‘theatrics’ (by analogy with ‘poetics’) at whose heart is the performability of the text, a theatrics that renders explicit and, if the translator so chooses, theorises what the creative writer does consciously and unconsciously. It provides a process that in many ways may be seen as allowing the translator to mimic and re-create that original creativity with as much dramatic energy and theatrical flair as possible. Both actor and translator draw upon art and technique, in varying proportions at different moments of performance and translation, in order to evoke the multiple truths that inhabit the play’s every exchange and action, and which come together to communicate the overarching ‘truth’ of performance. Losses, as conceived by traditional translation theories, may well still be incurred – this is inevitable in any process that involves transference between one mode, or form, and another. But such losses will, in all likelihood, be invisible to the receiving spectator. Moreover, they may be more than compensated for by the affirmative nature of the performance to which he or she is witness.²⁰

²⁰ See Gentzler’s account of the work of the de Campos brothers *Contemporary Translation*, p.197.

In *The Translator's Turn* (1991), Douglas Robinson argues persuasively that the literary translator, no matter how resolutely indifferent or even hostile to theory, works from what he describes as a 'dialogical' model of interaction between original and re-created texts.²¹ Such a model allows the translator to employ a wide range of intuitive, creative and re-creative strategies in order to maximise the literary qualities/reception of the new text.²² Robinson's punning title brings us back to the central metaphor of the translator's gaze turning away from the original to the new. Ranjit Bolt's opinion that the translator is a writer who has nothing of his or her own to say throughout the translation process – or in the 'turn' towards the new text – is a simple but effective statement of the need for translator creativity.²³ But this is not to suggest that the translator somehow elects to ignore the qualities of the original. Indeed, implicit in Bolt's belief is the idea that the translator comes to read the original with the eye of a writer, rather than as a critic. Robert David MacDonald, perhaps one of the most successful of British stage translators over the last thirty years, described his translation process of García Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, as one of reading and re-reading the original so intensively that he virtually committed it to memory, and then translating that memory – that intensive reader reception – into his new text.²⁴

²¹ Douglas Robinson, *The Translator's Turn* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1991).

²² See, for example, my discussion of the character of the Doctor in Lope de Vega's *Madness in Valencia*, in David Johnston (ed), Introduction, *Stages of Translation* (Bath: Absolute Press, 1996).

²³ Ranjit Bolt, "Translating Verse Plays", in Johnston, *Stages*, pp.249-262. Bolt is one of the UK's most spectacularly successful translators of verse dramas.

²⁴ In an interview with María José Sánchez Blanco, in *Boletín de la Escuela Oficial de Idiomas* 6 (Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1988), pp.3-7.

6

The frames through which the original is analysed bring, in that sense, precision to the passion of translating; they delimit the constraints against which translational creativity will fire; they are, in their own way, a form of Richards' close-reading skills, but which, rather than leading to a unified authoritative interpretation, will produce instead simply one variant among a number of possible variants.

The first frame will, almost inevitably, focus upon what might be termed the dramatic architecture of the piece. Drama is the narrative core of theatre; the play brings together the drama of narrative shape with the various theatrical discourses of performance, capturing for the stage as it does so a vision of life, a working model or paradigm of living rather than a simple reflection of it. What this means for the translator – no less than for the actor or director – is that everything on stage is part of various patterns of significance that enable the theatrical actions to underscore and vivify the dramatic core. Such patterns of significance are crucial to spectatorship; they are key elements in ensuring that the play is received in a way that is organic and coherent, rather than piecemeal or disjointed. Any variations, distortions or dysfluencies – whether linguistic, as in the case of, for example, Valle-Inclán, or contextual, as one might find in, again by way of example, Arrabal – will therefore be securely located within these patterns of significance so that they may be identified as contrived dislocations rather than being experienced as the sort of confusions that often arise in the wake of translational timidity.

Both actors and audience will search for the patterns of significance that underlie specific choices at the level of individual words. Lorca's theatre provides very clear examples of this, unsurprisingly given its tautness of construction. The dramatic core of *Bodas de sangre* centres on the conflict of enclosure and escape, a conflict that inevitably issues into retributive violence. All of this is vivified by theatrical actions and motifs that suggest circularity and cutting, so that, for example, when one of the choral woodcutters warns that there are 'cuchillos y escopetas a diez leguas a la redonda', the translator should be aware that 'a la redonda' is not merely prepositional, but rather a poetic allusion to inevitably encroaching death, to life hemmed in.²⁵ Similarly, at the dramatic core of *La casa de Bernarda Alba* is the act of watching; the theatrical motifs, from scenic arrangements to character exchanges and paraverbal elements, that illuminate and vivify this are numerous, including recounted stories, gossip, containment, and, most significantly, the window as a metaphorical portal into a different quality of experience. It is in this context that the translator has to negotiate insults like 'mujeres ventaneras y rompedoras de su luto' or the complaint of one of the daughters that 'y ni nuestros ojos siquiera nos pertenecen', not as arbitrary or culture-specific references, but rather as integral elements functioning within one of the principal structuring patterns of the play.²⁶

Analysis of the dramatic architecture of the play is not wholly a backward-gazing task, however. The performance of any play takes place simultaneously in two connected arenas – the physical configurations of the production and, as David Hare has noted, in the air,

²⁵ Federico García Lorca, *Obras Completas* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1980), p.639.

²⁶ Lorca, *Obras Completas*, p.884.

between stage and auditorium.²⁷ The first case – where the scale or scope of performance is affected by spatial or financial constraints – is, ethically at least, as much an issue for the translator’s competence as for the director’s.²⁸ Most commonly, in a theatre environment that is starved of resources, translators may be asked to reduce the number of characters, cut scenes, or make character doubling more logistically feasible. In a sense, with its insistence on the idea of translation as a contractual commission, *Skopos* theory may be considered to have already foreseen this possibility. It may be, too, that some translators prefer not to become involved with production decisions of this nature. But in doing so they should be aware that they are abrogating both their rights and their responsibilities. Whether they choose to think of themselves as the writers/creators/initiators of the new text, or as interpreters/followers of the original, what is clear is that the process of translating will have given them an insight into the play’s shaping patterns and the arc of character development that bears uniquely direct relation to the primary experience of the writer. It is this experience that may – and should – validate or challenge production decisions, most particularly throughout rehearsals, in which increasing emphasis is being laid upon the writer as one element in the collaborative theatre-making process.²⁹

The second instance is more properly concerned with the key question of complicity.

In terms of both stage language and situation, plays tend to present a shifting balance of the

²⁷ David Hare, *Writing left-handed* (London: Faber, 1991), pp.24-37.

²⁸ Indeed, it is not unusual for a translator to be asked to re-adapt an existing version for these very reasons. There is a marked difference, for example, between the *Blood Wedding* script I prepared for Communicado’s 1988 production, with 10 actors, and Bruiser’s 2003 production, with 6.

²⁹ See my article ‘Securing the Performability of the Play in Translation’, in Holger Klein and Sabine Coeltsch (eds), *Translation and Performance* (Salzburg: Salzburg University Press). In press at time of writing.

familiar and the unfamiliar, each serving as an optic into the other, together drawing the spectator into a journey that is simultaneously into the self and the other. Put in these terms, this appears to pose a simple choice between domesticating or foreignising the play in question. The translator must balance the possibility of re-location, which offers a unique method of profiling the receiving culture, with the opportunities for intercultural resonance that foreignising strategies bring. There is no right or wrong to this. Indeed, in a genre like theatre, characterised as it has been over the last century by myriad forms and focuses, and by a refusal to privilege any one form or event over another, it would be out of keeping to try to formulate any such law. Increasingly, indeed, translators tend to present plays that are cultural hybrids.³⁰ There is a clear sense to this as we shed lingering notions of the universal and develop more sophisticated ways of reading the cultural embedding of texts and utterances. Indeed, there is already a sense of hybrid anticipation aroused by a publicity poster or theatre programme that announces, for example, ‘Federico García Lorca’s *Yerma*, in a new version by Frank McGuinness’. And, working from a so-called literal – or plain – translation, McGuinness has, in many of his translations, been careful to allow heavily marked Irish voices to engage with situations and characters much of whose original cultural embedding is left intact.

New trends in Shakespearean criticism confirm that foreign audiences’ imaginative collaboration with the performance may be most effectively engaged when the play is located

³⁰ See Sirkku Aaltonen, *Time-Sharing on Stage* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2000), esp. Chapter 1.

within a cultural interstice that is simultaneously familiar and defamiliarised.³¹ In many ways, the infinite Shakespeares who inhabit cultural crossings between, for example, Japanese Manzai and the fast and furious word-games of *Love's Labours Lost* or Southern African politics and the politicking clans of *Julius Caesar*, are an antidote to the globalised product distributed from the cultural theme park that is Stratford-upon-Avon. Indeed, it may well be that, as English-speaking audiences' own ability to understand Shakespeare's language continues to erode, the future of vivid and meaningful Shakespeare productions lies within the cultural and post-colonial subversions of translators abroad. A rose by any other name, perhaps. But there is also a clearly discernible pragmatics of theatre reception in this. A play realises its potential for meanings, whether authorially intended or not, through the interaction between the fictitious world on stage and the imaginative collaboration of the spectator. The hybrid model of play-text must permit the new audience to gain access to the secrets that the play shared with its original audience; but the granting of that access must be equally elliptical or else the play courts the risk of didacticism on one hand and stylistic normalisation on the other.

Buero Vallejo's *El sueño de la razón* provides a clear example of this. Written in 1970, at a moment in history as equally dark as the period in which the play is set, in the year when nine activists were sentenced to death in the Burgos Trials, Goya's home, the Quinta del Sordo, is an objective correlative for national unease. The play, like a number of other works by Buero, is centrally concerned to debate the role of art and the figure of the artist at a time

³¹ See, for example, José Roberto O'Shea (ed), *Ilha do desterro* 36 (São Paulo: 1999).

of unreason and political despair. Goya's words 'estas paredes rezuman miedo' are completed by the spectators' own sense of this despair.³² Like the artist, they are locked into a history over which they have no control. 'Paredes' speaks of a sense of national enclosure, virtually a topos of the Spanish radical tradition; 'walls', however, is monosemic. Goya is, of course, referring explicitly to the walls of his home, upon which he has daubed the extraordinary Black Paintings in an outpouring of his fear and disgust. But the spectators' completion of Goya's words enables a shared secret to be formulated in the place where it is at its most potent – hanging silent in the air of the theatre: terrible things are happening around us and it seems that there is little prospect of escape or change. How is the translator to give the English-speaking spectator access to all of this? 'There's fear everywhere; it comes seeping through these walls' perhaps goes some way towards it.³³

7

The next frame of analysis is once again multiple. It takes us into the very fabric of the play itself: its language. Whole bodies of theory are available here to the eclectic translator, who may dip into them in order to tease out the ultimate implications of the decisions that he or she may be taking at word level.³⁴

Firstly, the translator will be concerned with how the language of the play is organised and, following on from Robinson's characterization of a dialogic relationship between texts,

³² Antonio Buero Vallejo, *Obra Completa* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1994), p.1301.

³³ For review and discussion of the 1991 London production of *The Sleep of Reason*, see, respectively, David Johnston, 'Buero en Londres', *El Público* 88 (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1992), 108 - 110, and 'Buero Vallejo: el reto de la universalidad', in Mariano de Paco y Francisco Diez de Revenga (eds) *Antonio Buero Vallejo: dramaturgo universal* (Murcia: Caja de Murcia, 2001), pp.99 – 110.

³⁴ It is not too fanciful to suggest that such theories fulfil a similar function to rehearsals and table work as the actor prepares.

will be seeking to read and subsequently to re-write the phonetics, punctuation, and kinetic patterns of the original text. The prime goal here is to make the language performable – meaning by that the maintenance of both speakability and significance. Some early lines from *Bodas de sangre* provide a hotly debated example.³⁵ The workaday exchanges between the Bridegroom and his Mother flare into a suddenly passionate outburst – the first of many in the play – when he innocently asks for a knife to cut grapes:

Madre (*Entre dientes y buscándola*): La navaja, la navaja... Malditas sean todas y el bribón que las inventó.
Novio: Vamos a otro asunto.
Madre: Y las escopetas, y las pistolas, y el cuchillo más pequeño, y hasta las azadas y los bieldos de la era.³⁶

The Mother's first speech presents little problem. The breath pattern is well established: repetition, pause, followed by two equally weighted pieces of invective. Her second speech is, from the point of view of rhythm at least, more complex. It breaks down into five elements, each of which is introduced by a conjunctive 'y'. Elements four and five, however, flow together, signified by the fact that there is no comma to create a pause before the final conjunction. The Mother is moving from the world of dangerous weaponry into more inoffensive everyday agricultural implements – but which are, in her imagination, equally menacing. Accordingly, her delivery accelerates as her sense of indignation at the dangers of the world intensifies. Fresh from an analysis of the play's dramatic architecture, the translator is immediately aware that what is being communicated here is the fear of cutting – her next

³⁵ I am thinking – with much pleasure – of the conference organised by Leo Hickey in Salford, jointly with the Instituto Cervantes, in 1998.

³⁶ Lorca, *Obras Completas*, p.566.

speech makes this more or less explicit anyway. What matters is that the signifiers of cutting should be expressed in rhythms that underscore the line's dramatic significance while, at the same time, enabling the actress to deliver its rising rhythm. Lorca achieves this through the repetition of the 'a' sounds in the first half of the line, the linking 'd' that echoes between 'azadas' and 'biellos' and the 'os'/'os' and 'e/a' 'e/a' repetitions of the second half. However 'azadas' and 'biellos' may translate literally is irrelevant – mattocks, pitchforks, hoes, whinnowing forks, whatever. The translator must search for a rhythmical solution that enables speakability and stylistic marking/significance to co-exist.³⁷

Kinetics - and to a lesser extent kinesics - are central to the creation of performable rhythms – kinetics, in terms of the way in which words are matched to movement, and kinesics, in the way in which words create spaces for non-verbal communication. The opening scene of Calderón's *El pintor de su deshonra* offers a good example of the ways in which writing implies movement and gesture. Don Juan has just arrived at the house of his old friend, Don Luis, bringing important and eagerly awaited news:

Don Luis: Otra vez, don Juan, me dad
y otras mil veces los brazos.

Don Juan: Otra y otras mil sean lazos
de nuestra antigua amistad.

Don Luis: ¿Cómo venís?

Don Juan: Yo me siento
tan alegre, tan ufano,

³⁷ My solution has always been 'even the sickle and the scythe'. It is a pity, however, to lose the word 'era', which means a circular threshing area. The original 'era' is still visible in the Cortijo del Fraile, from where the real Bride made her escape in 1927. Her Father was sleeping in the 'era' as she crept past him. The image is made even more suggestive when one takes into account that some anthropological theories place the origins of theatre in the threshing circle, around which members of the community would gather in the evening cool. All of this, of course, is unusable in the context of the playscript, but such details could be worked into production design.

tan venturoso, tan vano,
que no podrá el pensamiento
encareceros jamás
las venturas que poseo,
porque el pensamiento creo
que aún ha de quedarse atrás.

Don Luis: Mucho me huelgo de que
os haya en Nápoles ido
tan bien.

Don Juan: Más dichoso he sido
de lo que yo imaginé.³⁸

There is a beautifully struck balance here between two men, one bursting with news, the other consumed by curiosity, and the demands that are placed upon them by codes of courtesy. It is important that this does not degenerate into mere word play because it is the same balance – between the affairs of the heart and the exigencies of an other-directed society – that will shift fatally as the play develops. Here is one version that claims to be ‘agreeable to read and to perform’:

Don Luis: Once again and another thousand times so,
I welcome you with open arms, don Juan.

Don Juan: May this and a thousand more again
Bind our friendship from so long ago.

Don Luis: How goes it with you, friend?

Don Juan: I feel so happy, so gratified,
so pleased with life, so deeply satisfied,
that thought will never in the end
find the means fit to express
the sheer good fortune I possess,
for even thought I find,
will linger far behind.

Don Luis: I’ve overjoyed that things have gone so splendidly
for you here in Naples.

³⁸ Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *El pintor de su deshonra* (Madrid: Ediciones Alcalá, 1969), p.79.

Don Juan: In actual fact, my luck is greater than
I imagined it to be.³⁹

The translation is already twenty-five per cent longer than the original, struggling to clinch rhymes as well as to communicate every perceived nuance of the original. Semantic overloading is, of course, a difficulty common to many translations, especially of poetry. In this case, the formal welcome and response are excessively prolonged creating a simple problem of kinesics – the scene demands that the friends embrace before the more intimately probing ‘¿Cómo venís?’ – translated here by the less urgent ‘How goes it with you, friend?’. Furthermore, Calderón is a playwright who delights in the rapid build-up of dialogue – the device of constant intercutting between interlocutors is not uncommon in his theatre – and in this short excerpt there are already two examples of lines being eagerly finished by the other speaker that this version chooses to ignore.

8

The final point above serves as a timely reminder that the basic unit of dramatic discourse is not the individual speech, but rather the exchange between characters. The translational endeavour that derives from New Critical formalism is preoccupied with the intricacy, image, metaphor, ambiguity and pun of the individual utterance; that is appropriate enough, but not as an end in itself. When translating for the stage, all of these must be inserted into the context of character interaction. Bakhtin’s view that style requires two voices reminds us that theatre dialogue is shaped by what has gone before and what comes after, both in

³⁹ A.K.G Paterson (trans) Pedro Calderón de la Barca *The Painter of His Dishonour* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1991). It is the book’s back-cover that claims that the translation is ‘agreeable to read and to perform’. The edition is bilingual.

terms of style and reference.⁴⁰ The different elements of the exchange are linked in a process of anticipatory poetics. This is most obviously true where one speech meets with a punning response, but there are a number of other echoing elements, such as rhythm, the arrangement of words, figures of speech, image, metaphor and reference, that also serve to shape the exchange. It would be possible to give numerous examples of this in the work of any serious dramatist, but the constraints of space will allow for only one.

Valle-Inclán is one of the most linguistically challenging of all Spanish writers. It was undoubtedly because he knew language to be the defining element of his theatre that he frequently declared it to be untranslatable. His richly polyphonic stage language, the carefully orchestrated verbal music of tones, counterpoints and Stravinsky-like dissonance that emerge from a bewildering range of human registers and animal sounds, is no less concerned to generate linguistic fireworks as it is to offer verbal illumination. In doing so, it adumbrates our broader, increasingly destabilised concept of what constitutes the performative.⁴¹ This means that the translator must be alive to the various elements of the performative at play in these exchanges – Richards’ ‘interanimation’ of words may perhaps be usefully pressganged into a different service here. In this scene, taken from *Luces de Bohemia*, the blind poet Max Estrella, accompanied by the scurrilous Don Latino de Hispalis, is on a Bloom-like journey through the troubled streets of Madrid, where he encounters a young prostitute:

⁴⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry’, in Ann Shukman (ed), *Bakhtin School Papers. Russian Poetics in Translation* 10 (Oxford: RPT Publications, 1983). See also Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.24. See also Paul Simpson and Geoff Hall, ‘Discourse Analysis and Stylistics’, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 22 (2002).

⁴¹ See Patrick Campbell, *Analysing Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), esp. Introduction.

La Lunares: Pálpame el pecho. No tengas reparo... ¡Tú eres un poeta!

Max: ¿En qué lo has conocido?

La Lunares: En la peluca de Nazareno. ¿Me engaño?

Max: No te engañas.

La Lunares: Si cuadrase que yo te pusiese al tanto de mi vida, sacabas una historia de las primeras. Responde: ¿Cómo me encuentras?

Max: ¡Una ninfa!

La Lunares: Tienes el hablar muy *dilustrado*! Tu acompañante ya se concerró con la Cotillona. Ven. Entrégame la mano. Vamos a situarnos en un lugar más oscuro. Verás como te cachondeo.

Max: Llévame a un banco para esperar a ese cerdo hispalense.

La Lunares: No chanelo.

Max: Hispalis es Sevilla.

La Lunares: Lo será en cañí. Yo soy chamberilera.⁴²

The sharply contrasting registers that characterise the banter of this scene create a rising tone of pervasive irony so that, in the final analysis, it is impossible to know for sure who is the butt of whom. What is more sure, however, is that the scene will not work in English unless the translator captures the same tone of language in performance, as the poet parades his disdain for the prostitute and as she summons up all her resourcefulness in order to cajole him into paying for her services.

What demands does this scene, so characteristic of the style of the Valle *esperpento*, place upon the translator? On one level, the bantering tone and heavily marked ironies depend upon exact timing. There is no additional room, for example, to negotiate an understanding of the culture-specific references – ‘peluca de Nazareno’, ‘dilustrado’ etcetera – into the knowledge universe of the receiving audience. ‘A wig like the Nazarene’, for

⁴² Ramón María del Valle-Inclán, *Lucas de Bohemia* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1987), pp.152-153.

example, will evoke at once Holy Week parades for a Spanish audience. Moreover, this slots perfectly into the dramatic architecture of the play in that this journey, Max's last night of life, is arranged as a *via crucis*. The translator in this case has to find a version that both recreates the prostitute's ironic reference to Max's fashionably long hair, and signals it as a dramatically significant reference for the audience.

There is a danger here of creating unnecessary normalisation. Stage language is both real and stylised, language both naturally occurring and strikingly organised. A playable translation will allow its new spectators to recognise whatever the linguistic strategy of its characters happens to be. In order to achieve that, the translator must ask the same question as the actor: not 'what do these words mean?', but instead 'what are these words doing?'. At that point the translator is able to transmit the characters' strategies – or objectives/super-objectives – through his or her own communicative competence. This in turn enables the translator to map character strategies onto the linguistic template through which the individual spectator processes and understands naturally occurring speech. In this particular scene, Max is holding the prostitute (and his own desires) at bay through his own sense of artistic and intellectual superiority; it is a defence mechanism, masquerading as an air of convinced superiority. The prostitute, on the other hand, is busily invading Max's personal space at every opportunity; her strategy is to break down barriers. It might be fruitful here to recall Richards' yearning for equivalences. We no longer believe in synonymy within a single language; the possibility, therefore, of it existing across languages is even more

problematic.⁴³ It would therefore be plainly absurd to expect personal strategies to clothe themselves in identical terms across cultures. As a result, there will be many occasions when the translator must intervene at the level of syntax, connotation, tenor and kinetics, in order to re-create the intention of the strategy.

It is only at that moment – when stage language becomes real, when it can be processed by the spectator as naturally occurring language – that the spectator is provided with a linguistic framework for fully identifying and understanding the deepening and quickening moments of the drama when language moves from the plane of the naturally occurring to that of the stylistically re-arranged. To put it in the most direct way, the template of communicative competence that all native speakers possess must form the basis for whatever dramaturgical remoulding of language takes place in the translation. This is the linguistic underpinning for whatever foreignising, stylistic or idiolectic elements the translator may wish to inject or maintain. It is a necessary pre-condition which, if not met, may jeopardise the reception of the new text's otherness. This now runs the risk of being misunderstood and/or dismissed as mere confusion, confirming in the process the cultural and linguistic fundamentalism of any young Stephen Dedalus who may happen to be sitting in the audience.

9

Virtually by definition, a translation is a more intrinsically negotiable commodity than an original piece of writing, essentially because the translation is itself the end result of a

⁴³ See Bell, 'Pseudo-Problems', p.34.

complex process of negotiation out of the source language. To the extent, of course, that the original play is also the result of a translational process – as is any communicative act – then there is also a prime case for careful negotiation of that script, at least before its first performance. But the additional provisionality and perceived negotiability of the translated text may well be brought home with added force to the translator when actors and director bring other versions of the same play into the rehearsal room, as indeed they will if other such versions are available. Their principal reason for doing so is, of course, to deepen their research into the human realities and dramatic rhythms that underlie the linguistic clothing of the verbal text. But the truth remains that any sense of a canonical status for the translated text as product is irrevocably compromised.

The translation of plays for the stage is, in this key sense, more akin to the processes that translate idea into script, and script into performance. They are processes that ensue through the dialectics of challenge, destruction and re-affirmation. The creative process itself is about working through a number of alternatives in order to discover what functions best within the constraints and demands of the operative circumstances. How those alternatives are imagined in the first instance may well graft us back into the living wood of inspiration and creative mystery. But the axiom of frames set out in this paper perhaps go some way towards conceptualising the processes through which that creativity extends itself into communication. It is not a question of laws to be followed, as Dürrenmatt cautions, but rather of providing a dynamic prism through which the translator's loving backward gaze may be focussed more ruthlessly forward and outwards.

List of publications to date:

- No. 1.** *The American Dream in Spanish Poetry: Some Early Twentieth-Century Visions of the United States*, **Dr Terence McMullan**, Queen's University Belfast, February 2000.
- No. 2.** *Autobiography and Intertextuality in Carajicomedia by Juan Goytisolo*, **Dr Stanley Black**, University of Ulster, November 2000.
- No. 3.** *Radical Propensities and Juxtapositions: Defamiliarization and Difficulty in Borges and Beckett*, **Dr Ciaran Cosgrove**, Trinity College Dublin, February 2002.
- No. 4.** *Voices From Lusophone Borderlands: The Angolan Identities Of António Agostinho Neto, Jorge Arrimar And José Eduardo Agualusa*, **Dr David Brookshaw**, University of Bristol, March 2002.
- No. 5.** *National Identity – a Revisitation of the Portuguese Debate*, **Professor Onésimo Teotónio Almeida**, Brown University, Rhode Island, USA. October 2002.
- No. 6.** *Translation for the Stage: Product and Process*, **Professor David Johnston**, Queen's University of Belfast, November 2002.
- No. 7.** *Sujeto femenino en contextos de modernidad tardía*, **Professor Francisca López**, Bates College, USA, March 2003.
- No. 8.** *Antonio Machado And The Royal Art: Fact And Fiction*, **Dr Philip Johnston**, University College Dublin, October 2003.
- No. 9.** *The Censors' Confusion: (Mis)Interpretations of the Works of Alfonso Sastre*, **Dr Catherine O' Leary**, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, February 2004.
- No. 10.** *East Timorese Poems of the Revolution and Beyond: The Poetry of Francisco Borja da Costa and Celso de Oliveira*, **Mr Anthony Soares**, Queen's University Belfast, March 2004.
- No. 11.** *Borders, Batos Locos and Barrios: Space as Signifier in Chicano Film*, **Dr Catherine Leen**, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, November 2004.
- No. 12.** *"Camões, Portuguese war propaganda, and the dream of a safe colonial empire, 1914-1918"*, **Dr Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses**, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, March 2005.