interstice

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Speaking (on) Theory: teaching and translation - or teaching as translation...

> **Translation is an art BETWEEN tongues, and the child born of the art lives forever BETWEEN home and alien city. Once across the border, in new garb, the orphan remembers or conceals the old town, and appears new-born and different. Moving BETWEEN tongues, translation acquires difference** (Willis Barnstone: 265).

As our own *fin de siècle* draws haltingly to its end, it expresses its millennial anxiety ever more vocally in debates about the need to define, protect and preserve the canon. Such eminent thinkers and cultural critics as Harold Bloom, George Steiner and Richard Hoggart, for instance, have recently expressed, albeit in different ways, their horror at the rate at which intellectual values and learning are haemorrhaging from our culture. However, on the other hand, as literary studies within the Academy are increasingly perceived and presented as being 'threatened' by cultural studies, area studies, gender studies and so on, literary theory - which almost by definition is difficult and opaque - is infiltrating ever wider and more diverse fields, from art gallery catalogues through pop songs to television advertising and even teen magazines. Citations in sound-bite size from the work of Althusser, Baudrillard, Cixous, Derrida, and the other icons forming the ABC of contemporary European theorists stud the media of popular culture, while the literary works on and around which these theories are constructed often remain unread.

This encroachment upon territories usually hostile to 'high culture' can be explained by the existence of a widespread presupposition that because it is conceptual, theory is less culture-specific and therefore more immediately transferable than either literary texts or local readings of them. Furthermore, theory increasingly crosses national boundaries as well as intra-cultural frontiers, thereby contributing to a re-evaluation of the nature and status of 'culture' as it is (plurally) defined. Within the Academy, this phenomenon is particularly striking, and demands a re-evaluation of both how and why we teach it. Hillis Miller, for instance, has recently argued that: '**The most important event of the last thirty years in North American literary study is no doubt the assimilation, domestication and transformation of European theory**' (317). He also points out that

this process of assimilation has subsequently developed into one of dissemination, as North American literary theory is translated literally and figuratively from the United States throughout the world (319). The simultaneous internationalization of theory through translation and its infiltration of zones hitherto foreign to the Academy might initially seem to validate Goethe's notion that the function of translation is to increase tolerance between nations and the more recent claim by Anthony Pym that from the perspective of translators **'the ultimate aim of translation is to improve the intercultural relations with which they are concerned'** (169). However, these cultural displacements involve a shift from a Eurocentric to an Americanocentric theorization, and so even the theoretical interventions of such subtle, provisional and open-ended North American thinkers as Hillis Miller cannot be seen as occurring by chance - or innocently. After all, cultural exchange has often operated as a modality of business, following the protocols of the import/export industry, and, more insidiously and despite its proclaimed commitment to dialogue, it has often been a masked form of colonialism.

One of the main reasons why translation has historically been (able to be) used for colonialist purposes is because it has been seen and presented forcefully - but reductively - as a mode of communication, as a method of transmitting information across linguistic boundaries, and therefore as a means of containing the chaos of Babeldom. Walter Benjamin violently contests this concept of translation, since for him the essential quality of a literary work is neither statement nor the imparting of information and so any translation which attempted to perform a transmitting function would be a bad translation (69). For him, the task of the translator is **'to release in his own language that pure language (*reine Sprache*) which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work'** (80). He argues that the translator should in fact allow himself to be powerfully affected by the foreign language, advancing the Kabbalistic position that dominates post-structuralist theory of translation: **'Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image, and tone converge.'** (81)

Benjamin's central concern is with what he calls the **'suprahistorical kinship of languages'** (74), although this kinship does not necessarily imply identity or resemblance. Linguistic kinship is demonstrated by translation which does not seek to reproduce or replicate the original but endows the original with afterlife (*Fortleben*), with the living on or sur-vival that so fascinates Derrida in 'Living

On/Border Lines'. Even though always necessarily provisional, translation transplants the original into **'a more definitive linguistic realm'**, pointing the way to **'the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfillment of languages'** (75). Benjamin's kinship vision of language(s) does not allow of any colonialist exploitation of translation; rather, he envisages translation as serving the purpose of expressing **'the central reciprocal relationship between languages'** (72). And although this state of pure, originary language may be a utopian dream, translation can promise reconciliation and, as Derrida points out in his most sustained response to Benjamin's theory, **'a promise is not nothing [...]. As a promise, translation is already an event, and the decisive signature of a contract'** (1985: 191).

Neither representative nor reproductive, translation is **'neither an image nor a copy'** (Derrida 1985: 180); it is that which enables the original not to reproduce itself but to grow. A translation should therefore not strive for the fidelity of literalism, but should seek to inscribe and even foreground its own essential self-difference, its being different from the original, yet also different from itself as a paradigm of its language. This notion of a difference *within* informs the most interesting contemporary theories of translation. According to Derrida, **'One never writes either in one's own language or in a foreign language'** (1979: 101), and in *The Poetics of Translation*, Willis Barnstone goes so far as to assert that there should even be an element of willed betrayal in a translation: **'When a translation passes as original, it is profound betrayal. [...] Translation offers neither identity nor total synonymy across languages. Its art lies in the betrayal of the absolute, in the necessary difference'** (259). And in 'La Traduction et la Lettre', his manifesto of 'traductology', the French theorist and translator Antoine Berman pushes even further the challenge to the notion that fidelity is a valid criterion of the worth of a translation, asserting: **'Être fidèle à l'*esprit* d'un texte est une contradiction en soi'** (1985: 90; my emphasis; To be faithful to the *spirit* of a text is a contradiction in terms).

While Benjamin and his successors are undoubtedly right to advocate that the translator (and his/her translation) should inhabit a state of betweenness in which a lived and articulated awareness of linguistic difference permits us to envisage - in embryonic or intensive form - the kinship of languages, in the post-colonial world we need perhaps to be especially vigilant with regard to the dangers inherent in the process of translation. Bad translation is appropriatively ethnocentric: in the name of a false notion of communication, it not only assimilates but cannibalises the language and the cultural

presuppositions of the source text and chains the act of translating to the annexionistic aim that underpins many (and, indeed, perhaps all) cultures.

It is indisputable that the process of translation, both textual and cultural, is bound up with questions of power, and so it is hardly surprising that the economy of translation essentially involves the translation of works of the dominant culture (Western European and especially North American) into 'minority' languages - even those these may well be spoken by millions of people as with Chinese or Hindi. On the other hand, when works are translated from minority languages into a dominant language (in order then to be re-disseminated in modified form, rewritten and returned to sender as it were), there is always the danger that the dominant culture will avoid the problem posed by the untranslatable either by appropriating difference to itself or, more commonly, by effacing it. A notable case since the nineteenth century has been the assimilation of Oriental texts by western culture and the creation of Orientalism which is an essentially European way of speaking about the East, a discourse intended to control the East rather than describe it. By constructing the East as an inverted mirror image of its own values, the West refuses to admit the true alterity of the East and transforms its very real difference into an image of otherness grounded in, and centred on, the West. Texts from Oriental culture are thus borrowed, translated and modified into Orientalist form, and then exported back to the East.[1] What is more, even when the translator seeks to preserve the foreignness of the original, s/he is necessarily working within a dominant culture which has its own set of conventions and which has powerfully created a determining discourse on the Orient. As Talal Asad points out when discussing the problems of translating from Sanskrit into English, an unskilled Western translator **'may simplify in the direction of his own "strong" language'** (158). The process of translation may involve simplification and, indeed, simplification is often necessary for local, specific purposes - as when a particular point is to be not only communicated but foregounded. However, it should be recognized that this is a denial or, at the very least, a reduction of otherness, a strategy of controlling and of *containing* difference, one which depends on an adherence to a traditional notion of culture.

In many ways, the rise both of 'cultural studies' and of 'translation studies' as discrete and important shaping disciplines within

[1] Edward Said's *Orientalism* is, of course, the essential, almost canonical, reference-point here, but Alain Buisine's more recent *L'Orient voilé* is also fascinating, notably in its demonstration of how, far from being obstacles to understanding, the veil and the various Oriental *and* Occidental processes of veiling are fundamental to an understanding of the Orient as construct and as essence.

the Academy is due to increased anxiety about the concept of culture itself, of what it is and does. Crucially, these new critical perspectives engage us in a suspicious scrutiny not only of the hegemony of any one dominant culture but, more radically, of culture as a form of hegemony. The concept of culture as a totality of knowledge continues, alas, to haunt much thinking about translation. This leads to a privileging of bilinguality and to the promotion of ideas about linguistic and cultural competence which, although superficially seductive, are actually deeply worrying, because they are grounded in comfortable notions of belonging and possession. Mary Snell-Hornby, for instance, writes: '**the translator needs not only proficiency in two languages, he must also be at home in two cultures. In other words, he must be both bilingual and bicultural**' (42). However, is it an advantage to be 'at home' in either the target language or the source language, whichever may be one's native language? After all, as Benjamin has argued (and as Derrida has emphasized), we should recognise not only the difference *between* languages but the inherent - and essential - '**foreignness of languages**' (Benjamin 75; see also Derrida 1979: passim).

Each individual culture, of course, establishes itself and constantly defines itself through processes of assimilation whereby diversity, difference and otherness are identified in order then to be harmonized, incorporated and, where necessary, suppressed or excluded. Culture not only assumes but privileges the shared, the 'common': a common land, a common language, a common history, a common sexuality, a common attitude towards 'culture', and so on. The *commonwealth* that is culture is therefore dependent upon social bonding, and it also serves to reinforce the ties of group bonding. Consequently, both as a concept and as a social reality, culture necessarily operates through mechanisms of exclusion - and even, crucially, *as* a mechanism of exclusion. Indeed, the sense that diversity must be limited and controlled is conveyed powerfully by the fact that much of the discourse of cultural analysis is articulated around terms like 'foreignness' and 'belonging'; in other words, to be part of a culture presupposes an implication in, and complicity with, a series of codes.

If the inherent closedness of any culture is what defines and locates both that culture as a whole and each of its parts, it is also what makes it resistant to translation, to export into any other culture or discourse. The translator is thus faced with a resistance that has all too often been seen negatively - as an impediment to communication. Inevitably an outsider to the source language and to the target language (albeit in different ways), yet also an insider to and of those very languages (again in different ways), the translator must live out an in-between role as s/he negotiates the difficulties posed by the belonging of

the text. In his useful study of the problematics of text transfer, Anthony Pym has pointed out that text-belonging can be thought in terms of specific direct ownership (as with an author with a recognizable and highly individual idiolect) or in terms of collective ownership or **'situational belonging'**, whereby a text belongs in a certain social place (102). Pym recognizes that whereas the fact of belonging to a culture or discourse creates resistance to transfer and translating, in fact 'few texts are so extremely owned as to be untransferable' (117). For Pym, the fundamental task of the translator is **'to work against the bonds resisting the movement of texts'** (101). Increased potential movement is thus opposed to the stasis and closure associated with belonging and the translator inscribed as an agent for the transformation of values as texts are moved from **'their apparently rightful place'** (102).

Pym's view is a persuasive one, one which creatively supplements Benjamin's conception of the task of the translator by shifting the emphasis from Benjamin's focus on the essential kinship of languages within which the translator should allow his language **'to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue'** (81) to a concern with social and semantic structures of belonging with and against which the translator is constantly working. While kinship and belonging are closely associated notions, Pym's position is nonetheless substantially different from that of Benjamin in his focus on the translator as not only decision-maker but transformer of meaning and in his belief that translation rules are ethical decisions (151-74). This dimension of translation is still a largely unexplored area, although Berman has persuasively argued for an *ethics* of translation (1984: 23), in which the revelation of difference or foreignness as alterity is the primary objective of the practice of translation. According to Berman, translation is grounded in **'le désir d'ouvrir l'Étranger en tant qu'Étranger à son propre espace de langue [et] reconnaître l'Autre en tant qu'Autre'** (1985: 88-9) (the desire to open up the Stranger *as* Stranger to his own space of and in language [and] to recognize the Other *as* Other). In this conception, translation is profoundly dialogic, and Berman's ethical position permits a transcendence of the various oppositional logics that so often inform discussion of cultural otherness. By recognizing that there is a Stranger within, that the Stranger is a Stranger to himself as well as an/the Other, Berman is able to propose a model of transference between languages and cultures that precludes any impulse to annexation.

In post-colonial theory, the notion of the hybrid is frequently used as a model or metaphor for a new form of reading. For Homi Bhabha, hybridity **'is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic**

reversal of the process of domination through disavowal' (154). If colonial discourse seeks to determine an identity for those over whom it has legislative control, hybridity leads to a fragmentation and proliferation of differences and can consequently be seen to contribute significantly to the subversion of any and all essentialist models of reading, since it prohibits - or at least renders all nigh impossible - the establishment and maintenance of single, unitary identity. As Tejaswini Niranjana points out, such anti-essentialist models of reading point toward a new practice of translation, wherein foreignness is not avoided or effaced but activated and empowered: **'Translation, from being a "containing" force, is transformed into a disruptive, disseminating one'** (186).

The post-colonial, disseminatory model of translation undoubtedly contributes a powerful political dimension to our understanding of the workings, both real and potential, of translation, but in its justified assault on essentialist reading, it is perhaps somewhat blind to the continuing need for an evaluation of the identity - or at least the identity-position - of the translator (this is, as we shall see later, especially important when considering the mode of communication and translation that is teaching). As Joseph F. Graham, translator of Derrida's essay on Benjamin and translation, says uncontroversially in his 'Translator's Note', **'Translation is an art of compromise'** (205). However, Graham continues with the no less true but much less palatable affirmation that **'Compromise also precludes consistency'** (205). Whereas the source text normally has one author and so is written in one idiolect overseen by one major sociolect, the translation has at least two authors, two idiolects, two sociolects - and furthermore, none of these can ever be adequate or even stable, since the (eternally to be) translated text is always located *between* discourses. In other words, the translation is destined always to be a provisional text, one whose textuality is in a state of constant flux.

Translation is not confined to what takes place *between* languages; it begins already with the textuality, the coming-into-text, of a text *within* a language that can only nominally be described as one language. Translation in all its forms and at all stages of the dissemination of a text is inescapably double, and thus should be seen not only as a **'double art'** (Barnstone: 88), but as an art in which doubleness is also *duplicity*. The notion that there is translation within the same language is central to Heidegger's meditations on poetry, language and translation; indeed, at the foundation of his philosophy of existence lies his conviction that the same (*das Selbe*) is not to be confused with the merely identical (*das Gleiche*), since, as he suggests in his essay on Hölderlin's late hymn 'Der Ister', the same is truly the same only in the

differentiated and we can think 'the same' only through thinking difference and saying what has been (left) unsaid (155).

For Heidegger, it is axiomatic that every language in itself and for itself is in need of translation into itself as well as to and from a foreign language. A consequence of this is that every speaker of a language is simultaneously at home in and exiled from his/her language. We may thus accept that it is not only at the moment of translation that issues of uncertainty and indeterminacy arise: rather, **'there is textual indeterminacy well before the moment of translating. The best the translator can do is often to reproduce this same indeterminacy, the same cultural lacunae, as a trace of the other's belonging'** (Pym: 114).

Given that concepts such as ownership of a text and possession of a language are not wholly appropriate for a consideration of the operability of translation, it would seem advisable to inscribe hesitation and uncertainty not only into the act of translating but also into the product of translation, especially when one is dealing with a text whose meaningfulness is inextricably bound up with its articulation rather than being 'simply' a by-product of its meaning. Into this category would fall theoretical as well as literary texts, since a theory is always an idiomatic and provisional intervention; indeed, as Hillis Miller puts it, **'a theory, in spite of appearances, is a performative, not a cognitive, use of language'** (335), and so a recognition of theory's kinship with literature may help to redefine the reader's response to it.

Literature necessarily defies easy assimilation through reading; indeed, its essence is to do more than it says or can be seen to be saying. As Paul de Man argues, **'literature is not a transparent message in which the distinction between the message and the means of communication is clearly established [...] the grammatical decoding of a text leaves a residue of indetermination that has to be, but cannot be, resolved by grammatical means, however extensively conceived'** (15). It is in the nature of every literary text and, I would argue, of every theoretical text to generate uncertainty. Such texts are highly connotational, and their textuality resists the narrowly reductive translation that is decoding: the work's purpose is not (only) to communicate information, but rather to offer an *excess* - an excess of language and of meaningfulness that activates the performativity of reading.

Reading as interpretation is undoubtedly a function of identity, and no two readers will ever 'read' exactly the same text. However, reading as interpretation is also creative of identity, as the reader goes further than simply responding to the text and engages with it, *speculating* both on what it means and does and on who and what s/he

the reader is. The question of identity is bound up in and with language, although it should be remembered that identity is only ever partial (in both senses of the term). What one does *with* language is one of the major means of articulating (or trying to articulate) one's identity or identities (for we are all multiple identities, through the very fact of being socialized beings). To manipulate (our) language is a means of constructing ourselves both individually and collectively, hence the insistence in much current writing and thinking about gender, class and race on the need to move from models of language as an organ for communication to models of language as a mode of expression. Yet while expression is given primacy, the linguistic practice that is translation is no less fundamental in the establishment of identity: as Heidegger puts it: **'Tell me what you think of translation, and I will tell you who you are'** (76).

One of the main reasons why (a theory of) translation is so important for a concept of identity is that to translate is to live and speak or write in a dual mode - between the private and the public, between the chosen and the imposed, between the familiar and the foreign, between personal selfhood and collective identity, between desire and ideology. It is also to be implicated in a complex hermeneutic mechanism. Heidegger has economically (and problematically) affirmed that: **'All translation is interpretation. And all interpretation is translation'** (79).[2] Both of these propositions seem to me to be valid, to be true, and yet their simultaneous truth (or, more precisely, truth-value) challenges the Aristotelian principles of formal logic: the Principle of Identity (if anything is A, it is - and is only - A); the Principle of Non-Contradiction (nothing can be both A and not-A); and the Principle of the Excluded Middle (anything and everything must be either A or not-A). Both translation and interpretation are concerned with the space between discourses, yet they differ in their negotiation of this space. Interpretation, like translation, is a performative act rather than an explanatory one (although more often than not the performance is mistaken for an explanation!), but they have a different temporal relationship with the original, and it is in the fact that interpretation substitutes for and as translation, just as translation substitutes for and as the original, that the difference between these two practices of transfer(ence) operates most powerfully. As Philip Lewis says of commentary: **'commentary supplies the translation by doing other**

[2] **Although there is no evidence that he has read this essay (Heidegger does not figure in his index or his bibliography), Willis Barnstone uses an analogous formulation to propose provocatively, if perhaps a little over-rapidly, that 'reading is translation and translation is reading [and] writing is translation and translation is writing' (7). See also Iser's statement that interpretation has always been 'an act of translation' (35).**

than translation. In the wake of translation, the mission of commentary is to translate in difference' (62). Yet if commentary comes out of interpretation, it also inevitably proceeds to redefine and redetermine it, thereby binding the various modes of reading in a cycle of eternal, creatively speculative becoming.

When reading, there is always a need to be aware of and attentive to the translating position, horizon and purpose of the translator - and also of oneself as reader-translator. Furthermore, there is the need to be aware of the text's complex relationship with its own translatability. As Derrida argues:

> **A text lives only if it lives *on* [*sur-vit*], and it lives *on* only if it is *at once* translatable *and* untranslatable [...]. Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [*langue*]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately.** (1979: 102)

The translated text lives on through both its translator and its reader, but the essence of its textuality is conferred by the duality of its call for translation and its ultimate resistance to translation: that which draws the reader to ponder on it is in fact that which makes a total(izing) reading impossible and which excludes the reader from coincidence with its meaning - and with him/herself.

Whereas literature has traditionally been accepted as linguistically idiosyncratic or even 'opaque' and more recently as a complex network of intertextual relations, of dialoguing (and occasionally silencing) voices, theory has all too often been regarded as the Other of literature, as a 'single-voiced' metalanguage which speaks *of* literature and which therefore is much more limpid and much more translatable. Yet, as Derrida again reminds us, maximal translatability can lead only to **'impoverishment by univocality'** (1979: 90). Furthermore, theories of all sorts are by their very nature intertextual and agonistically under the jurisdiction of other discourses. They often are (and sometimes even present themselves as) the products of a desperate hybridity: in a paper on the state(s) of theory, Derrida points to what he calls the **'cannibalization'** which is going on between marxism, psychoanalysis, structuralism, post-structuralism, etc., and which renders impossible any singularity of theoretical discourse: **'you can imagine to what kinds of *monsters* these combinatory operations must give birth, considering the fact that theories incorporate opposing theorems, which have themselves incorporated other ones'** (1990: 67; my emphasis). Theories may indeed be monstrous, but this is precisely what allies them to the genre of the literary and leads to the blurring of the frontier-line between literature and theory.

As it becomes evident that theory has become seriously (if rather unexpectedly!) bankable and that it has an increasingly important role to play both in the financial economy that is popular culture and in the inter-social economy that is cultural politics, teachers or translators have an ever more determining part to play, since they are, according to Hillis Miller, the necessary transmitters of theory (331). However, teachers are not usually translators or at least are not translators in the moment of their teaching; there is a late-come aspect to their activity of pedagogical cultural transmission that problematizes their activity, since to teach theory - and especially to teach it in translation - has very different implications from reading it (in the original or in translation).

One of the most common and powerful modes of cultural exchange, teaching is frequently assumed to have an assimilationist function, helping to turn the foreign, be it a concept, a text or a theory, into something that can be understood and incorporated in the new place. Whilst I would not agree with Derrida's pessimistic view that '**all teaching in its traditional form, and perhaps all teaching whatever, has as its ideal, with exhaustive translatability, the effacement of language [*la langue*]**' (1979: 93-4), I do recognize that there is a great temptation for every teacher, like the translator from Sanskrit into English, to simplify in(to) his or her strong language.

It therefore seems to me that when teaching theory, especially theory written in another language, we should not only understand but constantly re-affirm to ourselves and others that we are engaged in an activity that is what I would call an in-between activity. This activity does not - or, in my view, should not - have as its primary function the explanation of the grammar or set of rules that governs the theory under consideration, since this would be to deny the literariness of theory, and yet for pedagogical and institutional reasons, teaching is predicated on the need for linear learning practices. The teaching of theory in translation does not set out to provide a(nother) theory, yet it seems inescapably to become a mode of theorizing: the teacher talking *about* theory rapidly becomes - and undoubtedly is perceived as - the teacher talking *(his or her)* theory. This slippage poses the problem of metalanguage that Irigaray has addressed in the context of women's identity and for which she offers as a response more than as a solution the activity which she calls *parler-femme* or speaking (as) woman. Irigaray's thinking here is both illuminating and liberating, because in its argument for a specificity *within* and/or *as* difference, it performs an act of bracketing, of suspending, even of excluding at the very time that it is foregrounding and rendering present woman *in* and *as* language. For analogous reasons, as a teacher, I may speak *of* theory, but within this act I also speak theory whilst also being outside it and other to it,

hence the title of this article which brackets the mark of my authority ('on').

The discourse of teaching will always necessarily be in some ways a 'late-come' discourse, one predicated on preceding discourses and inescapably destined to have a metalinguistic dimension: it functions as a metalanguage, even as it calls into question the viability and usefulness of metalanguage. Although very distant from any *Ursprache* or *reine Sprache*, a theoretical discourse may sometimes be seen to acquire the status of being a language itself, or at the very least a recognizable and discrete dialect, hence the use in my title of capitalization for Theory, since to speak Althusser, Bloom, Cixous, Derrida, etc. 'properly' is akin to speaking English properly: Theory follows the basic linguistic pattern of having a detectable, definable sociolect and a variety of readable, comprehensible idiolects. Whilst appearing - and claiming - to speak *about* theory, the theory teacher in fact speaks Theory as we speak English, French or German and thereby calls into question the nature of his or her pedagogic activity.

To teach theory is to engage in an activity which is as much about forms and structures of expression as about content to be communicated. Now, if the teacher of theory recognizes that teaching is problematically bound up with commentary and therefore with authority, s/he will be able to move towards a form of continuous translation and self-translation. In other words, if teaching is based on a different concept of translation than the traditional one that tends to efface specificity and difficulty in the interests of clarity of communication, and if it recognizes and proclaims its own linguistic specificity (and difficulty), the teacher of theory can begin to speak (on) Theory. Teaching theory is undoubtedly an exercise in translation; it is more, though - it is a continuous exploration of translatability.

As Wolfgang Iser points out, translatability can be seen as **'a counter-concept to cultural hegemony [...], a counter-concept to the otherwise prevailing idea of cultural hierarchy'** (30). By focusing explicitly on translatability and on the difference that lies within and that *is* translation, the teacher-translator draws attention to the multi-layered nature of every culture and every language and thereby highlights the fact that no cultural imperialism, be it that of Eurocentric, white, male, high-, low-, sub- or whatever-culture, can actually ever triumph in hegemonic form. In political terms, inter-cultural encounter has usually been considered in terms of the binary opposition of either assimilation or alienation, that is to say, it has been viewed in terms of a power-relationship in which that which is good (and/or meek) is assimilated, while that which is foreign and/or threatening is suppressed and excluded. However, translatability offers

an alternative to this binarism, since it is concerned with comprehension as a mode of understanding that is neither (mere) reception nor digestion, but rather an *embracing* awareness of difference and slipperiness. This is why is seems to me much more useful and interesting a mode of engaging with language exchanges than what is often known as comparative culture, since comparison frequently poses as, or is perceived and used as, a transcendental stance without actually addressing the fundamental question of *why* culture, religion, literature or whatever should be compared.

As a teacher of a foreign language and culture, I am all too aware that in 'explaining' the French language, French literature and French theory to my students, I am assuming, maintaining and often reinforcing positions that are suspect. It is usually assumed that either (a) one culture translates itself into another one on and in its own terms or (b) it tries to comprehend another culture in terms that are fundamental to that other culture. Yet it seems to me that it is the space *between* cultures and languages that is most interesting and the area that we should address. This is because this *space between* belongs to neither culture or language. It is a zone of uncertainty, a zone of self-reflexivity and self-questioning in which we have an experience of otherness - and this otherness is not only difference and distance from the other culture we are studying but also from our 'own' culture. When teaching theory or speaking (on) Theory, I find I am inhabiting a zone of betweenness on several levels (and not only linguistic ones), because the codes which structure my performance as a teacher are in creative conflict: under erasure, in abeyance, suspended... This is largely due to the fact that, as Miller puts it, **'a theoretical formulation is always provisional and idiomatic, never wholly clear and never wholly satisfactory. [...] Translations of theory are therefore mistranslations of mistranslations, not mistranslations of some authoritative and perspicuous original'** (Miller: 336-7). In other words, since the authority of the text under consideration must always already be in question, the authority of the guide to its interpretation must also be suspect. However, a theoretical statement is provisional only in terms of its content; as an utterance, as an intervention into the space of writing that is *écriture*, it is authoritative - inasmuch as it generates speculation(s) centred on itself and on its formulation. Thus, while the teacher undoubtedly occupies a space between languages, s/he must also occupy a space *within* language, participating actively in the struggle for adequate and appropriate expression that is the work and destiny of the 'creative' writer. Kristeva has defined the writer as **'a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened**

to death; instead he comes to life again in signs' (1982: 38).[3] For her, metaphorization serves both to mask and to manage a source of fear, and metaphoric substitution functions as a protective counter-phobic procedure. Kristeva's view of the writer may for some people seem both over-negative and over-insistent on the concept of psychic identity, but her perception of metaphorization as protective and ultimately reparative is insightful, and may be of use in reappraising teaching as performance, as a process which involves and is the staging of an act.

If to teach texts and ideas in translation is to enter a space between cultures and between discourses, it is also to enter a space *within* the thinking self, a space where authority (individual intellectual, epistemological authority) dissolves precisely because authority (social intellectual, epistemological authority) is conferred by the status of teacher. Whenever a social role is assumed or imposed, the individual's room for personal, idiomatic manœuvre is reduced. However, the acts of translatability that are demanded and generated by speaking (on) Theory encourage and allow the teacher to (re-)enter language creatively. To teach anything in translation is, of course, very different to teaching it in the original language, but it is particulary interesting, if unsettling, because it is so much bound up with - and dependent upon - a self-conscious awareness of the inadequacies of language. The reason why I now find the experience of teaching theory in translation more invigorating than teaching it in the original is because I enter a *space between* that is self-evidently multi-layered in a more complex fashion than the *space between* I inhabit when teaching French theory in French or Anglo-American theory in English. Tempted by *écriture* as a performative mode of teaching, I increasingly speak (on) Theory by speaking (in) parables which end in and with questions that my listeners must answer for themselves.

The parabolic discourse has been a pedagogic tool for centuries and is central to the teaching practices of all the world's major cultures and religions, but perhaps there is another step to be taken beyond parable. Perhaps teaching in and as translation helps us to glimpse what children know and have known for all time: knowledge shines through - and seeps through - the gaps in the systems, and teaching should be an activity in which we do not so much speak about anything as simply speak it and make it present. In doing this, in speaking (on) Theory, we would in effect be telling stories. To conceive of teaching as story-telling

[3] Kristeva's original French is as follows: ' L'écrivain: un phobique qui réussit à métaphoriser pour ne pas mourir de peur mais pour ressusciter dans les signes' (1980a, 49). In a recent essay on Kristeva, Jacqueline Rose has offered a modified translation which valorizes the grammar and the syntax of the original: 'The writer: a phobic who succeeds at metaphor so as not to die of fear but to resuscitate through signs' (32).

and theory as fiction is to inscribe into the pedagogical relationship a mobility and a reversibility that enable a rethinking of the nature and parameters of knowledge. Furthermore, when theory is (taught as) fiction, it becomes part of the canon in a radically different way than hitherto: it is simultaneously inside and outside the canon, commenting on it, whilst also constituting it, and calling up interpretations in the instant that it offers interpretations. Speaking (on) Theory consequently operates in a liberating and disseminatory way, reminding teacher and student that they are first and foremost readers of a space between. More even than a hybrid mode of hierarchical or post-hierarchical communication, it is a mode of engaging (with) the world that inscribes itself, its speakers and its listeners into the reality of language as performance.

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