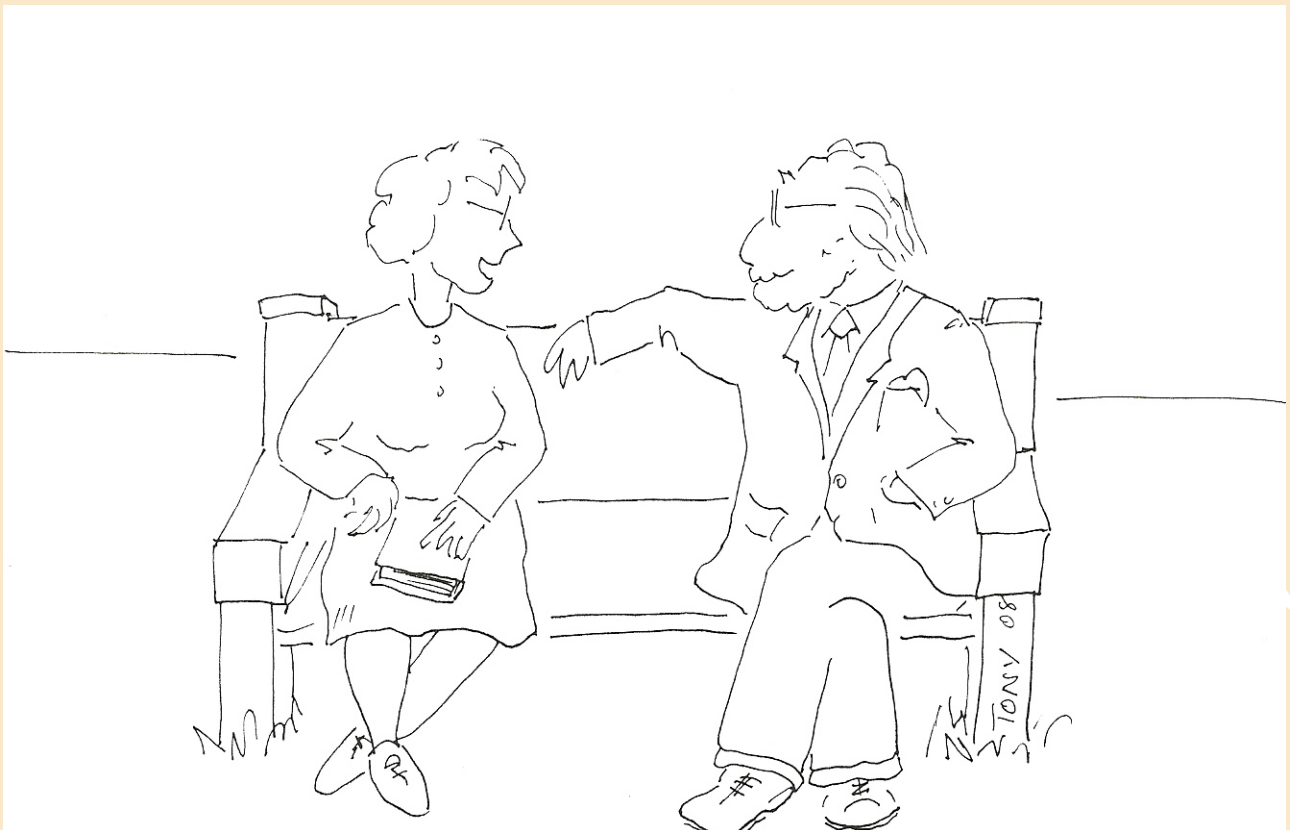


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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LITERARY DIVISION
NO. 44

WINTER 2008



Yes, I do like translating, but I much prefer having translated.

(In memory of Harvie Jordan)

Letter from the Editor

In this issue Tony Beckwith makes a return presence with his **By the Way** column and **BTW** cartoon, and Enrica Ardemagni sends us news “From the LD Administrator.” Special features in this issue include an interview with Arnold Johnston, whose translations of Jacques Brel lyrics have been making a splash; Mark Herman’s look at strategies for translating names in opera (that’s Bo-RIS, not BO-ris); and a machine translation of an Argentine zamba (“Knock-kneed, I sing to you”) guaranteed to bring a tear to your eye.

If you would like to send in an article, review, news item, letter, question, photo, or cartoon for the Spring issue, please submit it by e-mail addressed to michele@mckayaynesworth.com. All previously unpublished material is copyright © the respective authors.

Sincerely,

Michele Aynesworth
www.mckayaynesworth.com



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Editor: Michele Aynesworth

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michele@mckayaynesworth.com

Deadline for the Spring issue is March 1.
Please include a photo
and brief 2 or 3 sentence bio.

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Michele Aynesworth has specialized in translating Argentine authors, notably Roberto Arlt, Fernando Sorrentino, Edgar Brau, and Guillermo Saavedra. Her translation of Roberto Arlt’s novel *Mad Toy* was honored as a finalist for the Soeurette-Diehl Fraser Translation Award. Editor of the ATA’s *Beacons 10* and *Source*, she recently published *Blue on Rye*, a collection of her poetry and blues songs, and is now translating a French war diary by Charles Rist thanks to an NEA grant.

IN THIS ISSUE

Cover: Tony Beckwith's BTW Cartoon

Letter from the Editor2

From the LD Administrator4-5

In the News6-7

**An Interview with Arnold Johnston,
Translator of Jacques Brel.....8-13**

**McChine Translation
of an Argentine Zamba.....14**

**By the Way: Surrounded by Language
Tony Becomes Translated in Barcelona.....15-17**

**The Game of the Name
Mark Herman lets us in on the opera game.....18-21**

Minutes of the LD Meeting in Orlando.....22-23

FROM THE LD ADMINISTRATOR

*I would like to thank everyone who presented papers in literary translation at this year's ATA Conference in Orlando. It was great to have a chance to see a variety of presentations and to have two excellent speakers. Sandra Smith, the Marilyn Gaddis Rose Lecturer, treated us with a fascinating history of the novel **Suite Française** by Irène Némirovsky. Professor Smith inspired many who have not read her translation to do so, both through her intriguing presentation of how the novel was discovered and the challenges of translating the work. Professor Smith held her audience spellbound during a bilingual reading of the first chapter of the novel, first in French and then with her English translation, during the Literary Café.*

Michael Scott Doyle, our Distinguished Speaker, engaged the audience in an interactive presentation on

*Five Translators Translating: Reading Cormac McCarthy's **Blood Meridian** in English and Spanish. Professor Doyle gave in-depth information on his interviews with Luis Murillo Fort, the Spanish translator of **Blood Meridian**. Then, as any good professor, he gave those in attendance a list of vocabulary words taken from McCarthy's novels to test our knowledge of his use of vocabulary. After humbling us by our general lack of knowledge of many of the vocabulary words, he pointed out that the translator was working in three languages and three cultures, since he had to know how the terminology in the novel was used during the time period of the action that takes place in the nineteenth century. As seen in the picture of Professor Doyle with the Spanish and English book covers of **Blood Meridian**, the Old West had to be captured in exact terminology*

as it was used during that era (photo next page).

Thanks to those who attended a very active Annual Business Meeting. The minutes are posted on our website at <http://www.ata-divisions.org/LD/meetings.htm> and in this newsletter. Next year the ATA will be celebrating its 50th anniversary and the Literary Division is planning special events. We would welcome any suggestions on events our members would like to attend.

In addition to serving as Administrator of ATA's Literary Division, Enrica Ardemagni is Associate Professor of Spanish and Director of the Certificate in Translation Studies at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, is a board member of the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care, Chair of the Indiana Commission on Health Care Interpreters and Translators, and Chair of the Communications Committee of the Midwest Association of Translators and Interpreters.

The Literary Division

Officers



Administrator:
Enrica Ardemagni
eardema@iupui.edu

Assistant Administrator:
Montserrat Zuckerman
montsezuck@ameritech.net



*Professor Michael Scott Doyle, with the Spanish and English book covers of Cormac McCarthy's **Blood Meridian**. Professor Doyle was the Literary Division's Distinguished Speaker at this year's ATA Conference.*

2009 MLA CONVENTION TO FEATURE TRANSLATION

A letter from Catherine Porter, forwarded to *Source* by Enrica Ardemagni

I write to tell you of my plans for the Presidential Forum at the 2009 MLA convention in Philadelphia and to invite you to think about how you can collaborate. Following a tradition begun by Marjorie Perloff with her 2006 forum (“The Sound of Poetry, the Poetry of Sound”), continued by Michael Holquist (“The Humanities at Work in the World”) and now by Gerald Graff (“The Way We Teach Now”), I’ve chosen “The Tasks of Translation in the Twenty-First Century” as the theme for my presidential initiative at next year’s convention.

To recognize the importance of translation in the modern world, it suffices to reflect on the number of different languages we human beings speak and on the need for transmitting knowledge across linguistic boundaries. Moreover, the drive to translate extends well beyond the conventional understanding of rendering a message produced in one language by means of another language. As its Latin root *translatio* (transfer, carryover, displacement) suggests, translation’s basic function is to move meanings from one context (often but by no means exclusively linguistic) to another. In everyday usage, *translation* can denote such vital concepts as decoding, paraphrase, interpretation, and explanation; its purpose and scope are those of communication itself.

For the Modern Language Association, the issues raised by translation are more immediate, for they are focused by our institutional commitments to studying and teaching language and literature. The general question our organization constantly confronts in a largely monolingual environment is the relation of English to foreign languages. This question has many practical as well as theoretical dimensions. How do we justify teaching literature in translation and deal with the constraints, losses, and displacements that reading in translation entails? What uses should we make of translation--from and into the target language--in teaching foreign languages? Should departments of foreign and comparative literatures use translations extensively and make comparative translation a cornerstone of the discipline, or should they defend the use of original texts and pursue a practice of cultural comparison that stresses linguistic difference? What place should the nascent field of translation studies and courses in translation theory have in the teaching of language and literature? What perspectives on translation are offered by the various subfields of linguistics, and what can the study of problems in translation contribute to work on language acquisition? In the broad domain of study embraced by the MLA, what role should we ascribe to programs that train professional translators? What roles do we play in decisions about what texts are to be translated and in what direction? In the discussion about our national deficit in knowledge of foreign languages and cultures and about the need for international or global studies, should we be concerned about a translation deficit and advocate for more translation as a means of fostering transcultural awareness?

A wide-ranging exploration of these and other related questions can, I believe, be organized around three axes: translation in teaching, translation in theory, and translation in practice-translation at work in the world. My Presidential Forum will consider the future of translation, and related sessions will focus on these three broad spheres of interest. At the 2009 convention I hope to see the theme of translation addressed in some of the regular sessions organized by MLA divisions, discussion groups, and allied or affiliated organizations as well as in special sessions that individuals or groups of colleagues may wish to propose.

Beginning in January 2009, forms for submitting program copy for all sessions will contain a checkbox for the organizer to indicate whether the session should be considered for inclusion in the presidential theme. Please check the MLA Web site for these forms in January. As in the past three years, selected sessions will be listed in a brochure along with the sessions that make up the Presidential Forum; it will be published in print and on the MLA Web site. Although I cannot include all sessions, I will be grateful for your help in identifying potential contributions to the presidential theme of translation. I look forward to seeing you in 2009 in Philadelphia.

Cordially,
Catherine Porter

BBC News Flash

When officials asked for the Welsh translation of a road sign, they thought the reply was what they needed. Unfortunately, the e-mail response to Swansea council said in Welsh: “I am not in the office at the moment. Send any work to be translated.” So that was what went up under the English version which barred lorries from a road near a supermarket. “When they’re proofing signs, they should really use someone who speaks Welsh,” said journalist Dylan Iorwerth.



http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/7702913.stm

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARNOLD JOHNSTON

TRANSLATOR OF JACQUES BREL'S SONG LYRICS



*Arnold Johnston, who taught creative writing for many years at Western Michigan University, is now a full-time writer. His plays, and others written with his wife, Deborah Ann Percy, have won awards, production, and publication across the country. A Johnston-Percy-Roșu translation of **Epilog**, a play by Romanian Hristache Popescu, will appear in 2009. On Arnie's 1997 CD, *Jacques Brel: I'm Here!* (Western Michigan University), he performs his translations of songs by the noted Belgian singer-songwriter. Revues featuring his Brel translations have been staged in New York, as well as others in Chicago (recognized by four Jefferson Award nominations) and Kalamazoo; Jacques Brel's **Lonesome Losers of the Night** was one of Chicago's most acclaimed productions of summer 2008.*

MMA: Arnie, your performance at the 2008 ALTA Conference in Minneapolis has reverberated widely. I'd like our ATA audience to hear about it. You'd be a hit at our next LD Literary Café!

AJ: Well, thanks to the talent and energy of Nancy Festinger, I was able to take part in "How the Lyric Translates," a panel on the challenges of translating popular song. The panel was very well attended, and the audience was lively, enthusiastic, and full of good questions and comments. Nancy served as moderator, as well as performing and discussing translations of Spanish *boleros*. The other panelists were Al Bork, who compared the Billie Holiday songs "Crazy He Calls Me" and "Solitude" to versions by Brazilian poet Augusto de Campos, and Shirley Kumove, who discussed such standards as "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime" and Cole Porter's "Night and Day" as translated into Yiddish. My own role was discussion and performance of Jacques Brel's "*Ne me quitte pas*" and "*Ces gens-là*," comparing the former to Rod McKuen's version—"If You Go Away"—and my own translation, "Don't Leave Me."

MMA: Could you give us a sample of your comparisons?

AJ: Maybe you could attach my version of *Ne me quitte pas* to the end of the interview and let readers enjoy making their own comparisons.

MMA: Will do. I hear your had a musical running at the same time as the panel.

AJ: Yes, for me the occasion was a happy coincidence, coming as it did on the next-to-last weekend of the Chicago production of my musical, *Jacques Brel's Lonesome Losers of the Night*, for which I did all the translations. *Losers* ran for five months to rave

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with permission from
Theo Ubique Theatre Company to use the photos.

reviews and full houses at the No Exit Café, and was directed by my co-creator Fred Anzevino and staged by his Theo Ubique Theatre Company. Brel was, therefore, very much on my mind.

MMA: Can you tell us a little bit about Brel?

AJ: He was born in Belgium in 1929, and left to seek his fortune in France as songwriter and performer, ultimately writing some 200 songs in the language

AJ: Far too few of Brel's songs—beautiful, funny, ironic—have been translated into English, and many of the earlier versions no more than loosely approximate the spirit and substance of the originals. As Brel's biographer Olivier Todd has noted for French-speaking readers, "No need to be a good student of English to grasp how the Brel soufflé collapses in his translations." However, Paris-born language professor Dr. Paule Miller has commented positively on my own English lyrics: "I have heard



that, with Flemish, animates the unique cultural makeup of his native land. From his struggling early days in Paris as a coffeehouse *chansonnier*, Brel became Europe's Troubadour of the Century. Before his untimely death in 1978, he and his songs were known and beloved all over the Continent through his many recordings and concerts.

MMA: There must have been many translations of his songs already.

Arnie Johnston sing his translations of Brel's songs, and I have found myself forgetting that the language used was not French. To me, this is the mark of a successful translator."

MMA: How did you come to translate Brel's songs?

AJ: Around 1970, after seeing the popular musical revue *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* (with English lyrics by Eric Blau and Mort

Shuman), I assumed that Brel's work had been thoroughly and competently translated into singable English. Over the next decade, I discovered that this was not the case. I first translated a song by Jacques Brel in the early 1970s after hearing it in French as recorded by Judy Collins. The song was "*Chanson des vieux amants*" ("Song of the Old Lovers"), for which I could find no other English version. A few years later, I encountered Rod McKuen's English lyrics side by side with the Brel's original French version of "*Ne me quitte pas*," or "If You Go Away" in McKuen's version. I noted that McKuen's song contained virtually no image from Brel's, so I translated my own version entitled "Don't Leave Me." Then I turned my attention to the English lyrics of *Alive and Well* and found that they, too, were at best loose renderings of Brel's work.

After that, I began in earnest translating my own versions of many Brel songs. By the late 1980s I had translated some 30 songs, had performed them in several concerts to considerable acclaim, and had written a musical revue focusing on my versions of the lyrics. In 1990 Dr. Diether Haenicke, the President of Western Michigan University (where I am a faculty member) arranged for a production of my revue, *Closer to Brel*, at WMU. In connection with this production, I secured necessary permissions from and established a cordial relationship with the Brel estate.

In arranging for a subsequent revue, *Brel: l'Escapade de Musique*, conceived and produced by Le Wilhelm and staged in October 1995 at the Harold Clurman Theatre in New York by Wilhelm's Love Creek Productions, I translated more of Brel's work, and I've now completed translations of some seventy songs.

MMA: Have you recorded any of the songs yourself?

AJ: In 1997, again working through Western Michigan University, I recorded nineteen of the songs on a CD entitled *Brel: I'm Here!*

MMA: How did the production at the No Exit Café come to be?

AJ: There have actually been several theatrical venues for my translations. In January 2003, eleven of them were featured in a revue entitled *Brel: Life Dance*, performed at Danny's Skylight Room Cabaret in New York City. In 2005 Fred Anzevino and the Theo Ubique Theatre Company mounted a revue—*Jacques Brel: Songs of Love and War*—using some thirty of my translations at the No Exit Café; the production ran for six months, playing to packed houses and uniformly enthusiastic critical reception. *Lonesome Losers of the Night* goes a step beyond the revue format, being a "book" musical that focuses on a seedy Amsterdam bar—circa 1950s—and tells the story of two soldiers who, on their last night before shipping out, form a romantic triangle with a whore, the action unfolding under the jaundiced eye of the bartender. The show is told entirely in song, with no spoken dialogue.

MMA: Let's talk a bit about the translation process.

AJ: A couple of requirements for effective translation are obvious: a working knowledge of the language from which you're translating, a good dictionary, and a good thesaurus. Less obvious is the need for an excellent command of the language into which you're translating. Catching the letter and the spirit of someone's work demands the ability to be your own thesaurus for units of thought larger than individual words, to find the right idiomatic expression among a range of choices, and to express a thought in a number of ways, with appropriate attention to emotional nuance and wit. In short, good translation calls for the linguistic resources to provide yourself with options, rather than being stuck with your first attempt at rendering someone else's text into English.

Ask any translator to name the most difficult writing to capture in another tongue and the answer is likely to be, "Poetry," because even in its original form a poem attempts to reach beyond the limits of language. The considerable linguistic challenge posed by poetic translation means that translators often refrain from attempting to deal with the further complications of form, metrics, sound devices, and the like. Translating songs, however, especially in singable versions, doesn't allow one the luxury of backing away from most of these challenges. The songs of Jacques Brel, the lyrics of which certainly approach the linguistic

demands of poetry, also require facility with form, particularly as regards metrics and rhyme schemes.

My sense is that many previous translators of Brel's songs ultimately opted merely to produce something singable, whether or not the lyrics bore great resemblance to the sense or spirit of the originals. I believe, too, that Brel's translators sometimes underestimated an English-speaking audience's interest in and ability to understand French or Belgian cultural and historical references, no doubt accounting for the transformation of "*La Valse à Mille Temps*" into "Carousel," "*Les Flamandes*" into "Marathon," or "*Le Moribond*" into "Seasons in the Sun."

MMA: In the **Chicago Reader**, Albert Williams comments that "Brel's rousing drinking songs and aching ballads suit the scruffy intimacy of Theo Ubique Theatre Company's cafe venue, and the fine young cast . . . deliver honest, emotionally detailed readings of Johnston's translations, which capture the potent imagery and dark humor of Brel's lyrics." <http://www.theatreinchicago.com/review.php?playID=2480>

Can you give us some examples of ways in which you were able to find English equivalents for Brel's imagery and moods, at the same time respecting the need to make the songs singable?

AJ: In the very first Brel song I translated, "Chanson des vieux amants," are the lines

Plus rien ne ressemblait à rien
T'avais perdu le goût de l'eau
Et moi celui de la conquête.

The "l'eau" line seemed to derive from the French idiomatic expression "to live on love and fresh water." Lacking the space to make that understandable--eight syllables!--and needing to remember rhyme and metrics, I opted for the following:

When things began to fall apart
I turned away when women smiled
You turned to wine and mornings after.

When I make such decisions I try to come up with something that uses appropriate English idiom(s) and

manages some sort of verbal acuteness, as well as being singable. And in the refrain, Brel writes:

Mais mon amour
Mon doux mon tendre mon merveilleux amour
De l'aube claire jusqu'à la fin du jour
Je t'aime encore tu sais je t'aime.

That would translate literally as:

But my love
My sweet my tender my marvelous love
From clear dawn until the end of day
I love you still you know I love you.

Again, respecting meter and rhyme, as well as trying to come up with something that would resonate in English, I came up with:

But, oh, my love
Your kiss could always take my breath away
From light of dawn until the end of day
I love you still, you know, I love you.

And to resonate further, I played with verbs in subsequent iterations of the refrain, first substituting "can" for "could," then "will." For the final refrain, when Brel draws out the last phrase as "je t'a-ai-me," I used "I love you so."

I hope this gives a flavor of how I work, though I must say that, whenever I stray from Brel's original imagery in a way that bothers me, I keep tinkering until I come up with something I think is better. In *Ne me quitte pas*, for example, I changed my translation of this stanza:

Il est paraît-il
Des terres brûlées
Donnant plus de blé
Qu'un meilleur avril

Here's my original translation:

When the deadest of earth
On the emptiest plain
Is more fruitful by far
Than the soft April rain.

I wasn't happy with that, and I've finally come up with this new translation:

When a desolate waste
Yields healthier grain
Than a field that is graced
By a soft April rain

The new version resolves the illogic of the rain's being fruitful, as well as getting better rhymes.

MMA: How does one balance singability with the cultural nuances in a song?

AJ: Having moved on to other translation projects, including songs by writers in French and other languages, I would now generalize my observations regarding the likelihood of translators opting primarily for singable—rather than accurate—lyrics and their making questionable cultural assumptions about the interests and abilities of English-speaking audiences. My own feeling is that a powerful attraction of work in another tongue is precisely its cultural content. And while I agree that singability is vital, my own attempts at translation are guided by my commitment to rendering lyrics in English that come as close as possible to the originals in meaning and spirit, and in form that succeeds as both poetry and song. H. L. Mencken's famous observation, "No one ever lost money underestimating the intelligence of the American public" notwithstanding, one of my great satisfactions in translating Brel's songs is the critical and popular approval my versions have gained. Though that acclaim may at this point be far short of a place on the musical hit parade, it nonetheless encourages the hope that one needn't underestimate one's audience.

MMA: Tell us what you're working on now.

AJ: The working title of my latest project is *Songs You Thought You Knew*, a collection offering my own translations of songs in several languages that became popular hits in English versions often bearing little resemblance to the originals. In this context, returning to the 2008 ALTA panel, I'll note that during our warm-up session, Nancy Festinger suggested we sing "Autumn Leaves," Johnny Mercer's version of

Jacques Prévert's "*Les feuilles mortes*." I was delighted that I had brought with me my own quite different version of the song, entitled "The Dying Leaves," and had the pleasure of singing it in duet with Nancy, the first performance of a song from the new project. I'd suggest that one real pleasure of translating popular lyrics is precisely that of bringing to the English-speaking public "songs they thought they knew."

MMA: Thanks for sharing your experiences translating song lyrics with us, Arnie. I've translated a couple of Argentine songs myself and know how very difficult it is to balance "singability" with a respect for the original lyrics!

AJ: You're very welcome.

* * * * *

Don't Leave Me

Please don't go away
For you must forget
All you can forget
All that's flown away
Please forget the times
We misunderstood
All the explanations
That did no good
Please forget the times
When a simple "why"
In a single breath
Stilled the heart of joy

Don't leave me
Don't leave me
Don't leave me
Don't leave me

I will offer you all
The pearls of the rain
From a faraway plain
Where rain never falls
I will dig in the earth
By day and by night
To cover your body
In gold and in light
I will make you a land
Where love will be king
Where love will be law
And you will be queen
Please don't go away
Please don't go away
Please don't go away
Please don't go away

Please don't go away
And I will invent
Senseless language meant
Just to make you stay
I will tell you tales
Of those lovers who
Find the fire again
Of a love that's true
Tell you of the king
Whom you never knew
But who died alone
Wanting only you

Don't leave me
Don't leave me
Don't leave me
Don't leave me

When a mountain that's dead
Can wake with a start
And pour out its heart
Of fire so red
When a desolate waste
Grows healthier grain
Than a field that is graced
By a soft April rain
And because when the sun
Sinks down in a blaze
Red mingles with black
In the deepening haze
Please don't go away
Please don't go away
Please don't go away
Please don't go away

Please don't go away
I will weep no more
I will speak no more
I will hide away
Just to watch you dance
Just to see you smile
Hear you sing and laugh
For a little while
Let me be your shadow
No more than fog
The shadow of your hand
The shadow of your dog

Don't leave me
Don't leave me
Don't leave me
Don't leave me

Note: The original French lyrics, as well as Rod McKuen's translation *If You Go Away*, can be found on the Internet. A comparison of the French lyrics with those of McKuen appears at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If_You_Go_Away#McKuen_lyrics.

A MACHINE TRANSLATION

KNOCK-KNEED OF MY HOPE

Music and lyrics: Luis H. Morales

The following machine translation of *Zamba de mi esperanza* (the *zamba* is a traditional Argentine folk dance) comes courtesy of <http://translation2.paralink.com/>.

Zamba de mi esperanza
amanecida como un querer,
sueño, sueño del alma
que a veces muere sin florecer.

Knock-kneed of my hope
dawn as one to want,
I dream, dream of the soul
that sometimes dies without blooming

Zamba, a ti te canto
porque tu canto derrama amor,
caricia de tu pañuelo
que va envolviendo mi corazón

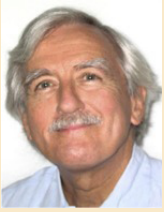
Knock-kneed, I sing to you
because your singing spills love,
caress of your handkerchief
that is wrapping my heart

ESTRIBILLO [refrain]:

Estrella, tu que miraste,
tu que escuchaste mi parecer,
estrella, deja que cante,
deja que quiera como yo se,
estrella, deja que cante,
deja que quiera como yo se.

Star, you at that you looked,
you to that you listened me to seem,
it covers with stars, leaves that I sang,
it leaves that it is me who wants like,
it covers with stars, leaves that I sang,
it leaves that it is me who wants like.

BY THE WAY



by Tony Beckwith,
<http://www.tonybeckwith.com/>

SURROUNDED BY LANGUAGE

We left Barcelona in the morning and drove northwest towards the mountains. It was early July, so it felt good to be leaving the clammy heat of the coast. Our final destination was a wedding in Toulouse but we were spending the night in the Pyrenees along the way.

We'd made reservations at a tiny place called *Estamariu* that was listed in an online directory, but which I could not find on my map of Spain. Just before reaching Andorra, which is at about 7000 feet, we turned off the main road and inched our way

up a narrow rutted lane that zigzagged back and forth, hugging the side of the mountain. After what seemed like a long time the track leveled off and we arrived at the village we were seeking. It was just a handful of houses huddled together on a shelf, surrounded on three sides by terraced fields that rose up in a graceful sweep to the towering peaks above. The streets were so narrow that at one point we had to fold in the rear-view mirrors on the sides of the car. The houses were mainly two story structures built of native stone hewn from the rugged surroundings. Over a deep-set door, 1817 had been carved into a massive lintel made of



ancient lumber. It was early afternoon and the streets were deserted.

Our home for the night, the *L'Era de Cal Bastida*, was a charming place with six rooms on two floors. After settling in, the ladies retired for a siesta and Geoffrey and I strode off to survey the terrain. We walked up the track we'd driven in on, past a corral where a dozen or so heifers stood and stared at us, past the stone church and the graveyard, past terraces carefully shored up with the same stone used to build the houses. Two men were harvesting a field, rolling hay into bales with a tractor. They told us the terraces were mainly used for growing hay, to feed the livestock during the inhospitable winters. We walked on uphill.

A weathered-looking man sat on a patch of grass under a gnarled, stunted tree, smiling. He was uphill from the track and we hadn't noticed him when we stopped to look around. We said yes, we loved the view. He invited us to sit down, and we did. "My name is Diego," he said. We introduced ourselves, and he remarked that we spoke very good Spanish, so we explained that we were from Argentina. "Oh yes, Argentina," he nodded. I mentioned that we were also translators.

"Translators?" he said, raising his eyebrows. "Ah well, you are in the perfect place: here you are surrounded by language!" He pointed north, south, east and west and said, "French, Spanish, Catalan, and Basque." Then he pointed down and up and added, "Also the language of the earth and



As we rounded a bend we stopped to look back, gazing out at a breathtaking view of mountains behind mountains behind mountains shouldering their way to the blue horizon, and the free-fall swoop to the valley below. We stood in silence, gazing. Until a voice behind us asked, "You like the view?"

the sky. Here on the mountain we hear them all blowing around us in the wind, and after a while they all seem the same. No difference between one language and the other." He laughed. "Maybe not an ideal situation for a translator trying to make a living!" We talked for a while and I noticed that,

like so many Spaniards, regardless of their level of education, he seemed possessed of a sincere respect for language and an instinctive appreciation for the art of expression.

That evening we sat on the terrace outside the *L'Era de Cal Bastida* and had dinner looking out over the lights in the villages far below. Geoffrey told our wives about Diego. "I think he was speaking metaphorically about how in Europe one is surrounded by many languages, all the time, as a matter of course. With so many countries so close together, there is an inevitable contact with lots of languages. This is something we miss when we live in places like the US or Argentina, where public discourse is mainly monolingual. Unless we are constantly exposed to both our source and our target languages, we have to work hard to keep our ear attuned to the genuine syntax and current subtleties of the absent one."

I agreed, and said that I'd been dealing with that very issue in the project I'd been working on recently. It was a book of whimsical stories and poems full of esoteric puns and word play, cultural references and rhymes. A challenging task that stretched and bent my mind as I labored to keep up with the author, trying to grasp the essence of his work and inhale it so that I might see his vision and hear his song. Sometimes, late at night, I saw words as clouds that moved and changed shape and took on lives of their own. Sometimes they seemed more like water balloons that hugged the contours of their meaning as I shoehorned them into new shapes and spaces, struggling to resist a literal interpretation while still being loyal to the text. One day, when I was resting my brain from working on this book, I came across "Drawing Class," a Billy Collins poem in which, although he obviously wasn't thinking about translation, he seemed to be talking to me:

*If you ever asked me
how my drawing classes are going,
I would tell you that I enjoy
adhering to the outline of a thing,
to follow the slope of an individual pear
or the curve of a glossy piano.*

*[...]
I would add that I can get lost
crosshatching the shadow of a chair.*

Geoffrey grinned. "Yes! I've tried to 'adhere to the outline of a thing' as I translate it. And I can certainly get lost in the crosshatching, changing one word for another, rearranging a sentence this way and that, straining to hear the author's voice coming through from the original."

"Maybe we should come back here and work for a while," I suggested. "If Diego is right, we could sit out on the hillside and listen to languages blowing in the wind until they all sound the same. We could step back and forth from one to another and understand them all."

Our plan was to descend on Toulouse in the morning, but that evening we were tucked away in a remote village somewhere on top of the world, sitting on a terrace where the air was crisp and clear, and time seemed unimportant. Lillian leaned over to Elaine and said, in a stage whisper, "What's Basque for 'Let's take a stroll'?" And so, with no further ado, we walked up the hill and looked at the quiet terraces in the moonlight.

Tony Beckwith was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, spent his formative years in Montevideo, Uruguay, then set off to see the world. He came to Texas in 1980 and now lives in Austin where he works as a writer, translator, poet, and cartoonist. "The Spanglish I spoke with my bilingual peers during my childhood was a perfect education for a translator, as it taught me how to deconstruct both languages and create a hybrid form with rules of its own."

THE GAME OF THE NAME

BY MARK HERMAN



*Mark Herman is a literary translator, technical translator, chemical engineer, playwright, lyricist, musician, and actor. For more than a decade he has written the "Humor and Translation" column appearing in **The ATA Chronicle**. In collaboration with Ronnie Apter, he has written several articles on translation, and translated numerous poems, miscellaneous pieces, and 22 works for the musical stage which have been performed throughout the United States, Canada, and England.*

Translations into English of operas, or of any texts meant to be sung to pre-existing music, are often terrible. One reason for this is the difficulty of opera translation. Many problems must be overcome and many compromises made among competing factors. But opera translations, and subsequent performances in the language of the audience – and of the performers – are absolutely necessary if the totality of the drama is to be conveyed across the stage footlights. In an opera, the drama results from the complex interplay of words and music, both heard simultaneously. The current popular expedient of projecting captions in the language of the audience does aid comprehension, but only succeeds to a limited degree in preventing the reduction of the opera to a wordless symphony with sets and costumes.

Some of the problems faced by opera translators are listed below, followed by a discussion of strategies for overcoming the difficulties posed by one problem, that of matching rhythms when translating names and other proper nouns.

The Problems Faced By Opera Translators

Like a translation of a spoken play, an opera translation must convey the original's meaning, characterization (including diction level), pacing, word play, and poetic form (if any). But an opera translation must also do much more. First, assuming that the music is to be changed as little as possible, an opera translation must also match the exact rhythm of the original. That is, it must match the original text syllable for syllable, stress for stress, and quantity for quantity, the last item referring to the relative length of time it takes to say or sing each syllable. Maintaining rhythm means that French alexandrines cannot be translated into iambic pentameter or prose. Somehow, rhythms of the source language must be mimicked without contorting those of the target language.

An opera translator must also take account of the fact that two separate aural systems pattern sense in an opera, the musical and the verbal. The two aural systems may support, ignore, or conflict with one other, but, except in instances of pure dialogue or pure music, both are present. For example, a musical setting may support the verbal pattern by pausing after end-stopped rhymes, or it may conflict with the verbal pattern by pausing elsewhere. The two systems can support each other by having their emotional crests occur simultaneously, or conflict with each other by cresting at different points. The translator must recognize and mimic these patterns, which can be a difficult task if the word order differs between the source and target languages.

Another problem is verbal repetition, a common occurrence in operas. If the cultural expectations of the target language do not accept the degree of repetition permissible in the source language, the translation needs to have some new lyrics where the original has repetition. Furthermore, if the words of the source language repeat but the musical setting changes, the changed music may not allow an equivalent repetition in the target language. The translator must then decide whether to write new lyrics, repeat old lyrics but in a way different from the original, or actually change the music to allow the translated words to repeat as in the original opera.

Sometimes, the translator needs to take account of and reproduce the very consonant or vowel sounds of the original, both when there is onomatopoeia and when the sounds have emotive effect or particular beauty or intended ugliness on the notes on which they are sung.

In a related problem, opera translators must consider the limitations of the human voice. When a sung pitch is outside the central octave of a singer's vocal range (usually the octave down from middle C for males and the octave up from middle C for females), the shape of the oral cavity limits what vowels and consonants the singer can produce. If translators choose words singers cannot shape properly, those words will be deformed out of all recognition.

If the target language is English, or another largely non-inflected monosyllabic language, an additional problem arises. In English, simple concepts and strong emotions, both abundant in opera, demand monosyllabic words. "Passion" is not a substitute for "love"; "bipedal appendages" will not do when "legs" are meant. Yet many operas are written in languages in which simple and emotional words are multisyllabic. One possible solution for the English translator is to spread the English monosyllable over two, or even more, notes, where this does not distort the musical line. Or the monosyllabic English word, or even the entire English thought, can be set on notes different from those of the corresponding original word or thought. And sometimes, especially, in a comic situation, one can risk the oddity of "bipedal appendages."

English is also relatively rhyme-poor compared to many of the common languages of opera. However, this is not nearly as serious a problem as most people imagine. The music usually allows at least some rhymes to be dropped in the translation. For instance, an *abab* rhyme pattern usually does not suffer if shifted to *abcb*. And, even when the music demands rhymes for aural closure, the true rhymes of the original can often be matched by less than true rhymes in English: off-rhymes (line-time), weak rhymes (major-squalor), half rhymes (kitty-pitted), and consonant rhymes (slat-slit), any of which can be used alone or in combination with other devices such as assonance and alliteration.

Of course, there are problems beyond the ability of the translator to solve. Consider *Maria Stuarda*, an Italian opera with music by Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) and libretto by Giuseppe Bardari (1817-61), after the German play *Maria Stuart* by Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805). Despite the incorporation of non-historical incidents, the opera does relate a true situation that existed in England at the beginning of 1587: the English court had condemned Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, for treason. The real Queen Elizabeth, like her operatic counterpart, was reluctant to sign the death warrant but finally did sign it. The opera ends with Mary's execution, another historical fact. The insoluble problem is that the music proclaims its early 19th-century Italian origins with almost every note, continually contradicting the opera's 16th-century British setting. Short of rewriting the entire libretto into a non-historical piece set in early 19th-century Italy, both translator and audience simply have to live with the discrepancy.

The problems faced by opera translators usually cannot all be solved simultaneously. Compromises must continually be made as one aspect or another of the original is deemed the most important for the translator to preserve at any given moment of the opera.

The Translation of Names

As an example of how Ronnie Apter and I go about making such compromises, I will consider just the first problem listed above – that is, rhythm, the matching of syllable count, stress, and quantity – in the context of translating the names of people and places, a category of words many people often assume does not need to be translated at all.

Problems of syllable count arise when an opera written in a language that inflects names, such as Russian, is translated into a non-inflected language, such as English. In Musorgskii's *Boris Godunoff*, the name Boris is mentioned many times, not just in the two-syllable nominative Bo-RIS, but also in three-syllable inflected forms such as Bo-RI-sa and Bo-RI-su. The third inflected syllable has no place in English, and so the problem to be solved is how to set two syllables in English on three musical notes. In our translation, Ronnie Apter and I used several strategies. Where possible, we simply eliminated the third note by tying it to the second. However, that sometimes ruined the musical line or was otherwise not viable. The alternative, if the name came in the middle of a phrase, was to “use up” the third note by setting the syllable of a different word on it, or if the name came at the end of a phrase, to reset the name on entirely different notes earlier in the phrase. Finally, if necessary, we dropped the name from the phrase altogether if we could do so and still have the phrase make sense.

Note there is another potential rhythm problem with Bo-RIS, involving stress. If we had decided to “translate” the Russian pronunciation Bo-RIS into the English pronunciation BO-ris, the change in stress would have required setting the name on different notes from the original every time it came up. We decided to give Boris and all the other Russian names in the opera their Russian pronunciation, thus avoiding having to reset them every time.

But what about the name of a Spanish character in an opera set in Spain, mispronounced not only with respect to English but also with respect to Spanish? Such is the case with Bizet's French opera *Carmen*, where the protagonist's name is Gallicized so that it is pronounced Car-MEN, with the accent on the second syllable. But the correct Spanish (and English) pronunciation is CAR-men. Nonetheless, since, at a high point of the opera, Don José cries out “Car-MEN! Car-MEN!” on memorable music, we believe that no verbal substitution is possible here, and that resetting the rhythm of the notes is highly undesirable. Therefore, were we to translate this opera, we would almost certainly simply accept the wrongly accented name.

However, we could and did reset the names every time when we translated *Maria Stuarda*, an opera already mentioned above. Consider the Italianized name E-li-sa-BET-ta, accented on the fourth of five syllables, versus E-LI-za-beth, accented on the second of four syllables. *Maria Stuarda* is a historical drama, notwithstanding its deviations from historical fact, and we felt that the characters should have their true historical names. Therefore, when the chorus and the Earl of Shrewsbury ask Elizabeth to show Mary mercy at the beginning of Act I, the Italian “Il bel cor d'Elisabetta segua i moti di pietà” which literally means “Let the good heart of Elizabeth follow the promptings of pity” becomes in our translation

Listen to the voice of pity! Good Queen Elizabeth, relent!
(Donizetti/Bardari, *Maria Stuarda*, Act I, 23-24)

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for the English translation by Mark Herman and Ronnie Apter

The English “E-LI-za-beth” is set on entirely different notes, in a different part of the phrase, than was the Italian “E-li-sa-BET-ta.”

In most translations, names are simply left as in the original (*Boris – Boris*), or given their direct equivalents in the two languages (*Elizabeth – Elisabetta*). But when fictional names have actual meanings, more radical translations may be called for. Examples of names with actual meanings or at least meaningful resonances abound in non-operatic fiction: consider Dickens’ Uriah Heep and Tolkien’s Mordor. Though often ignored, we believe that these resonances should be kept in translation if possible. In an opera translation, the name in the target language should have the same number of syllables, same accentuation, and same quantity as the original. In Smetana’s *Two Widows*, the character Mumlal has a name that resonates with the meanings “mutterer” and “grumbler” in the original Czech. In our English translation, we call him “Grumpel.”

Conclusion

Every translator is familiar with the need for compromise among the competing demands set by the source language text and the possibilities of the target language. Translators of advertisements, fiction, and poetry often need to consider sound as well as sense. Opera translation poses further demands due to the additional constraints of the pre-set musical rhythms, the limitations of the singers’ vocal apparatus, and the need to match (or mismatch) the emotive crests of the words and music. And even names require careful consideration by the translator.

GET READY TO SUBMIT PAPERS FOR ATA’S 50TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE!

Approximately five years ago the ATA changed its fee structure to pay one membership fee rate rather than a fee plus an additional quota to be a member of a division. Since that time, the Literary Division membership has increased from less than 300 members to over 1,900 members. What does this indicate about the interest in the Literary Division? We recognize that while an open fee schedule probably attracted more members into the Literary Division, our emails and phone calls to the Literary Division tell us more. The LD Administrator receives correspondence from around the world with a variety of requests showing that many members are just beginning in the field of literary translation and want to know how to break into literary translation. Other requests show the enormous differences regarding copyright and publishing contracts that exist for translated literature globally. Many write to address the issue of the pedagogy behind teaching literature in translation as well as the pedagogy of teaching literary translation. What has not increased over the past four years is the number of submissions for presentations on literary translation at the annual conference. We encourage those with expertise in the field of literary translation to submit panel discussions or individual presentations based on the topics included here, as well as any other topic in literary translation you think will be of interest to our members, by clicking on the following link:

<http://www.atanet.org/conferencesandseminars/proposal.php>.

MINUTES OF THE 2008 LITERARY DIVISION MEETING

ATA Literary Division Business Meeting Minutes Orlando, FL Saturday, November 8, 2008

Item 1. Welcome and Introductions

Meeting called to order: 11:05 AM ; presiding: Enrica Ardemagni, LD Administrator;
Montserrat Zuckerman, LD Assistant Administrator, acting as secretary.

Item 2. The agenda was accepted without changes.

Item 3. Montserrat Zuckerman was appointed to take minutes for the Business Meeting.

Item 4. Division Mission

The mission of the ATA Literary Division is to uphold excellence and ethical standards within the profession, to advocate fair and just treatment of literary translators by authors, agents and publishers, to promote recognition of work and professionalism of literary translators, to encourage cooperation among other literary translation organizations, and to support literary translators as a community.

- **Sessions at the Annual Conference** – 8-9 sessions slated for presentations on literary translation.
Newsletters – *Source* the first online edition came out in September (http://www.ata-divisions.org/LD/newsletter/2008/Source8_27.pdf.) Michele Aynesworth has accepted the position of Editor of *Source* for two years starting in 2007. In 2009 the Literary Division will open a search for a new editor. Past editors may apply for the position. A small stipend is awarded. The newsletter is quarterly and enhances the educational experience of the division members. It is currently on the LD website. You may submit articles to the editor through her email address on the LD website. Currently she is also doing the layout design and has some regular contributors to the newsletter.
- LD annual journal of literary translation, *Beacons X*, is online and can be purchased in hardcopy through the ATA website. There is currently a search for an editor for *Beacons XI*, which will be an online edition only. There are monies allocated for a web/layout designer for *Beacons*. Applications have been received and interviews will take place shortly with a search committee, headed by Liliana Valenzuela.
 - ✓ **LD Website** has a new web master, Myriam Young. If you want anything posted, especially in the category of publications or conferences, please send them directly to Myriam through the LD website.

Item 5. Elections

The term for the current LD Administrator expires with the 2009 conference so elections will need to be held. The current LD Assistant Administrator is serving a one-year Interim position. Since elections were not held, there will be an appointment of another one-year term with elections in 2009 for the 2-year Administrator and Assistant Administrator positions. Nominations and self-nominations accepted.

Item 6. Listserv

Those present were in agreement that the LD should start a listserv. Current membership is 1,935.

Item 7. Old Business

- ✓ Publication of the hardcopy of *Beacons X* was possible by private donations and an ATA match. The electronic copy of *Beacons X* is available by contacting the LD Administrator (LD@ata-divisions.org)
- ✓ Conflicting sessions is always a problem. Propose to the ATA Board that Business Meetings be held when no sessions are scheduled.

Item 8. New Business

Suggestions for **ATA 50th Annual Conference** (New York City, October 28-November 1, 2009):

- ✓ Propose to the ATA Board that literary translation be the focus of the conference
- ✓ Increase the number of panel presentations for literary division
- ✓ Literary Café: (1) podium with a mike and better lighting; (2) invite distinguished speakers to read; (3) stage translated play; (3) advertise distinguished speaker reading or play
- ✓ Staging of translated play: (1) in hotel restaurant area during lunch or dinner as a way to promote LD; (2) at Literary Café. Phyllis Zatlin volunteered to investigate this possibility; costs would be modest; need ATA buy-in as sponsor
- ✓ Keynote for 50th Annual Conference: Edith Grossman, Catherine Porter Lewis or Gregory Rabassa; request submissions from PEN
- ✓ Organize a special outing for LD members; e.g. a play

Advancement of new MLA-ATA ties:

- ✓ Promote ATA membership at MLA conferences by having hard copies of *Beacons* and *Source* on hand at the MLA conference.
- ✓ Propose that ATA Board submit the Proceedings of the ATA conferences for inclusion in the MLA bibliography bank.
- ✓ The topic for the 2010 MLA conference is translation. The LD will promote having members send proposals to the conference: suggestions: one session to consist of individual presentations of 10 minutes in duration; that Michael Scott Doyle be invited to submit his ATA presentation (2008) at the MLA conference.

Survey of membership to canvass LD membership re conference attendance in general and attendance at LD sessions.



The Literary Café

For years the Literary Division has sponsored a social event on Thursday evenings during the annual ATA Conference for members of the Literary Division. The purpose behind our Literary Café is to give individuals an opportunity to read and enjoy literary readings and translations. We have had some superb presentations, and in the future want to highlight the importance literary readings play through inspirational translations to open up the world to literary works. Starting this year we will have a lighted area with a microphone available for readers. Also, since this year is ATA's 50th Anniversary, we would like to fill our room with readers who can share experiences of past readings. Please contact the Literary Division Administrator, Enrica Ardemagni, LD@ata-divisions.org, to submit recommendations for individuals we may invite to read or for suggestions on what events you would like included in the Literary Café.