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Este artículo versa sobre las diversas maneras en las que el traductor puede abordar las obras del Siglo de Oro español con el objetivo de elaborar traducciones exentas del filologismo que ha venido caracterizando tantas versiones hasta la fecha. Al considerar la traducción como una práctica de escritura que procura evitar tanto el localismo como un código ético angustiado con preservar los derechos de la alteridad, este artículo propone una serie de estrategias de traducción dirigidas a la elaboración de traducciones que proporcionen expresión inglesa a estas obras clásicas sin que dejen de pertenecerse a sí mismas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Siglo de Oro, representación, hibricidad, éxodo, alteridad.

# Historical Theatre: The Task of the Translator

*This article discusses ways in which the translator may approach the plays of the Spanish Golden Age in order to create translations free from the philological deadness that characterises so many versions to date. By thinking of translation both as a writing practice that eschews locatedness, and an ethical regime that is anxious to preserve the rights of alterity, this article proposes a series of translational strategies geared to the writing of translations that give English-language expression to these classical plays, while simultaneously belonging to themselves.*

KEYWORDS: Golden Age, performance, hybridity, exodus, alterity.

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Where are we at all? And whenabouts in the name of space? I don't understand. I fail to say. I dearsee you too.

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James JOYCE, *Finnegan's Wake*

### I. PHILOLOGICAL HISTORICISM

This article sets out the reasons why it is only in the last fifteen years that the English-speaking world has shown any sustained interest in the plays of the Spanish Golden Age. More explicitly, and hopefully more usefully, it discusses what the guiding principles of what a dynamic, non-historicist, translation may be<sup>1</sup>.

There have been surprisingly few professional productions of the Spanish Golden Age in the English-speaking world<sup>2</sup>. Of course, it is not unusual for the English-speaking theatre to accord notional genius to foreign writers, even when their work is actually only rarely performed on the English stage — the theatre of García Lorca, for example, languished in this no-man's land right up until its emergence from international copyright in 1986. And there are a number of plausible reasons why such paucity of professional practitioner attention should be paid to a playwrights like Lope or Calderón. Some of these are, in the first instance at least, embedded within the landscape of a traditionally Philological Hispanist criticism. The view, propagated principally by the influential A. A. Parker from the late 1950s, that the theatre of

the Golden Age had produced no characters of any substance, that it was a theatre largely thematically driven, served to underline the apparent limitations of the stageworthiness of Lope, Tirso and Calderón in contrast to Shakespeare, whose plays rewarded performance-based no less than literary analysis.

Moreover, Lope's theatre, often discussed by critics such as Parker and Reichenberger as the unique founding drama of a national theatre (the national and the philological are, of course, easy bed fellows), was accordingly deemed to be local in scope, while Shakespeare's work was held, unthinkingly of course, to be universal in reach. In their eagerness to articulate the basis of a national theatre, these seminal critics gave seeming authority to a model of Spanish ethnicity that, among other things, elides the multicultural and multilingual roots that it shares with the great European story-telling tradition. Such ethnicity may be modelled spatially and territorially rather than in an explicitly linguistic way. Castilian Spanish was certainly being explicitly promoted as a 'natural' language throughout the sixteenth century, but the connotations of national integrity and ethnic distinctiveness that this entails are more important. Figuratively speaking, Lope's theatre — this prototype national theatre — nowhere lays claim to the land; but it does occupy it, and it does dominate it. For many critics, writing in that mid to late period of the twentieth century, this endeavour to discern a Spanish cultural hegemony seemed eminently justified. The theatre of the Spanish Golden Age, Lope's principal amongst it, becomes subsumed into the perceived uniqueness of Spanish cultural difference. And in this it enacts the tactics of power symptomatic of *translatio imperii*, drawing on the capacities of translation from other sources, classical and more contemporary,

<sup>1</sup> For further discussion, see Catherine Boyle and David Johnston (2007); and Susan Paun de García and Donald R Larson (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Thacker, for example, notes that Lope de Vega has only received twenty-one professional productions in the United Kingdom. See Boyle and Johnston (2007), Chapter 1. There has been only one professional production of a Golden Age play in Ireland — a 2008 production of Jo Clifford's *Life's a Dream* in the Project Arts Centre in Dublin.



to transform both meanings and places into elements consonant within the *grand récit* of Spanish ethnic and cultural distinctiveness<sup>3</sup>.

By way of example, we can look at *El caballero de Olmedo*. This is clearly one of Lope's great plays, one which has received several acclaimed productions in the United Kingdom. The scene in which the King discusses with the Constable the obligatory forms of dress for Moors and Jews resident within the Kingdom of Castile (ll.1554-1609) is immediately reminiscent to Lope's contemporary audience of the age-old Spanish fear of the enemy within, echoing at the same time the wider political context in which the rivalry between the two towns of Olmedo and Medina is set. What is the translator to make of a scene like this, rooted as it is in the macro-context of the play? The human significance of this scene for a contemporary audience has been eviscerated by the all-powerful context of history. It adds nothing new to the play unless the translator seizes the opportunity to re-write the scene in such a way that its politics become apparent, bathing the decree regarding Jews and Moors in the same pervasive atmosphere of rivalry, sectarianism and fear that is relentlessly coalescing against Alonso. And which, in the process, the contemporary spectator may well recognise as operative in the context of our own biopolitics.

In other words these are all plays that domesticate, that import the other wholly into a project of selfhood, that elide difference, irrespective of where those plays are set. In that way, then, the particular strand of critical thinking that asserted the uniqueness of Lope, that situated his theatre within the parameters of the national, is no less a function of the *trans-*

*latio imperii*, in terms of its tendency to relocate everything into a single narrative identity. This whiff of the local was to linger round Lope, right up until the late 1990s, the sense of a writer marooned behind the isolating concerns of a hothouse society and the arcane forms of the *comedia*. Lope becomes reduced to a series of disabling problematics: how do you cope with the uniquely complex polymetric form?; how do you articulate the unique intensity of the honour code?; how do you convey the unique obsession with social structure to a contemporary non-Spanish audience?; and how do you convincingly stage storylines in which character psychology and believable plotting are apparently consistently sacrificed to theme?

Together these questions seemed to predict a destiny of untranslatability. Consider the opening words of Victor Dixon's introduction to his own translation of *El perro del hortelano*:

Translators of Golden Age Spanish plays face from the outset the difficult and debatable question of form. Some opt for prose; but to my mind, since the *comedia* is an essentially stylized genre, steeped in a diverse poetic tradition, and dependent for much of its impact on the evocative potential of verse, to do so is unthinkable. In the case of Lope de Vega, one of Spain's very greatest poets, it would be a betrayal; the *traduttore* would truly be a *traditore*. (1991: 5-6)

But is that necessarily true? We will return to the issue of poetry later on. But at the moment what we should note is a desire on the part of this translator, characteristic of the philological mindset, to enshrine formal sameness as a translational item of faith — sameness that derives from the deeply-rooted sense that to negotiate the unique formal qualities of Golden Age theatre is a fundamental betrayal of essence.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion on the *translatio studii et imperii*, see Rita Copeland (1991).



## 2. THE TRANSLATOR AND THE CRITIC

It goes without saying that critical approaches to the playwrights of the Golden Age have been developing over the years. Over the last decade or so, for example, the somewhat belated importation of speech-act theory into Lope studies, for example, has at least given a nod in the direction of the plays' performative rather than solely formal qualities<sup>4</sup>. But the truth is that there remain crucial differences between the translator as intercultural mediator and the critic as cultural historiographer. To ignore these is to condemn translation to being a subsidiary mode of interpretation rather than a writing practice in its own right.

To refer to translation as a writing practice, as a creative struggle, 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 perspective 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 famous 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' (1991: 66-67). But a different interpretation of Wittgenstein's otherwise apparently problematic 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.

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 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. Translation happens when the translator is dialogically engaged.

Historians and new historicist critics frequently betray their own disengagement from history, and thereby their own detached position in relation to their subject, by avoiding being critics of their own cultures. Critical positions seemingly innocent of ideology, couched as they are as a denial of political position-taking, actually constitute a reluctance to admit the effects of culture — and history — upon their own critical procedures. The act of contextualising, for example, Lope de

<sup>4</sup> This is now developing to encompass discussion of Golden Age drama in multilingual performance. See the two items at note 1, for example.

Vega's audience seems to require that critical writers de-contextualise themselves; this act of de-contextualisation, in turn, legitimates the authors' detachment from the historical material they subsequently write about, bringing an apparent objectivity, that in reality is little more than rhetorical force, to their conclusions. Thus much literary historicism and reception history the contradiction at the heart of how Western historiography imagines time. That contradiction consists of the insurmountable bifurcation between past and present. In presenting themselves as somehow aloof from (or, at the other extreme, subject to) the historical mechanisms of their own cultures, these authors bifurcate between past and present and thereby dispel any sense their work might provide of the historicity of historical texts.

The 'aloof from' and the 'subject to' have profound implications for the shaping strategies for the writing of translations. On the surface, they can be seen as the writing tactics suggested by the extremes of domesticating and foreignising. But in practice they have as much to do with how the translator situates him or herself in relation to the cultural utility of the text in question. Central to this is the view that there is a disabling premise at the heart of Western historiographical discourse that prevents us from experiencing — experiencing in an active way, as somebody in the theatre can experience — the pastness of past things — in other words, their historicity. In *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau writes:

Historiography takes for granted the fact that it has become impossible to believe in the presence of the dead that has organised (or organises) the experience of entire civilizations... By taking for granted its distancing from tradition and the social body, in the last resort historiography is based upon a power

that in effect distinguishes it from the past and from the whole of society. (1988: 6)



If we follow this, we must accept that historiographical discourses are incapable of describing the quality of pastness, the aura, in which an object is inscribed and from which it derives. Essentially, the unwillingness to think about the past as something which occupies the present while simultaneously belonging to itself confounds the modern historiographical imagination. Translation, however, provides us not so much with a critical or historiographical tool, but rather with the possibility of a re-creative strategy. The central issue for the translator is both to exploit and travel outwards from his or her own historical context in order to develop a relationship with a past text that allows that pastness to be both protected and brought to new life.

Museological practices, amongst which this sort of historicist criticism may be included, have played a fundamental role in fabricating, maintaining and disseminating many of the essentialist fictions that make up the social realities of the modern world. Historicist criticism and museological exhibition deposit their texts and artefacts into a representational space where they stand for, rather than recreate and project, the past, and where they are inevitably infused with a sense of loss, experienced in terms of absolute alterity. It is, of course, this characteristic condition of 'absence through presence' of the museum artefact that prompted André Malraux to begin to formulate the parameters of his 'museum without walls'. One of the founding notions of postmodern art, the museum without walls is an imaginary place, a quality of access to a multiplicity of reproductions, to which the viewer adds his own experience as each original demands.



This imaginary museum is the meeting place of the artist of today with the artist of the past and the artist of the future. It is a place marked by contingency rather than design, a place where the expression of humanity cannot be constrained within the specific parcels of history or geography, so that the coordinates of time and space themselves become ruptured and re-formed. This is why Jorge Luis Borges can announce so definitively the death of geography. He satirises how mapping is abused when it centres obsessively only on the known, only on the perceived *centre* of things:

In that Empire, the craft of Cartography attained such Perfection that the Map of a Single province covered the space of an entire City, and the Map of the Empire itself an entire Province. In the course of Time, these Extensive maps were found somehow wanting, and so the College of Cartographers evolved a Map of the Empire that was of the same Scale as the Empire and that coincided with it point for point. Less attentive to the Study of Cartography, succeeding generations came to judge a map of such Magnitude cumbersome and, not without Irreverence, they abandoned it to the Rigours of sun and Rain. In the western Deserts, tattered fragments of the Map are still to be found, Sheltering an occasional Beast or beggar; in the whole Nation, no other relic is left of the discipline of Geography<sup>5</sup>.

The implications of this for translation are particularly striking. Mapping is, of course, important in translation studies, but it is the mapping of borders and frontiers that is of real import. And it is the act of translation itself that constitutes the genuine borderland. Such borderlands are infinite. Translation becomes the central activity of the imaginary museum,

<sup>5</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, 'Of Exactitude in Science', in N. T. di Giovanni (trad.), *A Universal History of Infamy*, London: Penguin Books, 1975 [1946].

the world of the possible, where the work of art, like a translation or series of translations, may remain unrealized, but not impossible. This idea opens the door to virtual interaction with the artworks of all ages so that translation becomes a mode that has the potential to cross-cut between all literatures and all cultures, no matter what their context.

The cultural site represented by the traditional museum, where each artefact is helplessly submerged in the all-powerful context of history, provides in this way a radical counterpoint to what translation is capable of achieving and, at its best, does achieve. Acts of metonymic commensurability, as well-meaning as they may be, serve to homogenize individual lives into an essentialist mass that refuses our possession, even as we make the effort to possess them (Agamben, 1998). As an ethical regime deeply concerned with the representation of otherness, contemporary translation, however, is able in its re-creative strategies to exploit the dynamics of thresholds, the way that texts constitute sites for negotiation and change. The process of translation, rooted as it is in contingency, promotes and negotiates random connections<sup>6</sup>. This negotiation of connections is a functioning of the hermeneutic motion for which Steiner argues so persuasively in *After Babel* (1975), so that the object that is other, the playtext from elsewhere or elsewhen, becomes simultaneously an artefact that speaks of other contexts and other practices, as well as a living piece of theatre that fosters a relationship between these contexts and their assumptions, and the contexts and

<sup>6</sup> For example, when a Belfast-born translator writes a version of *El perro del hortelano* for a Washington audience, to be performed just as the Bush administration is giving way to that of Obama, what energies are released here? See <[www.shakespearetheatre.org](http://www.shakespearetheatre.org)> [Consulted: January 2009].

assumptions that operate in the here and now of performance. It is a way of establishing the human continuities that extend our experience of history not as a known map but as the random and enormously fruitful series of connections and relationships that Walter Benjamin, most forcefully, argued it really is. It is how we come again to believe in and experience the presence of people who are other to us, across the gulfs of history and geography<sup>7</sup>. In the act of translation, an audience may experience, both the pastness of past things, and their subterranean connections with the present moment of performance.

This is a broad statement of strategy, and of course there are as many ways of achieving it as there are historical plays and translators. Two examples, drawn from my translations of *El perro del hortelano* and *Los locos de Valencia* will have to serve as adequate illustrations.

The stage-language of *The Dog in the Manger* is angled both to evoke the flavour of a language that in terms of its formal organisation and lexical choices is temporally other to the spectator in the here and now, and to offer occasional contemporary usages or colloquialisms that violate that distancing. Here is one simple example taken from the beginning of the play when Diana is trying to order her reluctant servant Fabio to search for the intruder she has disturbed.

FABIO My lady called?

DIANA Your lady called?  
Your lady is blazing with rage  
and you come coolly ambling along.  
Buffoon! Dolt! Find out who it was  
came out of that bedroom.

FABIO That room?  
DIANA Just let your feet do the talking.  
FABIO My feet?  
DIANA Move!

[FABIO runs off]

Find out who it was. I want his name.  
He'll pay for this outrage, this disgrace<sup>8</sup>.

The language here, in this early and deliberately understated example, sets the tone for a play in which there is a striking modernity of themes — principal among them, the relationship between love and sex, and their respective governability, and in the play's final deceit, the importance of spin. These are issues that should chime with any contemporary audience, and it is important that they are not shrouded behind language that is subject to the past. And of course the other side of the transaction demands that the audience does not lose the sense of human continuity because of stage-language that sets itself apart and is aloof from the past.

In Scene VII of Act 2 of *Los locos de Valencia* asylum warden Pisano reflects on his growing attraction for the madwoman Erifila and her apparent involvement with another inmate of the asylum, in a way that sharply contextualises the play's central conceit of love and madness. This is a key speech in the play and, although the actor playing Pisano may well regret that Lope chooses not to develop this character story, it serves to underline beautifully the play's central assertion of the relativity of sanity, and its informing tension between desire and order:

PISANO No me espanto que esta loca  
tenga enamorado un loco;  
que a un cuerdo no lo es poco,

<sup>7</sup> See Walter Benjamin, 'Paris. Capital of the Nineteenth Century', written in 1935 as part of his *Arcades* project.

<sup>8</sup> Johnston (2004: 23).





a dalle el alma provoca.  
 Por ella traigo el cerbelo  
 más mudable que un molino;  
 ¡oh amor!, si eres desatino.  
 ¿Cómo eres dios en el cielo?  
 Cuando cuentas y clarete  
 me habían de entretener,  
 ¡me viene amor a poner  
 garceticas y copete!  
 Perdida va la veleta,  
 no hay que fiar de la edad;  
 que siempre es la voluntad,  
 del apetito alcahueta.  
 Con todo, es tal mi pasión  
 que por ventura la estimo.

The writing is beautiful, characteristically driving and economical, passionate and precise in the way in which this middle-aged man expresses his slide from pragmatic life to the embracing of excess. Michael Frayn has noted, in the context of Chekov, that ‘Translating a play is rather like writing one. The first principle, surely, is that each line should be what that particular character would have said at that particular moment if he had been a native English-speaker’ (1980: 3). This of course would produce a version aloof from the shaping movements and perceptions of any original, in other words a wholly domesticating strategy. My version attempts to stand not as a metonymy, but rather in a metaphorical relationship with the original speech, echoing its constituent elements, but re-casting it in a way that re-dramatises the love-madness dialectic for a contemporary audience, pruning away in the process some of the excessive and, for a contemporary audience, distracting rhetoric:

Mad attracts mad, natural enough.  
 Like to like; birdbrains of a feather.  
 But she churns the brains of the sane;  
 my mind’s spinning like a windmill  
 left standing in a hurricane.  
 At my age, nothing excited me

beyond a glass of good red wine.  
 And now I look at the mirror,  
 I fix my hair, practice my smile,  
 make sure my clothes are hanging well.  
 This is the madness of seagulls  
 wheeling and pitching on the wind.  
 But I’d not change it for the world<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. TRANSLATION AND MOVEMENT

When we translate from the elsewhere or the elsewhen our shifting gaze — the dialogical gaze of the translator — allows that object to be simultaneously of then and there, encased in cultural difference, but also belonging to the shifting here and now of our spectator. In other words, translation is not a filter between past and present, for the cultural other and the located self; it is potentially a prism that releases, that fires off in different directions a series of intercultural and intertemporal moments that challenge and enrich spectator reception and experience.

This internal dialogism between present and past serves to throw what Walter Benjamin saw as the profound instability of the past into sharp relief. And if we accept this notion of the profound instability of the past — can we point to a moment when the Enlightenment can actually be said to have ended? How rigorously Victorian are Victorian values? — then we also have to consider that the full range of meanings of any text are dispersed forwards across time and space. Euripides’s *Bacchae* is a play about terrorism, for example, although it was written centuries before Robespierre’s ‘reign of terror’. If *Fuenteovejuna* is the most internationally performed play of the Spanish Golden Age, it is because it speaks persuasively of the Spanish Civil War, ostensibly

<sup>9</sup> Johnston (1997: 67).





the twentieth century's defining ideological conflict. The past and past texts are unstable because they are constantly projecting themselves into the future in a process of endless extensions and completions. By the same token, geographies are no less stable, and the most fruitful and random connections can be established across the fictions of cartography.

Translation, and especially translation for the theatre, is a process that in this way engineers movement — movement between the narratives, concepts and structures of life that are embodied in foreign texts, and the affective and cognitive environment of the new spectator. Both the theatre and translation provide passageways of thought and feeling, sometimes on the surface, sometimes profound, between the here and the elsewhere, the now and the elsewhere.

This idea of passageways deliberately echoes the thought of Gilles Deleuze. In *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Deleuze observes that 'cinematic movement is a translation in space'. Later he expands this: 'Movement in space expresses a whole which changes, rather as the migration of birds expresses a seasonal variation' (1986: 111). Deleuze's sense of the translational processes at play between screen and viewer, the translation that occurs when the cinematic spectator organically reconfigures screen events, when his or her condition of presence provides an expanded consciousness of the space occupied by the film, is at once a useful concept for the analysis of spectatorship, and for understanding the processes at work in any act of translation. What a translated play does, at its best, is make something from somewhere else, or sometime else, the elsewhere and the elsewhere, tangible in the experience of a spectator who exists in the here and now of performance.

For when we translate theatre, is this not what we should be aiming to do, to engineer an interactive transaction that is the equivalent of Deleuze's 'cinematographic network', to create the movement between stage and spectator in which whole realms of experience and knowledge are created and depicted through changing patterns of assemblage and fragmentation? In other words, to effect the seasonal variation, the movements through time and space that bring about the migration of birds, the flight of imagination, in an auditorium. And in doing so, we do not engineer sameness. Rather we announce difference, change. Movement. Not metonymy but metaphor, the performance of the similar through the dissimilar<sup>10</sup>.

The strategical movement enabled by this dualism of stage language can also be achieved through formal re-orderings. *Los locos de Valencia* is one of Lope's most characteristic comedies of intrigue. The play ends, typically, with a highly contrived series of marriages that restore order to a world that has been subject to conspiracy and disorder. For a contemporary audience this may not be surprising, but it is much more challenging in dramatic terms to compare and contrast past and contemporary expectations within the structure of the play itself. The play therefore is published with two chronological endings, the contemporary one that sees Laida abandoned as 'a lonely figure looking for lost pebbles', followed by the original one that draws together all the loose threads. One of the characters, Belardo — a madman who believes he is Lope de Vega — cements the two endings, inviting the actors to rewind their actions:

<sup>10</sup> See Aristotle, *Poetics*, especially xxi – xxv.



BELARDO This is not the way things should be,  
 loose ends and jagged shards of words.  
 Art is harmony as life is,  
 and Laida should not be left thus.  
 Was her wrong-doing any greater?  
 Let us see things a different way:  
 When he flees from Erifila  
 Leonato meets the Gentleman  
 and enters upon his service.  
 A coincidence, but possible.  
 The curious wedding's announced  
 and Leonato attends it too.  
 More than that, he becomes best man,  
 though we can imagine his fear  
 as Erifila re-appears  
 like a ghost from his sordid past.  
 But then he hears Verino speak:  
 'A more tragic case altogether.  
 Her madness is beyond repair'.  
 His former mistress has gone mad  
 in the words of a learned doctor.  
 His jellied guts turn into valour.

*o perhaps.*

VERINO A more tragic case altogether.  
 Her madness is beyond repair.

LEONATO I think I should say something here...<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. TRANSLATION AND ITS FRAMES

The physical surroundings of performance never act as a totally neutral filter or frame. They are themselves always culturally encoded and have always — sometimes blatantly, sometimes subtly — contributed to the perception of performance. (Carlson, 1993: 6)

Marvin Carlson's reminder that space is an active participant in performance further serves to underline the contingency of translation. Of course it was Einstein who insisted memorably that the scope of any object studied needs to incorporate the relativity of its frame

of reference. This is crucial to the translator. Translation, in its ability both to safeguard the elsewhere and elsewhere of the text, and to project that otherness into the present moment of performance, is almost by definition post-teleological writing. Ends are replaced by new ends. And because that moment of performance is always in the here and now, the act of completion that a translation brings to a translated play-text is constantly superseded by the next translation. And by the next performance. Translation posits an infinity of possible extensions, of possible completions

It is certainly true that good writing (if translation isn't writing, it isn't anything) engineers movement between the events on stage and spectatorial imagination. Such movement may be achieved by a number of tactics, but its central strategic goal is to allow the translated play to make its mark in the air between stage and audience. When we translate a play from somewhere or sometime else — in other words, when we translate a text, replete with alternatives and alterity — we bring into the auditorium a swirling constellation of possibilities. And of course writing or directing (and therefore translating) a play is about attempting to conjoin and coordinate this vast range of possibilities — which, taken together, constitute the work's translatability. Crucially, translatability is not rooted in the commensurability of texts, languages or cultures, but in the metaphorical sweep of the text. Taken as a whole this vast range of possibilities represents the cultural momentum of the text, its journey through time and space, along which it acquires and absorbs different meanings and potentials for performance. Translation as an operation — or as a series of operations — plays a determining role in the maintenance of this momentum.

<sup>11</sup> Johnston (1997: 115).



Through these dynamics, translation creates difference and prompts hermeneutical reflection. As part of its ethical commitment to the cultural integrity of the source language, much contemporary translation theory advocates 'foreignizing' the target language. This recalls Venuti's assessment of translation as the site at which a different culture emerges, or Iser's conception of the liminal space born of translation. But need the translator be consciously concerned with importing cultural difference in the act of translation for that difference to survive in the translated text? Surely difference is an inevitable feature of the multivalence of all discourses that come from the elsewhere and the elsewhere? This is more than a formal difference — one doesn't need, for example, to translate the original polymetric forms into English equivalents for that difference to be expressed on stage. At the heart of the plays of the Spanish Golden Age, there are other deeply-rooted differences that prove potentially more thrilling to an English-speaking audience — the simultaneity of thought and action that contrasts so markedly with the more reflective discourse of Shakespearean characters is but one such core feature that simultaneously defamiliarises and re-theatricalises Golden Age theatre in English performance.

It is with this dual goal — of defamiliarising and re-theatricalising — in mind that the translator can perhaps more meaningfully approach the issue of polymetric form. Described by Dixon as a formal requirement, marking the boundary between translation and betrayal, the question of poetry poses in reality a fundamental issue of foreignisation. There is little native tradition in English, of course, of verse drama. English-language rhyme, which is semantically-based, is more marked than Spanish-language rhyme, which is frequently

achieved through grammatical suffix. As Kevin Jackson once noted in an engaging article about translating Racine 'our noblest tragedies do not rhyme. English couplets are more often the tool for wits and wags — the lighter Pope, Swift and the Widow Twankey' (Jackson, 1990: 32).

In that regard, any stylistically taut organisation of stage language, other than iambic pentameter and blank verse, will serve a foreignising agenda, both for spectator and, equally importantly, actor. At the heart of the issue is the search for language that is performable. The word 'performable' is not as innocent as it looks, and its validity has provoked a great deal of debate — some of it obfuscatory, much of it nugatory — in translation studies circles. In essence, however, the translator must surely search for a rhythmical solution that enables speakability and stylistic marking/significance to co-exist. In terms of the actor and his or her performance, 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 from Calderón's *El pintor de su deshonra* offers a good example of the ways in which writing demands 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,  
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.

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’m overjoyed that things have gone so  
 splendidly  
 for you here in Naples.

DON JUAN In actual fact, my luck is greater than  
 I imagined it to be<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> A. K. G Paterson, *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.

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 the translation 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. Here is another version:

DON LUIS Again, Don Juan, my oldest friend.  
 Let these arms embrace thee.

DON JUAN Again  
 I rejoice a thousand times  
 to see you, my dear friend, Don Luis.

DON LUIS Tell me your news.  
 DON JUAN No words could speak  
 of the happiness I feel.

A joy far beyond all reason.

DON LUIS It seems all went well in Naples.

DON JUAN Joy beyond imagination<sup>13</sup>.

The energy of the scene is quite different in this version. On one hand it achieves its goal of defamiliarisation — not least through the unusual eight-beat line that conveys a particular urgency to the writing, but also through the deliberately formulaic ‘thee’; on the other side of the transaction, the correspondence between this readily accessible stage-language and its

<sup>13</sup> Johnston and Boswell (1994: 3).



gestural infrastructure allows for a fast-moving opening scene. Essentially it re-theatricalises the scene in English.

This in itself serves as a useful reminder that theatre translations written with an audience in mind cannot be exclusively logocentric. Spectatorship, of course, depends upon a willingness to blend in, blend out and then blend back in again to the world being represented on the stage, and in performances of the sort of hybrid translations being described here, the English-speaking spectator is encouraged specifically to blend in and out of the then and now, the there and here<sup>14</sup>. This brings us back to that key notion that translation completes a text within a framework that will be substantially different from the next framework. A translated text establishes itself in the *ou-topos*, the no-place, in that sense, and it achieves its vitality, its extraordinary utility and malleability, from the fact that it is written from the position of exodus; the translator writes in a dynamic of constant exodus — exodus from here to there, and from there to here<sup>15</sup>. From then to now. And now to then. If we accept this both as a creative principle and model of writing practice, then we move away from the notion that we somehow have to choose to adopt domesticating or foreignising strategies. Both the domestic and the foreign can be simultaneously present to us in any re-creative strategy, just as they are in our experience as translators when we confront a text from a different time or different place. The translator loses fixity, enters exile, engages in continuing exodus, in and through that creative confrontation.

<sup>14</sup> For further discussion of cognitive blending, see Giles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (2002).

<sup>15</sup> See Stephen Kelly (2007). The notion of 'aterritoriality', discussed by thinkers like Ricoeur and Agamben, is clearly also important here.

Why should the translated play not reflect the huge swirling movement of that reading and writing experience?

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