

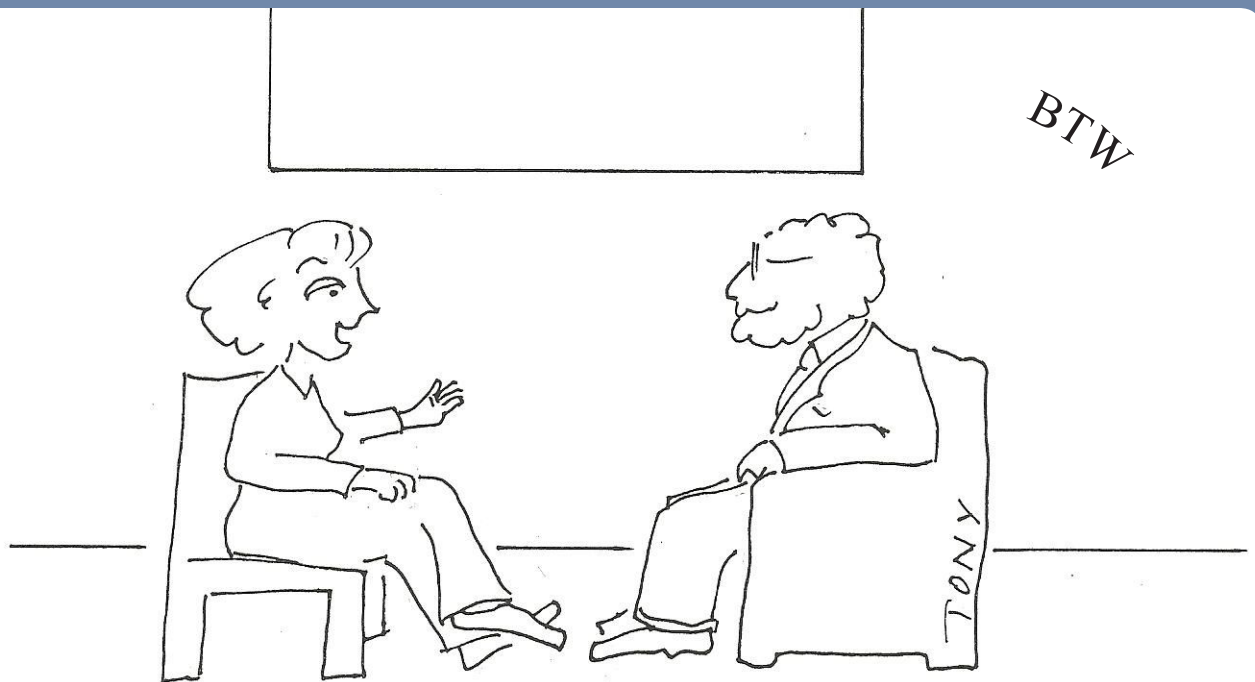
A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION
OF THE ATA'S LITERARY DIVISION

NO. 57

FALL 2012

SPIRITUAL TEXTS AND REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES

FEATURING AN INTERVIEW WITH
WILLIS BARNSTONE



Ever since he gave me a diamond ring he's telling everyone we're carbon dating.

IN THIS ISSUE

FROM THE EDITORS.....	3
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES.....	4
LETTER FROM THE LD ADMINISTRATORS.....	5
NEWS AND VIEWS.....	6
Profile: Willis Barnstone Traci Andrighetti	
REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES.....	11
A review of Lisa Carter's presentation in San Diego Rafa Lombardino	
READERS' CORNER.....	14
Publications, Awards, and Readings	
BY THE WAY.....	16
Add Arabic and Simmer for Eight Centuries Tony Beckwith	
TRANSLATING A CHILDREN'S BIBLE.....	22
Mark Herman and Ronnie Apter	
OLD LANG SINE: SEEKING TRUTH IN ANCIENT TEXTS.....	24
Ames Dee	
CREDITS.....	31

BTW Cartoons by Tony Beckwith

FROM THE EDITORS



Michele Aynesworth
Editor-in-Chief



Tony Beckwith
Associate Editor



Patrick Saari
Chief Copy Editor



Traci Andrighetti
News Editor

Several threads run through this issue of *Source*. Traci Andrighetti's interview with Willis Barnstone, noted translator of biblical poetry, kickstarts our focus on the **translation of spiritual texts**, though the interview runs delightfully off course to tell us how Barnstone met the Babe. Mark Herman and Ronnie Apter reveal the surprising challenges of translating a children's Bible. Finally, Ames Dee's essay "Old Lang Sine: Seeking Truth in Ancient Texts" explores the linguistic hurdles encountered in her journey through ancient spiritual texts.

An overlapping thread suggested by readers of *Source* is that of **translators' real-life experiences**. Rafa Lombardino reviews Lisa Carter's presentation at October's ATA Conference in San Diego, "The Einstein Enigma: A Case Study in Literary Translation." Lisa talked about such issues as working with an editor who doesn't respond, being distanced from the author, being asked to make substantive edits to the translation, and working under extreme deadline pressure.

More reporting on **the ATA Conference**, including a look back at the LD's After Hours Café, comes in the letter from Literary Division Administrators Emilia Balke and Clayton Causey.

In his **By the Way** column, Tony Beckwith muses on the evolution of the Spanish language and its centuries-long seasoning by Arabic.

Winter 2013

The theme of our Winter 2013 issue will be translations of poetry, including translations of French poet Baudelaire by Frank Guan and of Danish poet Benny Andersen by Michael Goldman.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Michele Aynesworth specializes in translating Argentine and French authors.

E-mail: michele@mckayaynesworth.com.

Tony Beckwith, a native of South America's Southern Cone, now lives in Austin, where he works as a writer, translator, poet, and cartoonist.

E-mail: tony@tonybeckwith.com.

Patrick Saari writes, translates, edits and interprets in English, French and Spanish.

E-mail: patricksaari@netlife.ec.

Traci Andrighetti is a prize-winning literary translator and author, editor, and creator of the Italian language and literature blog **italicissima**.

E-mail: itraci@hotmail.com.

Special thanks to Jamie Padula for proofreading and to LD officers Emilia Balke and Clayton Causey for their support.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

For upcoming issues we're particularly interested in "real life experiences" of literary translators, as well as translations of

- poetry (especially for Winter 2013)
- children's or teen books
- crime fiction or thrillers
- film subtitles.

Source is published by ATA's Literary Division.
American Translators Association
225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590
Alexandria, VA 22314

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submit articles up to 1600 words, font size 12,
Word or text file, single-spaced.
Indent paragraphs or put a space between them.
Include a brief bio of two or three sentences and,
if convenient, a photograph.
Illustrations and links, etc., are encouraged.
Submissions may be edited.

We encourage submissions from Asia, Africa,
and all other cultures less frequently represented
in these pages.

Send general submissions for future issues to
michele@mckayaynesworth.com.
News and Views submissions go to
itraci@hotmail.com

WINTER 2013 submissions deadline: February 1
All previously unpublished material
copyright © the respective authors.

FROM THE LD ADMINISTRATORS

We're all translators because words fascinate us. Each one has the colors of a butterfly's wings and when they swarm together in good literature they surround us and lift us up beyond the world of contracts and birth certificates, beyond the world of interpreting at conferences, courts and medical appointments, beyond vapid email communication. They take us to a place close to the mystery of the universe, a place both human and divine, a place of euphoria and surrender, a place of loss and death. The pursuit of this sensation is what brought us all to the Literary Division's After Hours Café.

We had a published novelist give a reading from an upcoming book dealing with merit, privilege and self-repression. There was a poetry reading from a recently-published Spanish-English bilingual poetry collection from poet/translator Liliana Valenzuela that paints a picture of women in a world of barriers and boundaries. One translator collected Russian poems from retired immigrants in Minneapolis and read his translations, which were especially impressive since they were faithful to both meter and rhyme.

We spent two hours reveling in words. We didn't want to leave. Let's make next year in San Antonio just as electric.

On October 25, just before the LD Annual Meeting, a group of us got together for lunch and talked about literature, our work, our hopes and dreams, and what we can do for the Literary Division. I hope that the rest of you who came to this lunch enjoyed it as much as I did and that we will meet again next year.

The Literary Division's Annual Meeting was relatively well attended, about 30 people were present. Unfortunately, we ran out of time and could not discuss important division business. In preparation for the next year's elections for LD Administrator and Assistant Administrator, we are looking for volunteers to form a Nominating Committee. We are also looking for volunteers who are knowledgeable about and enjoy blogging and other forms of social media, as well as volunteer editors interested in working on an online issue of Beacons. There are many benefits to be had from using social media and digital communication: they are inexpensive ways to reach a wide audience, they can be stored at no additional cost and made available for a long period of time, and they are much easier to produce.

We wish you a very happy Holiday Season filled with warmth, love and joy!

Emilia Balke and Clayton Causey



Emilia Balke is a freelance translator, interpreter, and voiceover talent. She translates from Russian, German, and Macedonian into English and Bulgarian, and from Bulgarian into English.



Clayton D. Causey, CT, is a freelance translator and musician. He translates fiction, poetry and song lyrics from Spanish, Portuguese and French into English.

Literary Division
Administrator:
Emilia Balke

ebalke@language-web.net
Assistant Administrator:
P. Clayton D. Causey
literarytranslator@gmail.com

NEWS AND VIEWS



Traci Andrighetti
News and Views Editor

PROFILE: WILLIS BARNSTONE

Willis Barnstone is a poet, translator, biblical scholar, memoirist, anthologist and artist. He taught at Wesleyan University, was O'Connor Professor of Greek at Colgate University, and is now Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature and Spanish at Indiana University, where he has been a member of the East Asian Languages & Culture department and the Institute for Biblical and Literary Studies.

Last month I had the great pleasure of interviewing Willis Barnstone about his fascinating life and amazing body of work.

Traci Andrighetti: Although this issue of *Source* focuses on religious translation, I would be remiss as an Italian-American if I first didn't ask you what you remember about meeting the honorary Italian, George Herman "Babe" Ruth, a.k.a. "the Great Bambino."

Willis Barnstone: Babe Ruth and I lived in the same apartment house on Riverside Drive in NY. One day the doorman asked me to come up and take a photo with the Babe. He was going to give away baseball diplomas to poor kids at the 1939 World's Fair in Queens. The shot appeared that Sunday on the front page of New York News or New York Mirror, I don't remember which for sure, but one of those two great tabloids. I've included the poem I wrote about it, which is from a recent book called *Stickball on 88th Street* (originally published by *Colorado Quarterly*, 1978). There is also a photo that, well, my older sister carried around with her for years till she thought I was old enough not to lose it. I lose everything, but I still have the photo, and I made a wall-size poster out of it for fun.

TA: You were about 12 years old when you met Babe. Do you have any recollection of who or what you wanted to be back then? Did you want to be a baseball player like most 12-year-old boys? Or did you already have a sense that life would take you down a very different path?

WB: When I was that age I didn't know. I had no idea that I would be a poet. That came only when I was 19 years old and already a senior at Bowdoin College in Maine (where I was born, though I grew up in NY). One night in Longfellow Hall (Longfellow and Hawthorne were both of the class of 1825 and both were expelled as freshmen for playing cards and gambling for a keg of wine they would buy between semesters, though they were later readmitted), I woke up because in this very cramped room my roommate, who had been through WW2 as a rifleman, had a severe epileptic seizure. Suddenly, at two in the morning, he started to scream, and he was biting his tongue. I got up and pulled his mouth open, his eyes opened, but he couldn't see. The next morning he woke feeling that every bone in his body was broken. That night I wrote my first poem. I went back to sleep, and twenty minutes later I wrote a second one. The next day, I took the poems downstairs to my French, Danish, and Czech, older, more mature and very European friends, and they took them seriously and mentioned Rilke, Valéry, etc. And so instead of giving me shit, it was honest belief. And from that moment, I knew what I would be for the rest of my life, with everything else secondary. And though I am most diverse, having published some seventy books with the best trade and university presses with a few lovely limited collector's editions, poetry is the center that connects me to fiction, anthologies, and three books of memoirs. It is the vice of my life. And it gets worse (or better) all the time.

TA: So, you literally became a poet overnight. But how did you become involved in translation?

WB: I became interested in translation in 1948 when my future Greek sister-in-law, majoring in Spanish at Mount Holyoke College, sent me a poem by Antonio Machado that began, "Era un niño que soñaba / un caballo de cartón... [A child was dreaming / of a cardboard horse]...." I translated it. The first book I published, *Poems of Exchange with Six Poems Translated from Antonio Machado* (l'Institut Français d'Athènes, 1951), contains six poems in translation. Later, I went to Yale University to write my PhD dissertation on the poetry of Antonio Machado. A recent translation I did of Machado's poems, *Border of a Dream: Selected Poems of Antonio Machado* (Copper Canyon Press, 2004), won the Lannan Literary Award for Translation that year.

The original book came out with a striking drawing by Picasso of Machado called "Homage to Antonio Machado" and a preface by novelist John Dos Passos, as well as a reminiscence by Juan Ramón Jiménez, who won the Nobel Prize for Poetry.

I have published some eighteen books of poetry (my center), many books of criticism, three volumes of memoir, five books on the Gnostics, the same number on the New Testament, and I think thirty-one volumes of poetry in translation and one novel

from Modern Greek. Add the anthologies and an edited book, and you see why I am crushed by this damn obsession with writing. Do I sleep, my friends ask? Yes, I do, but I also enjoy working. Throughout all these books, the binding force, the binder holding the paint firm, is poetry. It is my ultimate vice. It happened one winter night in Maine.

TA: It makes sense that, as a poet, you would have an interest in translating poetry. But how did you become interested in translating religious texts?

WB: Most of the world's poetry has been religious or political historically. I translated the complete poems of Sappho in a bilingual edition for Doubleday Anchor in 1965. It has become a classic and is often republished. Most of Sappho's poems are to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and to the other gods as well. We may not believe in Homer and his gods, but the Greeks did. Remember that Socrates was executed by the city of Athens for defaming the gods. So, it was natural for me to translate not only Sappho, a "pagan," but also the complete poems of Saint John of the Cross, author of the famous *Dark Night of the Soul* and the best poet in the Spanish language, for a New Directions book, vigorously in print, and Wang Wei, the 8th century Daoist/Buddhist poet, for University Press of New England in *Laughing Lost in the Mountains: Selected Poems of Wang Wei* (Panda Books, 1989, with Tony Barnstone). And, of course, the poetry of the New Testament in my two books with Norton, *The Restored New Testament* (2009) and *The Poems of Jesus Christ* (2012). There will be a forthcoming *The Poems of God* to make a trilogy of biblical poetry.

TA: From my perspective, translating poetry and translating religion are two very different endeavors. Would you agree? Or do you find them similar in some way?

WB: There is no difference in my mind in translating religious poetry from secular poetry. I don't make a religious pitch for or against the beliefs. I don't think any poet ever has in translating religious texts, unless they are totally mediocre. I have never heard of anyone translating Homer or the Homeric hymns or Indian Hindu scripture or Buddhist or the Biblical Song of Songs (which I published in a separate book) who makes a pitch for or against the religion or the faith. I don't translate as an act of proselytizing. That would corrupt the purpose and quality of the endeavor.

To learn more about Willis Barnstone, please visit his Wikipedia page http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Barnstone and his website www.willisbarnstone.com.

Barnstone's website includes a complete (and awe-inspiring) bibliography of his work, as well as pages from his journal and samples of his drawings. There is also a page devoted to his translation of *The Restored New Testament*, which contains a sample translation from Mattityahu (Matthew), "The Parable of The Sower."

The Building

Babe Ruth lives on the other
side of the court. His brother-in-law
jumped from the 18th
story into the handball
area where we play until tenants
get angry. I heard the thump
when I was in
bed. The Babe gave
me a baseball diploma. The same
elevatorman, Joe, who slapped me for
not being nice to
Jerry (it wasn't true)
took me upstairs to the Babe's
for the photo in the *Daily News*.
Sunday afternoons we hear
Father Coughlin and Hitler
live, shrieking on the radio. Everyone
hates Hitler. Comes a strike, new
men keep billy clubs
by the doors. I
like the scabs same as Ruddy
and Joe outside to whom we
bring sandwiches. I heard
Ruddy got hit trying
to bust in. They almost broke
his head. It's funny for men
to ride me up
the elevator. I always
run downstairs. They slow me down
as I race for the outside
into the north pole
wind and the gully.
But often I spend the afternoon
in a corner of the elevator,
going up and down
in the tired coffin.
When no one else is riding,
they let me close the brass
gate. I do it
like a grown man.

(From *Stickball on 88th Street*, republished in 2011 by Red Hen Press)

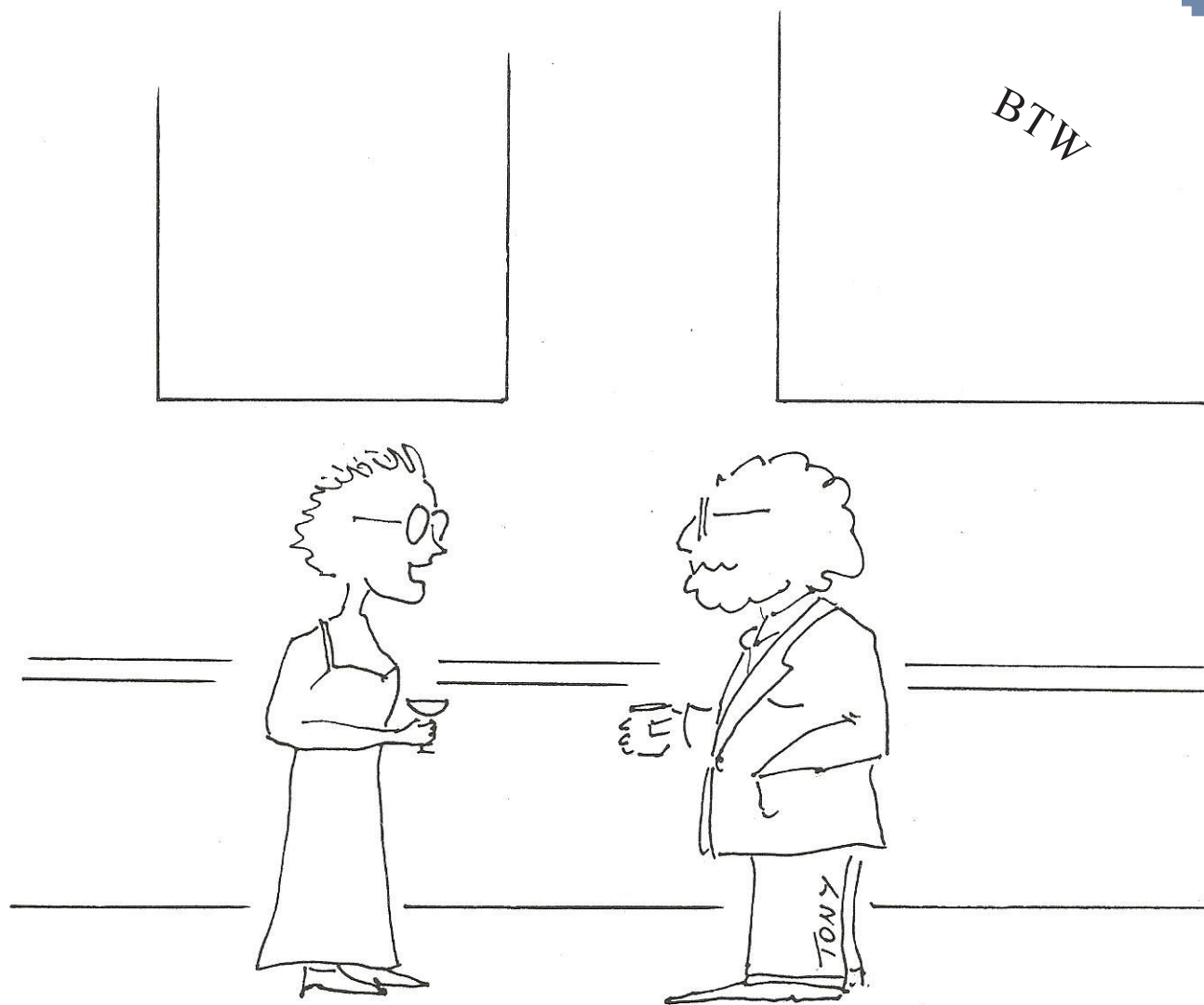
Prof. Babe Does the Honors



The mighty Babe Ruth, in cap and gown, no less, rehearses his role as Professor of Swat with the aid of two youthful sandlot admirers, Billy Barnstone

(left) and Mitchell Rosenheim. The Babe will hand out Academy of Sport diplomas to several thousand youngsters at the World's Fair tomorrow.

Young Billy Barnstone, left, with Babe Ruth



But, if all the world is a stage, then where, I prithee, doth the audience sit?

REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES OF A LITERARY TRANSLATOR

A Review of Lisa Carter's Presentation in San Diego

by RAFA LOMBARDINO



Rafa Lombardino (rlombardino@wordawareness.com) is certified by the ATA (EN>PT) and UC San Diego Extension (EN/ES), where she currently teaches aspiring translators. Also the director of Word Awareness, a small network of professional translators in California, Rafa has been dedicating more time to literary projects, completing five EN>PT books and one PT>EN book in the past two years. Contact: rlombardino@wordawareness.com or <http://rafa.lombardino.net>

"I want to bring books to the audience and, as a translator, I hope people can trust my work," says Lisa Carter.

During the 53rd Annual Conference organized October 24-27, 2012 by the American Translators Association (ATA) in San Diego, I attended a session entitled "The Einstein Enigma: A Case Study in Literary Translation." The presenter, Lisa Carter, is a Spanish into English translator certified by the ATA and the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO) and the owner of Intralingo Inc.

Lisa was first contacted in August 2009 to translate *A fórmula de Deus*, originally written by Portuguese best-selling author José Rodrigues dos Santos. However, since she is a Spanish into English translator, she was given the Spanish version of the book, *La fórmula de Dios*, translated by Mario Merlino.

She admits to thinking it odd to work with a bridge language, that is, her source material would be a translation of the original text. According to the publisher, the Spanish version had benefited from some extra editing, and that was why editors pushed for the Spanish into English translation.

The proposal made her shift her perspective on how to approach the translation process. "I want to bring books to an audience, so should it really matter if it's a translation of a translation?" she asked herself. However, she felt tempted to often check the original in Portuguese in order to identify what possible adaptations could have taken place and decide how she would find solutions for her English version.

Unfortunately, she was unable to contact the Spanish translator, who passed away before they could discuss his own solutions. "As a translator, I hope people can trust my work. Shouldn't the Spanish version then stand on its own?" she asked, mentioning that Mario Merlino was a reputable translator with many books published. "Still, errors can slip in if editors are purely correcting grammar, without knowing the original language," she added.

Negotiations — From the start, the project was labeled a “rush” assignment to be completed between August 2009 and “by the end of the year.” Nevertheless, she only received the contract in November 2009 and, after many rounds of negotiation, translator and publisher finally reached an agreement on price, royalties and deadline to have the book translated by March 2010.

“When we’re dealing with a bestseller, the rush is always one-sided, from the part of the editor,” she says, admitting that it took a little bit of client education to make the publisher understand that, despite their eagerness for the English version to hit the shelves soon, the work has to be done responsibly to assure consistency and, consequently, success.

“Translating a book of this nature in two months is possible. You can get words on the page, but you’re not going to get style and it won’t be a bestseller,” she added. “I worked very hard seven days a week for five months. I breathed this story, I slept thinking about the story.”

While waiting for the green light to initiate the project, she started preparing and read the book thoroughly many times between August and November. She researched a lot and worked on a rough draft, even though it wasn’t a concrete job until the contract was signed. Once she was able to commit to it, she had to hire a Spanish-speaking researcher to help her.

She asked the publisher whether she could consult with the author if she had any questions, but the editor wanted everything to go through him, which ultimately delayed the process. “I wasn’t aware of the arrangement between author and editor, and some writers prefer not to be contacted by translators,” she says. “My obligation was to the publisher, but I felt like we were cheating on the author.”

Challenges — Lisa acknowledges that she doubted herself during the translation process, mainly due to her unfamiliarity with concepts in math, science, and philosophy. The author’s note in the beginning of the book, stating that physicists and mathematicians defend the scientific theories used in the novel, also made her nervous about accurately rendering these ideas yet unknown to her.

She recalls that some of the philosophical issues were introduced by the author without the mention of any source. “Complex concepts and theories were distilled through the dialog, taking big ideas and reflecting them in simple phrases,” she explains. There were no footnotes to refer to and these notions were embedded into the story.

The use of foreign languages—a result of the main character’s many travels all over the globe—posed yet another challenge. There were many quotes in German, Chinese, Hebrew, Farsi, and Tibetan, so everything had to be double-checked in these languages by her researcher, who luckily attended the University of Ottawa and had access to native speakers to assure each passage was spelled correctly.

In addition to these issues specific to concept and language, as a reader of literature in English Lisa also detected some inconsistencies with characters and redundant language. As an example, she mentions the fact that the very knowledgeable protagonist would sometimes make comments that were not very consistent with his abilities, all for the sake of educating readers.

Some of the dialog also brought her to a screeching halt due to repetitions that she thought wouldn’t work in the translation. Weighing in the author’s original intention, she worked around it by adapting it to the English writing style, streamlining the speech without changing the meaning.

"The purpose of dialogue is to advance plot," she explains. "The challenge was to introduce information to readers, without jeopardizing the idea of who the character was and making sure the reading experience was intact."

Completion — After completing her work and noticing that the editor wasn't responding to her follow up enquiries, Lisa decided to contact José Rodrigues dos Santos. "I was feeling too distant from the author," she recalls. "And my responsibilities to the publisher were done."

She apologized for not being in constant contact and explained that the editor insisted on being the middle man. The author was very graceful and confirmed that it had been the editor's decision not to let them communicate with each other during the translation process. Dos Santos even gave her an interview for her blog announcement when the book was released.

Ultimately, the editor revised her translation and she had no say in it, despite making sure a clause had been included in the contract that she was to see the final version of the book before going to print. Yet, that never happened. "When one of my book translations comes out, I never look at it very closely," she acknowledges. "It's always too painful. I keep thinking, 'I could have done better.' In addition to that, some sections are completely changed or even left out of the final version after going through the editor."

Her translation finally hit the shelves as *The Einstein Enigma*. The change in the title—which could have been "God's Formula" to match both the Portuguese original and the Spanish version—was a decision made by the publisher, most likely wanting to avoid any controversy in the English-speaking market that the word "God" might cause. Later, the title of the Spanish version also changed from *La fórmula de Dios* to *El enigma de Einstein*.

Recognition — Lisa remembers that, after the release, the book wasn't widely available. "It was a drop in this large pool of books," she says. "I had worked so hard for months and it felt like my baby was going out in the world and nobody cared."

But that situation soon changed when the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award took notice of the book. She was notified of the nomination in July 2011, but couldn't tell anybody until November of that year, when the official announcement was made.

The nomination came from readers and the Municipal Libraries of Lisbon and Porto, in Portugal, and the book made it to the 2012 long list. Nominations are open to any title published in English, without making a distinction between works originally written in that language and translation from a foreign language. "That made me feel very proud that the book was being judged by how the story was told in English," she states. The Dublin Literary Award has a large cash prize of 100,000 €, which in the case of literary translations is split 75% to the author and 25% to the translator. Out of 149 books nominated in 2012, 39 were translations. Jon McGregor ended up being the 2012 winner for his novel *Even the Dogs*.

Lisa says she was thrilled and honored to even be considered for the award. "It gives you prestige, since both author and translator are recognized," she mentions. "Publishers have a marketing strategy, but it only applies to the book and author, not the translator."

READERS' CORNER



Catherine Manning Muir's translation of the historical novel *Hikayat Siti Mariah* (The Saga of Siti Mariah) from **Malay lingua franca** into English will be published in January 2013 by Lontar Foundation, Jakarta, as part of its Modern Library of Indonesia book series. The historical novel by Haji Mukti, published in serial form over the period 1910-12, is the earliest example of pre-Indonesian literature and the only indigenous literature written in the vernacular, rather than in Dutch, describing the harsh impact of the Forced Cultivation system on the lives of the Javanese who labored under it.

Ingrid G. Lansford had numerous translations **from Danish** published this year:

- Ib Michael's novel *Paven af Indien* (2003) as *The Pope of the Indies* (Gyldendal e-book, April 2012).
- "The Fruit Flies," from "Bananfluerne," by Jan Sonnergaard in *Jeg er Stadig Bange for Caspar Michael Petersen* (Gyldendal, 2003) and in *Metamorphoses*, Spring 2012.
- "The Boy in the Front Seat" from *Drengen på forsædet* by Peter Seeberg, in *Rejsen til Ribe* (Nørhaven 1991), in *Metamorphoses*, Spring 2012.
- "Goodbye" from "Farvel" by Jan Sonnergaard in *Jeg er Stadig Bange for Caspar Michael Petersen* (Gyldendal, 2003) and in *Great River Review*, Summer 2012.
- "Under a Spell I" from "Bjergtagen I" by M.A. Goldschmidt, in *Metamorphoses*, Fall 2012.
- "Do You Believe in Life after Love?" from *Sidste Søndag i Oktober* (Gyldendal 2000) by Jan Sonnergaard in *Metamorphoses*, Fall 2012.



and **from German**:

- "Mardi Gras" from "Fasching" in *Umarmungen* (Berlin Verlag 2007) by Keto von Waberer, in *Metamorphoses*, Spring 2012.
- Christian Helm, "Clown Cheeryouup" from "Clown Glücklichmach" in *Das System der Äpfel* (Caballus 2011), *no man's land*, Fall 2012.



Peter McCambridge has recently had two translations from **French** published by Baraka Books (Montreal):

- *The Orphanage* by Richard Bergeron,
- *The Adventures of Radisson* by Martin Fournier.

The first chapter of *Bestiaire* by Eric Dupont, for which Peter received the 2012 John Dryden Prize for literary translation, has also just been published by *carte blanche* magazine.

READERS' CORNER continued



Literary Division member **Lydia Stone** recently edited and did most of the translation for a bilingual (**Russian/English**) issue of the quarterly journal *Chtenia* (Чтения) devoted to the works of Leo Tolstoy. The 128-page issue may be purchased for \$10 from the Russian Life web site www.russianlife.com, where additional information is also provided.

Lisa Carter was presented with the **Alicia Gordon Award for Word Artistry in Translation** at the ATA's 53rd Annual Conference in San Diego in October, 2012.



Liliana Valenzuela's poetry chapbook "Codex of Journeys: Bendito camino" was published by Mouthfeel Press in October 2012. Poems translated from Spanish into English by Angela McEwan in collaboration with the author. Available from www.mouthfeelpress.com, Amazon, and local booksellers.



Upcoming readings:

Sunday, December 2, 2-3:30 p.m. "Transcultural Poetry Reading" as part of the 2012 Women & Fair Trade Festival. "The Old School," 1604 East 11th Street. Austin, Texas. Liliana Valenzuela, host.

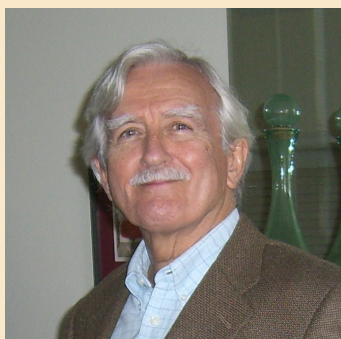
Friday, December 7, 7 p.m. "Flor de Nopal Literary Festival," Emma Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, 600 River St., Austin, Texas. Liliana Valenzuela, featured reader.

Anne Milano Appel announces her recent translations from **Italian**: Claudio Magris, *Blindly*. September 2012, Yale University Press. (Originally published by Hamish Hamilton/Penguin Canada, 2010.) <http://yalepress.yale.edu/book.asp?isbn=9780300185362>



Other translations published in 2012:

- Maurizio de Giovanni, *I Will Have Vengeance: The Winter of Commissario Ricciardi*. Hersilia Press.
- Paola Calvetti, *PO Box Love*, a novel. St. Martin's Press.



ADD ARABIC AND SIMMER FOR EIGHT CENTURIES

A brief account of the origins
and evolution of the Spanish language

BY TONY BECKWITH

Language is history. Words have been our constant companions on the long journey of human evolution, capturing the prosaic and the sublime, conveying the tangible and the ephemeral, expressing the essence of our existence. In the natural order of things, words are assimilated and discarded as times change, people move, and cultures overlap. Like us, our languages are organic; like us, our languages evolve or die.

*The strength
of a language
does not lie in
rejecting what
is foreign but in
assimilating it.
--Goethe*

Sometimes the assimilation involves just a word or two; a convenient expression crosses a linguistic frontier to take root in a different language and, after a period of time, loses its “foreign-ness” and is granted “native” status. Words like paparazzi, glasnost, and geisha come to mind.

In other cases, a whole collection of words is borrowed when a new technology of some kind is introduced from one culture to another, as we have recently seen with the migration of computer-related terms from English to other languages. Something similar occurred many years ago when the French brought their cuisine to Great Britain, enriching the English language with words like au gratin, canapé, and roux.

And then there are loans and transfers on a massive scale that influence a language and give it a breadth of expression and depth of nuance that it never had before. One example of this was the Norman conquest of Britain in 1066¹. Another was the Moorish invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 711 A.D. Who were the Moors? And where were they from? Before answering those questions, let us very briefly review the history of the land they conquered.

Neanderthals, of course, roamed the Iberian Peninsula about 32,000 years ago, long before our story begins. Far closer in time to our period, the area was inhabited by Iberians, Celts, Celtiberians, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Greeks, among others. The region was called Hispania when it became a province of the Roman Empire, and

¹ See “My Mother Tongue” by Tony Beckwith (*Source* No. 48, Summer 2010).

the language spoken there during that period was a variation of the Vulgar Latin imposed by the Romans over existing local dialects. The Empire collapsed in about 476 and Hispania was subsequently taken over by the Visigoths—Germanic tribes that ruled the Peninsula until they were defeated by the Moors.

These Moorish invaders were nomadic Muslims who crossed the western Mediterranean at its narrowest point, the Straits of Gibraltar, then swept across the rugged Iberian terrain in wave after conquering wave that carried them as far as the Ebro River in the north. They were mainly Berbers and Arabs from North Africa but their inspiration was the Islamic faith which was born almost a century earlier many miles to the east in Mecca. During the late 7th century the Muslim empire rippled out from the desert kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula to hold sway over a vast territory that stretched from India in the east to the Pyrenees in the west. Arab horsemen rode as far west as they could across Northern Africa, converting those in their path to Islam, and then turned north. In 711 they landed in Gibraltar and were soon masters of this southwestern tip of Europe, which they controlled for the next eight hundred years. They brought with them a refined sense of art and architecture, a profound respect for learning, and their language: Arabic.

The Moors established many centers of trade, civil administration, and scholarship in their new territory, most notably in the cities of Córdoba, Toledo, Granada, and Sevilla. Córdoba, the ancient city on the banks of the Guadalquivir River that had been an Iberian settlement and an important metropolis in Roman and Visigoth times, became the capital of the Islamic Caliphate that ruled Al-Andalus (known today as Andalucía), the Moorish domain in the southern portion of the Iberian Peninsula. By the 10th century, Córdoba was considered the most populous city in the world, and was also the intellectual capital of Europe. It was a widely acknowledged center of learning, where scholars flocked to study and translate documents dealing with science, philosophy, mathematics, astrology, medicine, and education. This was truly a golden age of translation! Here, as in Damascus and Baghdad—the other great centers of the Muslim empire—classical and canonical Greek and Roman texts were translated into Arabic and preserved for posterity, providing a link to past knowledge that was all but lost when Europe slipped into the Dark Ages.

The Arabic that flourished in medieval Spain belonged to the Semitic subgroup of the Afro-Asiatic family of languages. It was closely related to Hebrew, Aramaic, and Phoenician, and was thus directly linked to the earliest languages spoken by mankind. Over the course of many centuries it had evolved into an eloquent, poetic language with a vast vocabulary, making it ideally suited to the task of

transforming the Romance dialects of southern Europe into the flowering languages of the Renaissance.

This Arabic was the language that percolated throughout the Iberian Peninsula during the eight centuries of Muslim rule. It was spoken mainly by those living in the southern region of Al-Andalus, and was learned by the many European scholars who came to do research in the libraries and universities established in Toledo and Córdoba. Over time, it seeped into the Latin dialects that were still spoken among Christian populations living in northern Spain. How, precisely, did that happen?

The Christian monarchs of the old Spanish kingdoms, of course, had never accepted the Muslim conquest and, ever since the Moorish invasion, had been fighting to reconquer the lands they had lost—a campaign that lasted for centuries and was known as *La Reconquista*. Toledo was taken in 1085 by Alfonso VI, the king of León and Castilla. Córdoba fell to Ferdinand III of Castilla in 1236. Málaga was taken in 1487 after being besieged by the armies of a recently united Christian Spain following the marriage of Isabella I of Castilla and Ferdinand II of Aragón, the Catholic Monarchs. And finally Granada, the last Moorish stronghold in Al-Andalus, surrendered in 1492, and an extraordinary period in history came to an end.

During the *Reconquista*, as the Christian forces moved gradually south, towns and cities that had been under Moorish rule for generations were flooded with northerners who spoke a variety of Romance dialects, the most durable of which was Castilian. Christians living in Moorish territory had, by and large, developed hybrid dialects such as Mozarabic, a combination of Romance languages and Arabic. These dialects were quickly absorbed and replaced by Castilian, which in turn embarked on a massive borrowing spree, assimilating Arabic grammar and vocabulary and transforming itself into the forerunner of the Spanish that is spoken today. As a result of this dual Latin and Arabic influence, the “language of Cervantes” became rich in synonyms. Spanish speakers can thus refer to the olive in their martini with an Arabic word, *aceituna*, or a Latin one, *oliva*. Similarly, to warn of a lurking scorpion they can say *alacrán* or *escorpión*. When arranging appointments they can consult their *almanaque* or *calendario*, and both mean calendar. It helps to remember that most Spanish nouns that begin with *al-* (the Arabic definite article) were borrowed from the Moors.

The list of Arabic words that migrated into Spanish during that period is far too long to include here. But, as a matter of interest, let us look at just a few examples, grouped in categories for ease of reference. Many of these words ultimately found their way into other European languages as well, including English.



Civil administration: *alcalde* (mayor); *barrio* (neighborhood); *aduana* (customs).
Home furnishings: *alfombra* (carpet); *almohada* (pillow); *sofá* (sofa).
Food & beverages: *azúcar* (sugar); *limón* (lemon); *café* (coffee); *azafrán* (saffron).
Building & architecture: *alcoba* (bedroom); *adoquín* (paving stone); *azulejo* (tile).
Mathematics: *cero* (zero); *álgebra* (algebra); *cenit* (zenith).

As the *Reconquista* inexorably advanced, Castilian advanced with it to become the lingua franca of Spain—a Romance language generously seasoned with Arabic. King Alfonso X of Castilla, known as Alfonso el Sabio (Alfonso the Wise), prompted the creation of a standardized form of written Castilian in the 13th century by assembling a group of scribes at his court to transcribe an extensive collection of works on history, astronomy, the law, and other fields of knowledge.

The Spanish Royal Academy was founded in 1713, essentially for the purpose of preserving the “purity” of the language. The Academy published its first dictionary in six volumes between 1726 and 1739, and its first grammar book in 1771.

Spanish is now the official language of 21 countries. When the United Nations was established in 1945, Spanish was one of the five official languages, along with Chinese, English, French, and Russian. Interestingly, Arabic became the sixth official language of the UN in 1973.

Spain finally shook off eight centuries of Moorish rule with the *Reconquista* of Granada in 1492. Later that same year, Christopher Columbus was commissioned by Queen Isabella to set sail westward, and his voyage not only changed the world—it opened up a whole new chapter in the evolution of the Spanish language. But that’s another story.

***Photo previous page: The Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain.
The name Alhambra comes from an Arabic root which means red or crimson castle, perhaps due to the hue of the towers and walls that surround the entire hill of La Sabica which by starlight is silver but by sunlight is transformed into gold.***



I took leave of my senses and now I can't find them anywhere.

TRANSLATING A CHILDREN'S BIBLE

BY MARK HERMAN AND RONNIE APTER



Ronnie Apter

Together, Mark Herman and Ronnie Apter have translated poems from various languages into English and 22 operas, operettas, and choral works, many of which have been performed on both sides of the Atlantic. They have also written numerous articles on translation and on opera.



Mark Herman

La Bible: *Les belles histoires de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament*, published by Bayard Éditions in 1995, includes stories from the Old and New Testaments retold by the French children's author Marie-Hélène Delval with gorgeous illustrations by the painter Ulises Wensell.

When we were asked to translate the book into English for more or less simultaneous publication by Reader's Digest Young Families, Inc. as *The Reader's Digest Bible for Children: Timeless Stories from the Old and New Testaments*, the job differed in several ways from what we were used to. First of all, the translation was to be a work for hire, meaning that we would have no rights or say in the translation, other than to request that our names be removed from it if we did not like the final book, once the translation was finished and we were paid a fixed fee. Now this is the way most translators, even literary translators, work. But not us. We retain the copyrights, or at least the rights to royalties, for our opera translations, and also to our poetry translations and articles, for which our up-front payment is usually a couple of copies of the journals in which they are published.

Second, we were not only to translate Delval's work, but also to adapt it in two ways. The first, which we succeeded in doing only to a limited extent, was to change all the masculine references to God to something that was gender neutral. The second, which we did succeed in doing, was to make the translation acceptable not only to the largely Catholic French audience for which it was written, but also to Jews (the Old Testament only, obviously) and Protestants. To ensure this, there was a vetting committee consisting of an Episcopal Bishop, a Catholic Monsignor, and a Jewish Rabbi, all three of whom, as it turned out, received much more prominent notice in the final book than we did.

Third, we were warned that anything we wrote that was considered inappropriate for children would be censored. And, indeed, there was censorship, but only of a single word: "adultery."

We largely succeeded in deleting masculine references to God from our translation of the story of creation. Due to the space occupied by the illustrations, there is relatively little text on each page, and so this story takes up all of the first ten of the 150 pages of text in the book. On these ten pages, we used the word "God" eighteen times, the pronoun "I" twice, and a masculine pronoun, "he," only once.

By the way, from the very first word of Delval's retelling, the poetry of the Old Testament comes through. We were chastised by the Reader's Digest editor for making the Old Testament so much more poetic than the New Testament, possibly, she said, because of

our Jewish prejudices. "No," we told her, "it's just that the Old Testament is written largely in poetry and the New Testament largely in prose and Delval's text and our translation reflect this."

If Delval left out a story, or part of a story, that we considered important, there was nothing we could do about it. We felt this particularly acutely in the story of Jonah. Though Jonah is a relatively short book, occupying just two and one quarter pages in our edition of the King James Bible, many people, Delval included, omit the all important fourth chapter. This is the chapter that tells of Jonah's fury at God's mercy toward Nineveh, and the lesson in mercy that God teaches him.

Certain problematic passages were smoothed over by Delval, rendering our job easier. For instance, in the King James version, Luke, Chapter 2, Verse 14 says: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Now, as Biblical scholars know, this is a mistranslation of the original Greek, which St. Jerome got right in the Latin Vulgate. The error probably stems from Luther's mistranslation into German. The original Greek, and the Latin Vulgate, mean: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace toward men of good will." Delval glossed over this by using words which we rendered: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth through God's love."

Returning to the Ten Commandments and censorship, we really don't know who was offended by the word "adultery." And it must have offended someone, rather than simply being a word the editors thought children would not understand, because there is a glossary in the back of our translation which, in addition to proper nouns, explains such words as "anoint," "covenant," "covet," "disciple," and "resurrection." And so the editors misworded the commandment into "You shall not take someone else's husband or wife."

As for reconciling the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish versions of the Ten Commandments, that was our job, and we combed through several modern English versions of the Bible, as well as the King James version, to come up with a compromise that would satisfy all three of our religious vetters.

Despite the miswording of the commandment about adultery, we still thought the book worthwhile and did not ask that our names be removed. It really didn't make much difference because our names were printed in microscopic type on the copyright page on the reverse of the title page. Also on that page, in much larger type, were the names of the three religious vetters. The editors at Reader's Digest obviously felt that the most important person in this whole enterprise was the woman who wrote the Foreword of less than a page, since she is the only person whose name appears on the front cover of the book. However, the author and illustrator, as well as the writer of the Foreword, do appear on the title page.

If the editors thought that the name of the writer of the Foreword would sell copies, they were mistaken. To the best of our knowledge, despite the merits of the book, it did not sell well. This may have been due to a scathing review, for once not of the translation but of the book itself and its illustrations, which suggested that readers buy a different children's Bible published about the same time.

OLD LANG SINE: SEEKING TRUTH IN ANCIENT TEXTS

BY AMES DEE



*Ames Dee is a writer, poet, and dabbler in languages in the Pacific Northwest. Since 2007 her work with Spanish, French, and Sanskrit has been published by the American Translators Association in **Beacons** and in **Source**.*

I used to draw sine waves in my journal and complain about the fact that my life never seemed to proceed in a straightforward direction. I was always veering off course and then oversteering back. Finally I figured out that this is the way life goes. Only in looking back can we perceive a straight path.

The straight path of my spirituality has felt like a series of giant wobbles. Born a Jew, raised an atheist, stumbled into meditation, experimented briefly with New Age practices . . . unaware that I was seeking God and vice versa. Startled into Christianity (where I reconnected with my Jewish tribe: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), called to the ministry, dismayed by the institutional church, dark night of the soul, hovering on the outskirts (weekday Mass-goer, Saturday Presbyterian, Sunday morning devotee of *The New York Times*). Finally dragged by the Holy Spirit into the Catholic Church—oy, vey! And now a yogini.

My lifelong fascination with languages has played a part in all of this. (See *Source* No. 52, Summer 2011, for an account of my adventures in Sanskrit.) Although ultimately I've needed to be a grateful reader of translations, I prefer to visit the original text. Even a smattering of knowledge adds to my appreciation of the nuances. Editions that present the author's text and the translator's work on facing pages are my favorites.

Sometimes astonished by the beauty and power of the translator's choices, I can also be disappointed when I know enough to recognize a prosaic or misleading translation. The worst sinners are the Vatican scribes, whose—Germanic? Latinate? at any rate, non-English—word order into the worship of this poet brings winces not a few.

Equipped to be a Rabbi

My conversion to Christianity was sudden. I knew nothing about my new religion. I did, however, have an advantage in Bible study. The summer of my baptism, I studied ancient Greek, the language of the New Testament. And in high school I had studied Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament.

Thus equipped, when a Bible verse causes me to “ponder in my heart” [Cf. Luke 2:19] or when the translation at hand furrows my brow, I turn to my collection of more than a dozen Bibles—not counting the twenty on my iPhone—to compare and contrast. If that doesn’t satisfy me, I reach for Zondervan’s *Greek and English Interlinear*, Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, or even a Hebrew Bible with book titles in German. I like to think of this autodidactic research as my rabbinical mode.

My newest discovery is <http://biblos.com/>, which offers every Bible scholarship aid I know and several I’m not yet familiar with. My favorite so far is the ability to peruse the Old Testament verse by verse in Hebrew, with each word transliterated and translated. My Hebrew was semi-fluent at one time—I could converse easily with the little Israeli girls I babysat for, though not with their quick-speaking parents. מים עד השמים, *Mayim ad ha’shamayim*, “Water up to the sky!” the three-year-old rhymed enthusiastically as I carried her into the swimming pool. But that was a half-century ago. Now, like a cane for the lame, biblos.com with its many helps is a comfort to lean on.

“The Bible”

A few years ago I began taking private yoga lessons, and the next thing I knew I’d been seduced into adding another ancient language to my rusty arsenal. I began learning the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali in Sanskrit, and then the *Bhagavad Gita*, culminating in a 10-hour workshop given by Edwin F. Bryant, a Rutgers University professor, author, and translator, which demanded every Sanskrit verse I’d learned, and more. (While sitting on the floor for two days! Only one bathroom break!) Thus it was with relief on several fronts that when my yoga teacher left the country for two years I returned to the “easy” study of Hebrew and Greek in that all-time bestseller, the Bible.

What we call “the Bible” and talk about as if it were a single book is actually many books, written over a millennium and a half and passed on through oral tradition for centuries before that. The collection, or canon of scripture, varies depending on whether you are reading a Protestant Bible (66 books), a Catholic Bible (73 books), or a Greek Orthodox Bible (77 books). The 29 books of the Hebrew Bible are known as the *Tanach*, a Hebrew abbreviation that combines the first letter of *Torah* (the five books of Moses), *Nevi'im* (the major and minor prophets), and *Ketuvim* (the “writings,” including Psalms and Proverbs). In the Old Testament of Christian Bibles, the order is different: the prophets appear at the end.

Widely varying types of literature are represented in the Bible. They include poetry (e.g., Psalms), aphorisms (Proverbs), history (Judges), biography (King

David), short stories (Jonah), letters (St. Paul), visions (Revelation), prayers (the Magnificat), parables (the Prodigal Son), genealogies (in both the Old and New Testaments), prophecies (Isaiah), religious laws (Leviticus), sermons (the Sermon on the Mount), and more.

The books of the New Testament were written in Greek, the *lingua franca* of the Near East at the time of the Roman Empire. But the Biblical authors differ markedly, according to scholars, in the quality of their writing. St. Paul—whose Epistles follow the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (which is really a continuation of the Gospel of Luke)—liked to remind the recipients of his letters that he was a highly educated and well-traveled rabbi. Mark, by all accounts, wrote a rough Greek. The subjects of Mark’s stories, Jesus and his disciples, may have spoken no Greek at all.

The language of Jesus and his community was Aramaic; within the Greek of the Gospels, occasional snippets of Aramaic persist—e.g., Mark 5:41, “*Talitha cumi*”; Mark 7:34, “*Ephphatha*”; Mark 15:34, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*?” Certainly Jesus must have known Hebrew, since he was addressed as rabbi and could read from the scrolls of the prophet Isaiah [Luke 4:16-17], but did he also speak Greek? We don’t know. It’s likely that everything the Gospels tell us Jesus said is already a translation! This places an additional layer of difficulty between his spoken words and the reader of an English Bible.

For all these reasons, translation of “the Bible” into modern English is no simple task. Preferably it is done by large, ecumenical committees with diverse areas of expertise, including linguistics and archaeology. The most famous and enduring English translation, the King James Version of 1611 (just seven years later than Hamlet) is notable for its use of ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts rather than the Latin text, which was itself a translation and thus a further step removed from the originals.

The Case of the Single Eye

For someone interested in getting as close as possible to original meanings, the King James Version (KJV) and its subsequent revisions are ideal in their choice of translation style: word for word rather than phrase for phrase or idea for idea. My longtime favorite in that lineage is the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of 1971, which takes account of the many changes in the English language in almost four hundred years. All quotations that follow, unless otherwise specified, are from the RSV.

A word-for-word translation sometimes results in strange locutions, where the meaning may be unclear either in the original language (there are literal holes in some of the Hebrew scrolls) or in the resulting translation. Consider these words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! [Matthew 6:22-23, KJV]

What in the world is ὁφθαλμός ἀπλοῦς, *ophthalmos haplous*, a “single eye”? “Single” seems straightforward; *haplous* is the word from which we take the biological term “haploid” meaning the single set of chromosomes in a gamete. Yet most modern translations scurry to substitute another word. And what is this “light”?

For the past few years I’d neglected Bible study in order to immerse myself in Hindu scriptures related to my practice of yoga. Now I was coming back to the Judeo-Christian scriptures with fresh insights, influenced by a different part of the ancient world from the one in which the books of the Bible were written.

Chakras

Those puzzling words from the Sermon on the Mount confronted me as I returned from Sanskrit to Greek. I had encountered them many times before. But unlike the King James with its faithful if obscure translation of an eye that is “single,” modern translations prefer to describe the eye as “sound” or “healthy” or “clear” or “good.” Interpreters suggest that Jesus was referring to an attitude of thought, a way of seeing the world that is single-minded, and that produces in the beholder a sense of well-being. But I sensed something more was there, for from a distant memory arose that odd phrasing of the KJV: an eye that is not healthy or good but “single.”

Ancient Indic philosophy includes an understanding of the human body similar to the Chinese view, which is familiar to those of us who have studied acupuncture charts while being poked with needles. There are channels of energy running throughout our bodies. Estimates in ancient Hindu scriptures vary from seventy-two thousand to more than three hundred thousand energy channels. If they are balanced and not blocked, they contribute to our health; otherwise, illness can arise.

In addition to energy channels, or *nadis* in Sanskrit, the Indic view includes energy wheels called *chakras* that run along the spine from its base to the crown of the head. There are seven or nine or more, depending on which school is cited. In the one I learned, the sixth chakra from the bottom is located between the eyebrows and is sometimes referred to as the “third eye.” It governs intuition, spirituality, insight. The seventh chakra is the crown chakra, often depicted as a thousand-petaled lotus and a source of light. Digging deeper in my memory, I pulled up the factoid that the pineal gland, located deep within the brain, is sensitive to light, and is thought to regulate circadian rhythms by means of the hormone melatonin.

More jetsam of my journey through life floated to the surface. There was a book I recalled having seen but not read called *Jesus in India*. Was it about the “hidden years” Jesus spent between the age of twelve—when he was found

teaching the elders in Jerusalem and telling his parents “I must be about my Father’s business” [Luke 2:41-52, KJV] — and the age of thirty, when he was baptized by John in the Jordan River and began calling his disciples [Luke 3:21-23a]? No one knows what Jesus was up to during those years about which scripture is silent. Was he working in Joseph’s carpenter shop and being a dutiful son to Mary? Was he studying? traveling? Where did he get his wisdom? Can he have gone to India and studied with the *rishis*? Or, since Israel was a crossroads of the Roman Empire, did wise men from India come to his native country and teach him there?

With all these bits of information and conjecture buzzing in my brain, I begin my rabbinical quest to bring ancient India to ancient Israel, the better to understand the meaning of the “single eye” that fills the body with “light.”

Light

One part of the jetsam is easy to jettison. *Jesus in India* by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad turns out (*selon* Wikipedia) to be an account of Jesus’s supposed post-crucifixion travels. I’m interested in Jesus’s youth, before he began his ministry. When did he develop the authority people would later recognize in him? [Mark 1:27-28]. How was it that he “increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man”? [Luke 2:52]. Where did he learn this wisdom? How did he acquire his healing power? The neighbors who knew his whole family complained, “Where did this man get all this?” [Mark 6:2-3]

My hunch is that by some means or other — perhaps taught by his mother (who was by some accounts favored by God and visited by angels [Luke 1:26-37]), or perhaps tutored by a traveling seer — Jesus became a mystic, a seeker after God through personal experience. The Gospels record that he taught his disciples how to pray — “Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” [Matthew 6:9-13] — but there’s no indication that he succeeded in teaching them how he himself prayed. In fact, when he asked his disciples to pray with him in the Garden of Gethsemane before he was arrested, they fell asleep! [Luke 22:39-46] Yet we know that Jesus spent long hours, once as long as forty days and nights [Luke 4:1-2], alone in the wilderness fasting and praying.

The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record that Jesus, as he prayed on Mount Tabor with Peter, James, and John, was radiant with an unearthly light, conversing with Moses and Elijah (who preceded Jesus by several hundred years). In these accounts of the Transfiguration, evidently his whole body was filled with light — just as he promised in the Sermon on the Mount to those whose eye is “single.” This light is the evidence of divine contact brought about through intense prayer. “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light” [Matthew 17:2]. “And his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them” [Mark 9:3] “And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white” [Luke 9:29].

There are examples of such light in the Old Testament as well. When Moses went up on Mount Sinai, “the appearance of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel” [Exodus 24:17]. When he descended from the mountain, “Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God” [Exodus 35:29].

Matthew is the only Gospel writer who mentions light explicitly in his description of the Transfiguration. In Matthew 17:2, quoted above, the word for this transfiguring light is φῶς, *phos*, from which we get our word “photography” (literally, writing with light). *Phos* is from the same root as φωτεινόν, *photeinon*, the word for light in the passage we’ve been looking at from the Sermon on the Mount. In other words, *phos* is the “light” that your body will be full of if your eye is “single.”

All mystics—Hasidic, Christian, Hindu, Sufi, *ad infinitum*—use similar means to seek the same Supreme Being. Often the technique, whether meditation, chanting, movement, or sensory deprivation, induces a trance state (cf. the so-called whirling dervishes) undertaken to focus the mind on what Jesus called “the one thing needful” [Luke 10:42]. The universal evidence that this holy state has been reached is light, the very light we see represented as haloes in paintings of the saints, the light that bursts forth from the crown chakra, the “glory of the Lord” that transfigured Jesus on the mountaintop. I myself have seen a halo of light around a Hindu devoté of Krishna as he chanted his mantra, focusing his mind on a manifestation of God that was sacred to him.

The Single Eye

Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* are not about worship *per se*, but they are about yoga, “union,” a state that is transcendent and transfiguring. He begins his text by saying he’s going to instruct us in yoga, and then defines what he means: Yoga is the cessation of mental whirling. In Edwin F. Bryant’s translation [North Point Press, 2009: *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary*], “Yoga is the stilling of the changing states of the mind” [Patanjali I.2].

According to Dr. Bryant, “The means prescribed by Patanjali to still the states of mind or fluctuations of thought is meditative concentration, defined as keeping the mind fixed on any particular object of choice without distraction” [Bryant, p. 19]. Patanjali himself says, in Bryant’s translation, “Meditation is the one-pointedness of the mind on one image” [III.2]. In fact, the whole point of the *Yoga Sutras* is to show how to achieve this deep state of meditation, or *samadhi*, so that the mind may be clear, unclouded, at rest.

Similarly, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna speaks about the one-pointed mind needed by those on the path of karma yoga: “Those who follow this path, resolving deep within themselves to seek me alone, attain singleness of purpose. For those who lack resolution, the decisions of life are many-branched and endless” [BG 2.41, Eknath Easwaran translation].

Patanjali describes some of the supernatural effects—*siddhis*, or powers—that may be observed in those who practice this single-minded concentration. In Tantric Buddhism, *siddhis* are believed to include clairvoyance, levitation, and bilocation [Wikipedia: Siddhi]. The twentieth-century Catholic saint Pio of Pietrelcina, known in his lifetime as Padre Pio, was frequently reported to have accomplished feats of bilocation, having being seen by reliable witnesses in two different places at the same time. Present-day followers of Transcendental Meditation claim to achieve levitation as one of the effects of their practice.

Is it possible that even such feats as walking on water might be achieved? [Cf. Mark 6:47-50] Surely an enlightened being, especially during intensely focused meditation, might seem to be supernaturally illuminated, as Jesus was in his Transfiguration [Mark 9:2-3].

Humility

In any translation, but especially in the translation of sacred scriptures, a certain humility is required. Edwin Bryant says that all commentaries (and possibly by extension, I surmise, all translations) are of necessity sectarian [workshop on the *Yoga Sutras*, May 2012]. But shouldn't the purpose of the translator be to get out of the way of the author as much as possible so as to let the text speak for itself? To let the light shine? To let the eye be "single"? The King James translators seem to have done this better than their successors, allowing the Greek to speak for itself in the matter of the "single eye."

Let us assume for the moment that the "single eye" is in fact what Jesus meant, or is an accurate translation into Greek of what Jesus said in Hebrew or, more likely, Aramaic. It's mysterious, isn't it? And yet in another context, the one I've been presenting here, it seems quite natural in the light of ancient Indic beliefs. How this commonality between ancient India and ancient Israel came to be can only be guessed at; I've suggested a few possibilities. But I'm grateful to those seventeenth-century scholars whose willingness to be humble in the light of a mysterious locution led me on this linguistic and philosophical journey.

I hope, dear reader, that if you have accompanied me in my amateur meanderings through sacred scriptures in ancient languages, you too have found some new light. To the real translators, whose craft and learning I admire, I beg forgiveness of my sins, and I salute you!

Addendum

At the end of his workshop on the *Yoga Sutras*, Edwin Bryant signed a copy of his book for me. He wrote [*emphases his*]:

"Dear Ames, Please consider that the God of Jesus and the Isvara of Patanjali and of the Bhagavad Gita are the same supreme loving being!"

.אמן Ἀμήν. Amen.

Credo.

CREDITS

P. 9 “The Building” by Willis Barnstone published
courtesy of Red Hen Press

P. 9 Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

P. 15 Photo of Liliana Valenzuela by Nell Carroll

P. 19 Photo: “Patio de los leones,” a photo of Spain’s
Alhambra palace: This image, which was originally posted to Flickr.com,
was uploaded to Commons using Flickr upload bot on 18:15, 29 September
2008 (UTC) by Petronas (talk). On that date it was licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alhambra_-_Granada.jpg

P. 24 Ames Dee, Self-Portrait