

Dancing with Myriam: Creating and Staging a New Metaphor for the Process of Translation

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This article tells the story, and analyzes the development, of a “staged metaphor” for the translation process, from its chance inception over ten years ago, to the more recent revision and staging of the script. In 2005, I was teaching world literature at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco, while also researching the writing of Irish and North African women. I chose to focus on those women writing in Irish, Tachelhit, Arabic, or French, whose work had been translated into English. I was initially inspired by Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill’s poem, “The Language Issue,” which compares the “sending forth” of her writing to a potential reader, to the story of Moses being discovered by Pharaoh’s daughter. My ultimate goal was to produce a chamber theatre play, based on the Irish and North African texts, which would dramatize a metaphor for the translation process. This was an outgrowth of my doctoral work, in which I had drawn on oral interpretation theorists, who see the performance of literary texts as an accepted means of doing literary criticism. Accordingly, I also expanded the project to include the observations of translation theorists, and I incorporated these into the creation of the script for a chamber theatre performance. After directing a staging of the script in Morocco in 2007, I realized that I needed to add more choreographed movement, and to incorporate the character of Moses’s and Myriam’s mother into the metaphor. The addition of dance, and the foregrounding of the relationship between Myriam and her mother, draws unapologetically on female relationships. It is my conclusion that the revised metaphor, with the addition of these elements, is validated by Yves Bonnefoy’s and Henri Meschonnic’s depictions of “translation as relationship with an author,” and that, the metaphor does indeed “provide . . . fresh insights.”