

Authors–Translators–Authors

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Introduction

[F]requently writers translate other people's works because those are the works they would have written themselves had they not already been created by someone else. (Bassnett)

The theme for this issue, “Authors–Translators–Authors”, was chosen for the 8th annual St. Jerome's Day conference at the University of Alberta on September 30th, 2010, where some of the articles were originally presented. Those have been revised for this publication while others were submitted in response to a call for papers on this theme and we are proud to present them in this volume. We were honoured, therefore, to have in our midst David Homel, an award winning Montreal writer and translator whose novel *Midway* had just been published. His keynote address appears as the leading article and the reader will get a sense of how insightful his talk was as well as of his incomparable sense of humour that conference participants also had the chance to appreciate during our customary translation reading event the next day. The topic was chosen before Swansea University (UK) organized a conference on the same theme, which took place at the end of June 2010.¹ The preceding year another conference had been organized in Siena, Tuscany, from which a collection of essays entitled *The Translator as Author* was published in 2011, covering topics ranging from author-translator collaboration to self-translation. Since then many more conference announcements and calls for papers on this theme have been noticed: to name only two, the “Translators as Protagonists” conference held in Vienna University in 2011 and the recent call for papers for a 2013 conference on “Translators and (their) authors” in Israel, posted by the Translation Studies Federation.² Not surprisingly then, as the day approached for our own event we became more and more convinced of the importance of this topic and we looked forward to sharing insights with North American writers translating international writers past and present and with translators doing the same or writing about varying topics.

Indeed, our annual celebration of translation always seeks to facilitate the dialogue between translators and authors and to learn from their own perspective on their practice. After all, as José Saramago once reminded us: “Todos somos traducidos y todos somos traductores” (2003 np).³

¹ Go to <http://www.author-translator.net/> for more information.

² More information can be found at <https://sites.google.com/site/translationstudiesfederation/>.

³ The ending of the following quote: “Los escritores hacen las literaturas nacionales y los traductores hacen la literatura universal. Sin los traductores los escritores no seríamos nada, estaríamos condenados a vivir encerrados en nuestra lengua. Todos somos traducidos y todos somos traductores”.

Translators who also write and writers who translate know that translation **is** writing (Bassnett and Bush 1). No matter where translators might individually position themselves on the continuum stretching from the most “faithful” translation to the most creative adaptation, they all accept the authority and the responsibility to bring the text into its new linguistic, cultural, and even semiotic setting. That year, the conference’s call for papers urged translators, authors and scholars to send proposals that would explore any aspect of this dual relationship. Inspired by the volume edited by Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, *The Translator as Writer* (2006), we sought to dismantle “the hegemonic distinction made between writing and translating” (Bassnett 173), which has been established for a very long time and perpetuates the perception of translation as a lesser art, a nearly invisible activity always already subjugated to prestigious and visible writing. The fact is, however, that translation relies on deeply honed writing skills to be successful and that writing often adopts strategies that resemble translation as we have had numerous occasions to discover during our annual gatherings. As Bassnett describes from her own experience, various drafts of writing are more a matter of a thought process, happening in one’s mind rather than on the computer, while translating produces several visible drafts on the computer. She mentions the role of a “game element” in the translating activity that “does not emerge in [her] other writing, where the game (if it can be termed that) happens internally before the practical writing stage begins” (178). As writers often mention in interviews or informal conversations, translation, whether it is done by the writer him- or herself, or to the writer’s works, can also influence writing and sometimes even change it. Such was Bassnett’s experience in translating the Argentinian poet Alejandra Pizarni: “translating Pizarni *was* Bassnett writing” (178). What we learn from this account is that writing and translation are intricately intertwined and that the relationship between the two shifts and adapts itself to the varying personalities and styles of the authors and translators involved. The suggestion of a ludic element at play is very helpful in conveying what is true for many literary translators who love languages and the infinite possibilities that they offer even, and perhaps particularly, within the confines of rendering a text into another language. This deep and complex connection between writing and translating was indeed at the heart of our motivation for the St. Jerome’s conference and the exchanges initiated by the theme proved that writers, translators and scholars alike are passionate about reading, writing, translating and interpreting. An interesting analogy can be drawn from music when brilliant interpreters establish their authority on a composer’s creation and become “authentic creator[s]”, “recomposer[s]” as Jacques Hétu said of Glenn Gould (quoted in Bazzana 252). In other words, performers, like many creators, are always looking to surpass their last performance according to a set of criteria that they alone know and understand because the original work comes alive thanks to them and is, therefore, subject to the changes and improvements that characterize life itself. Many of those elements are echoed in these pages.

David Homel in “I Can Do Better Than That!” shares many details about his practice and explains his unusual process in translation as a way to discover the text as an author would while writing it. Then Stefano Muneroni writes about “The Cultural Politics of Translation: The Case of Voltaire’s *Mérope* and Scipione Maffei’s *Merope*”, examining how Voltaire’s adaptation of Scipione Maffei’s *Mérope* reveals both men engaged in a cultural politics struggle to assert their own authority

on the Greek play. Next, we travel to Ukraine and the novel *Depeche Mode* by Serhii Zhadan. Roman Ivashkiv applies the concept of transmesism—translation and mimesis into one—to the fictional representation of the figure of the translator in order to elucidate the complex nature of translation. Transmestic texts turn out to be quite untranslatable unless translation itself is conceived as an essentially playful and creative act. The next article, “Is the World Enough? Culture, Translation, and Impassable Differences in the Life of Victoria Ocampo” by Marta Wilkinson offers a reading of *Testimonios*, the Argentinian translator’s journal and the sort of document that critics are lucky to be able to consult because it shows another aspect of the translator as writer. Tracing the life journey of Victoria Ocampo through translation reveals how she learned about difference and otherness to finally reach “intercultural maturity”. In the final article on the theme, “Translation and Response between Maurice Blanchot and Lydia Davis”, Jonathan Evans analyzes the narratological elements in Blanchot’s *La Folie du jour* and a story by his translator Lydia Davis entitled simply “Story”. This fascinating case of a close relationship between a translator and her author is one more example of what Bassnett describes in the epigraph chosen for this introduction, which Evans also quotes late in his essay. Whereas Blanchot’s narrative explored “the institutional need for narrative” and his narrator’s inability to formulate one, Davis focuses on “personal aspects of narrative” (58), demonstrating that her translation constituted one level of response to Blanchot and her writing a second level.

The thematic part of this issue ends with the presentation and an English translation by Tom Priestly of a poem by the Slovenian writer Janko Messner, which the translator, a faithful participant in the annual St. Jerome’s event, has graciously contributed. A book review by C(h)ris Reyns-Chikuma closes the issue and presents a recent bilingual edition and scholarly analysis of Paul Valéry’s long poem *Le cimetière marin*. The author wonders whether such a publication is still marketable today and concludes that it adds considerably to our understanding of the poem.

TranscUlturAl would not exist without the volunteer work and cheerful help of many people, so acknowledgments are necessary. This issue has been a long time in coming due to unfortunate personal and professional circumstances that are now under control. I’m happy to welcome Dr. Elisabeth Herrmann to the team as my co-editor and to thank her for “jumping in” with such enthusiasm and efficiency. I’m also very grateful to Angela Sacher for carefully editing some of the articles and to Nataliya Sharlay for helping with the final editing. This wonderful team is already hard at work on the next issue (5.1, 2012) on the theme of “Translating Peripheries”, which will be available shortly. The first volume of the current year will be devoted to the theme “The Old and the New” and we are still accepting submissions. We welcome your comments on any aspect of *TranscUlturAl*, dear readers, and encourage you to send in your contributions. All you need to do is register on the site as an author and post your article. If you are interested in reviewing submissions, please let us know as we are always looking for more experts in a variety of areas both in translation studies and cultural studies. Book reviews are also very welcome. Finally, I wish to thank the authors for their immense patience in waiting to see this issue come to light.

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