

Introduction: Mnemosyne in Translation

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Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory and mother of the nine muses, is at the centre of this issue of *TransculturAl* on the theme of translation and memory. As sculpted out of granite by the Norwegian artist Fredrik K.B. (www.fredrik-kb.com), she appears very beautiful but faceless, almost blurred, somehow both present and distant, not easily deciphered, in fact just like the function that she represents, memory. According to Hesiod's *Theogony* poets were inspired by both Mnemosyne and her daughters who provided them with the right words for their poetry. She is also, therefore, the principal muse for the sort of perfect language that poets, and more to the point in this context, translators are always searching for, the right words to render the sense of source texts that, in a perfect world, have inspired them and that they wish to make available in the target culture. However, beyond, or rather beneath the mythical representation of memory, runs a current of uncertainty, full of wonder certainly but always chaotic, uncontrollable, random, proving memory to be a very unreliable mode of expression or, as Edward de Bono puts it: "A memory is what is left when something happens and does not completely unhappen" (quoted in Volos et al). On the one hand, therefore, memory functions as a figure of inspiration for creativity and, on the other hand, it may be equated to the dark side of history in spite of also being an integral part of it.

Much can be learned from the pairing of translation with memory, as some scholarship has already shown: "If we can translate within a language as well as from language to language, we can also translate from what Bermann calls the 'lived historical event' to the legible trace of that event, and from that starkly present experience to the spectral permanence of history" (Bermann and Wood 2005: 176). This 'spectral permanence' is also very much at work in memory, as a ghostly presence, or a "way of knowing" to borrow from Patricia Yaeger who theorized in southern American women's fiction "the different terrors that cross white and black cultures" (93). Perhaps translation is indeed one of the most effective ways to underline this ever moving meshing of history and memory, this dynamic weaving of lived experience and history, and to unveil the stitches that holds it together ever so loosely. Bermann, through her analysis of René Char's *Feuillets d'Hypno*, poems about the French *Résistance*, calls attention to this. She writes:

Like the death it attempts to describe [the execution of Roger Bernard, one of Char's comrades], the past this text 'translates' lies beyond any tactile or visible certainties. A text translating the lived experience of the past can only be produced out of new and different cloth, woven in the airy uncertainties of memory, affect and language. (Bermann 2005: 263)

Indeed, as Sharon Deane-Cox has shown in the case of the Holocaust, translators can be considered secondary witnesses in the memory transmission of a "lived experience" that survivors are often unable to talk about. She also argues that, given the problematization of memory as a mediation of

the past within the field of memory studies, it is surprising that the “remediation”¹ of the past “through translation has largely gone unheeded within memory studies” (Deane-Cox 309). While there are no articles about the Holocaust or similar cultural traumas in this issue of *Transcultural* we do hope that both translation studies and memory studies scholars will explore these questions further through interdisciplinary collaboration and thus contribute to “the emerging body of work on the translation of the Holocaust” that Deane-Cox refers to, mentioning research by Piotr Kuhiwczak; Raffaella Baccolini and Federico Zanettin; Peter Davies; and Jean Boase-Beier (309-310). What can be learned from those kinds of studies is that translation and memory enter into a dialogic interaction that perhaps is most productive in the mediation of past human cataclysmic events and the incommensurable traumas they leave in their wake.

The pairing of memory and translation also uncovers the crucial role that culture plays in the different ways that diverse societies remember. Translation activities influence the interpretation of both distant and recent past in countless ways, including the stories told about human origins as well as the present day. Cultural memory cannot help but impact society, drive the development of government policies, craft networks of international cooperation or mistrust, and shape the futures we foresee for the next generation—but this is also true of the elision of specific traditions and cultural artifacts through colonialism or forced migration. Hegemonic languages, literatures and narratives often crowd out alternative voices and memories. Likewise, immigrants may be expected to leave their memories behind in order to become integrated, hence accepted, into adoptive cultures. From the perspective of translation and memory we might wonder how diverse people and cultures choose to remember (or, conversely, to forget) certain literary works, genres and authors. A perspective combining translation and memory helps in exploring the perpetual dismantlement and construction of identities that ineluctably affect the inhabitants of today’s global multicultural cities, or, to borrow from Sherry Simon, ‘cities in translation’, such as Calcutta, Trieste, Barcelona, Montreal (Simon 2012), New Orleans, and even Edmonton, Alberta, Canada where this journal is published.

The issue opens with three articles that all deal with literature, translation and memory but from different periods and cultures. The first of these is a study of the successive translations of the *Alexander Romance* and the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. Both texts were translated into many vernaculars and widely circulated across the world but surprisingly their cultural impact has been understudied. Benjamin Garstad focuses on one episode of the *Apocalypse*, later included in a recension of the *Alexander Romance*, to show to what extent the cultural memory of Alexander “spawned [a] xenophobic response not only in Byzantium, but throughout Europe” that can still be felt today in the “perceived aggression” of the Muslim world. The second article also deals with the Middle Ages but brings us to France for a fascinating look at the twelfth-century poet Marie de France as a translator of what was then a vanishing oral genre, the Breton *lais*. Jeffrey Longard explores the issues related to the cultural memory of this minstrel art that through Marie’s poetics became “exclusively a form of French literature”. Since little is known of the particularities of the Breton *lais* it is very difficult to know exactly how Marie transformed the genre. Longard argues that the strategies she used amount to “adopting the memory of the Bretons” and he shows, through a textual analysis based on Steiner’s Hermeneutic Motion, that Marie’s *lais* are the result of a process of incorporation and restoration,

¹ The concept of “remediation” has been studied by Astrid Erll who relates it to multiple reiterations of an event or a text.

according to the cultural mores of the time. The third piece investigates (re)translation as (re)membering of successive French translations and adaptations of *Oliver Twist*. Viewing literature as an organic body, translation as a process of remembering but also of potential dis-memberment, Julie Tarif considers how (re)translation can regenerate and reshape a literary work. Further, she asks about what is remembered of certain works and why, how and by whom those works are remembered.

The fourth and last article is not explicitly related to the theme but it offers a remarkable and insightful look at the problematics of translation influencing the process of awarding the Nobel Prize in Literature throughout its history. One could imagine many case studies to follow this research, based on the numerous examples cited by the author Kelly Washbourne, in order to explore what happens to the textual and cultural memory of the winners' or the losers' texts through translation. We are very pleased to include all of these articles here in the hope that they will inspire more scholars to delve into this theme from the perspective of literary studies and other disciplines, which can all benefit from more collaborative research with translation studies and memory studies.

This section is followed by two book reviews and a translation from Arabic into English of a short story entitled "A White Rose," recently written by Mona Elnamoury, an Egyptian fiction/feminist writer and academician.

The issue closes with a rich creative dossier, edited by Elena Siemens, that blends approaches in translation and cultural studies to represent musings about translation and memory, as its title suggests: "Stirred: Memories and Dreams." Ranging from autobiographical material (d'Angelo; Malena; Onita; Tardif) to political critiques (Defraye; Iorga;), the pieces presented here draw from many disciplines (drama; fashion studies; music; native studies; poetry; urban studies) for their creative realization. Elena Siemens introduces the collection with a creative essay of her own that discusses autobiographical films by Andrey Tarkovsky, Woody Allen, and Guy Maddin while interspersing her comments with her photographs inspired by the three directors, as well as Warhol's autobiographical project *America*. In the pages that follow her introduction many different kinds of memories are evoked: those of personal objects; texts; drama productions; popular culture; bodily functions; family; places; doors; music; childhood; colonization; Indigenous storytelling; the dead; language; clothes. I opt for letting readers discover this collection by themselves as it would do it a disservice to discuss it in too much detail. Enjoy!

Before I close I need to express my sincere thanks to my Assistant Editor, Wioletta Polanski, who is also responsible for creating the cover of this issue, to Elena Siemens for continuing to be an inspiration for both the academic and artistic aspects of editing and writing, and to all the contributors for their diligence and remarkable work.

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