Research

Of Mirrors and Multiversity, Doppelgängers and Doppelgängerins

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As "*heimlich* [which] comes to be *unheimlich*," the familiar turning into a stranger, the mystery exposed,[2] Freud's concept of the "uncanny" provides a rigorously dual mould wherein we find his idea of the Doppelgänger as split, divided, revealed or repeated. In his "Uncanny," Freud also mentions this special case of a double which we all have seen, the mirror reflection of the self. But a specular image – which, thirty years after "The Uncanny," would become the central metaphor in Jacques Lacan's psychology of the child's self – in Freud's essay is shifted to the realm of a footnote; thus, in a way, it is repressed. Indeed, to the elderly Freud, this unwelcome sense of a split – between what he thought, and what he saw, of himself – causes anxiety, a feeling far-removed from the "jubilant assumption" of an independent selfhood which arises in the Lacanian little child. In both cases, nevertheless, it is a source of knowledge and empowerment: whether causing a man to flinch or bringing to a child a happy surprise, it shows them their double; they are not alone and, through this specular duality, they can learn about themselves. However, a question arises concerning the female self; does a mirror – in psychology and literature – accommodate the female double as well? In other words, does she look in the mirror to find a Doppelgängerin or is it her function to hold the mirror up to the male self?

The Doppelgänger

Noch hat niemand von Doppelgängerinnen gehört.
—Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter*

Mirror mirror on the wall ...

The motif of the mirror as used by Freud expresses his anxiety over a sense of a split in the self. In a footnote to his "Uncanny," Freud tells us about his little adventure on a train. Traveling at night, alone in a *wagon-lit*, Freud is suddenly surprised by the appearance of a disoriented "elderly gentleman in a dressing gown and a travelling cap" who seems to have strayed into his compartment. However, after a fraction of a second, he realizes that this confused "elderly" person is his own mirror reflection in the glass of the door. But a sense of misrecognition has already taken place and, inevitably, it has produced a sense of a divided self (17n23). Robin Lydenberg, in his Lacanian reading of this event, emphasizes the sense of unease caused in Freud by this sudden and unwelcome realization and explains that this anxiety is produced by a sudden intrusion of the *real* encroaching onto the apparently

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[2] Cf. Alix Strachey's translation of Freud's "The Uncanny" (1-4).

composed "me." This unpleasant feeling, in Lydenberg's words, "can be relieved only by reentering the symbolic" (1080), by talking this apprehension away, which Freud, in fact, does by turning it into an anecdote. However, the *real* in Lacan and in Lydenberg's reading would manifest itself in different loci. In the anecdote recounted by Freud, the disquieting figure (or the disturbing *real*) appears in the mirror – the mirror which for Lacan would be the locus for the opposite: for the comforting unified vision of the self. In Lacan, the mirror gives us the first impression of the wholeness of the self, it produces a "jubilant assumption of [one's] specular image" which, when we were still little children, would give us a sense of wholeness, *Gestalt*, agency and "the mental permanence of the I" ("The Mirror Stage" 2). But in Lacan, confronting the mirror is a willed action; the specular figure returns a gaze for which one is prepared. Freud, in contrast, is unpleasantly caught non-prepared, like those tired shoppers suddenly confronting their faces in the cameras of the shopping malls. Preparation is all that matters; had he time to prepare his posture and his mien before glancing at the swaying door, the glass would have shown him a *symbolic* self – unruffled and self-possessed – rather than the *real* self. Or, in other words, the mirror would have showed him his Doppelgänger as a composed and aestheticized version of what he was, or *a* face – this mask ready for social interaction which is so ironically promised to Eliot's Prufrock in the lines which predict that "[t]here will be time, there will be time / To prepare *a face* to meet the faces that you meet […]."

It is this distinction, the difference between *the* face and *a* face, that also produces a rift in Dorian Gray: Wilde's Dorian studies *a* face of his frozen beauty in the mirror (cf. CC 98) perversely comparing it with *the* face – real, cruel and aging – which develops by sudden turns in the painted picture. The picture eventually has to be wrapped in heavy fabric and hidden in the attic, and it turns out that, like Lacan's *real*, it is indestructible, or, if destructible, then only at the cost of destroying the living self. This difference between the symbolic and the frightening *real* in the self also produces the shock of Jacques Rivette's *La Belle Noiseuse*, a film which can be treated as a postmodernist postscript to Wilde's *Dorian Gray* and which, as noted by Slavoj Žižek, highlights the indestructibility of the *real*. Žižek observes that, while a beautiful model provokes the painter (she "urges him on"), the picture which he completes reveals all of her, and *more* than she would like to see: it exposes an excess which Žižek terms the disturbing *real* "Thing" or *agalma*, the hidden and the fascinating (*The Plague of* 68). Similarly, Wilde's painter Basil creates a picture that reveals the terrifying and fascinating thing which Dorian chooses to call his "soul."

So, the disturbing Doppelgänger – as the "elderly" and strayed Freud, *agalma*, the *real* of *la noiseuse*, or Dorian's "soul" – is suddenly revealed when the controlling consciousness loses its grip over one's semblance, as happens at the moment of absent-mindedness depicted in Freud's anecdote, in the case of *la noiseuse*'s yielding her self to the painted semblance, and as a result of the fantastic externalization of Dorian's "soul." However, if we stand in front of a mirror prepared, with the intention of seeing this other, or the *real* in "me" – we will not see it. To a prepared onlooker, the mirror yields only an illusion, a studied pose and mien, an intended, aesthetic, or symbolic version of "me." Curiously, in one of his fairy tales, "The Fisherman and His Soul" (written at the same time as *Dorian Gray*), Wilde features a mirror in which this illusion is dispelled: this fantastic Mirror shows everything in the world except the face of the one standing in front of it (see *CC* 247). By blanking out the image of the onlookers,

it prevents them from falsely assuming that the reflected figures looking them straight in the eye are their true Doppelgängers, or the *real* them, since the *real* will always look *askew*.[3]

Mirror, mirror made of words …

But when the mirror breaks, even if the look is straight, the reflection goes awry. And it may yield a frightening sight to a child that gazes unprepared. The image of a fractured mirror – a broken mirror of mimesis – lies behind the modernist sensibility. With the onset of literary modernism, "[w]ords strain, / Crack and sometimes break" (*Burnt Norton* v) – the mirror of poetry breaks into the splinters of Eliot's work, the mirror of mimesis turns into the magnifying glass of Joyce's prose and warps the picture. Then, *the real*, the disturbing other in "me," slips into this fractured mirror, replacing the composed and posing self. This encounter with the *real* as the specular Doppelgänger is poignantly rendered in Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. The terrifying other, or the frightening *real* in "me," is unexpectedly revealed when little Malte dresses up in front of the mirror, donning family robes, costumes, and uniforms. Reflected, Malte sees a monster, the "Thing" that is frightening and unknown whilst a sense of the familiar self is lost. The grown-up Malte recalls this childhood fear in his diary: "For a length of a second I had an indescribable, grieving, and vain longing for myself, then there was only He: there was nothing but Him […]" (79). Malte-the-little-boy breaks down in tears unable to recognize himself. There is nothing left of this "jubilant assumption of [one's] specular image" which would have given a toddler a sense of agency and *Gestalt*. Having haphazardly assembled and donned various items of clothes – symbolical of his family's achievements and aspirations – little Malte inadvertently upsets the symbolic system of signification. And when the ball gowns, regalia and uniforms are jumbled up, the most frightening thing happens, the real unknown is revealed in the mirror and the worst dream is temporarily realized – his nightmarish fear that there is some other lurking in him, the fear which used to seize him when, lying in bed and running a fever, he imagined that the "Big Thing" would develop out of him and that his hand or arm would turn into "a big dead animal" (45), into something other than him. The apparition in the mirror is evocative: it is something Malte doesn't know, the self overlaid with claims imposed by family love, tinged, shaped and distorted by what others wanted him to be.

Traumatized by his childhood memory, Malte-as-an-adult will fashion for himself aesthetic reflections, he will see himself reflected in the life stories of historical characters: of the Russian imposter Grishka Otriepoff, the leprous king Charles VI, and Charles the Bold, personae through which he would speak. Eventually, Malte will replace his own self in the diary with the figure of the biblical Prodigal Son, referring to himself in the third person as "he." In Freudian terms, this strategy would be symptomatic of childhood narcissism producing an antidote against the fear of mortality. Necessary for a child, in an adult it becomes a sure sign of immaturity, with the aesthetic Doppelgänger turned into what Freud would term as "a harbinger of death." (cf. Freud 9).

While identifying himself with historical figures, Malte devises one more defense: he wishes to be "truly" reflected in the eyes of the woman who loves him, to be seen for what he

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[3] As Žižek has it, "in the uncanny encounter of a double (a Doppelgänger), what eludes our gaze are always his eyes: the double strangely always seems to look askew, never to return our gaze by looking straight, into our eyes – that he were to do it, our life would be over […]" ("I Hear You", 94).

"truly" is by his cousin Abelone, whom he imagines as prefigured in the historical Bettina Brentano, one of the moving spirits of German Romanticism. This function of the idealized Bettina, or of the romanticized Abelone, is best symbolized in the episode singled out for interpretation by Bianca Theisen: Malte, standing in front of the tapestries "La dame à la Licorne" ("Lady with a Unicorn") in the Musée de Cluny, dreams of showing and explaining this image to Abelone. He points to the Virgin holding a mirror that reflects a unicorn whose features otherwise would remain invisible to a person standing in front of the tapestry, and he formulates a question: "Abelone I am imagining that you are here. Do you understand Abelone?" (qtd. in Theisen 122). What is it that Abelone should understand: that to see one requires artistic mediation or that the self should not be confronted head on? Or, perhaps, that Malte wants her reduced to his female alter ego (and to an aesthetic *ficelle* in his narrative) showing him *his* face in *her* mirror—the face which otherwise he would not see. Ascribing to a female figure the function of mirroring the male self, naturally, is not a feature exclusive to Rilke's modernist aesthete. It is glaring in Walter Pater's masculine aestheticism, for instance, in his "A Prince of Court Painters," a story in which Pater's Antony Watteau is befriended by two women: by Marguerite-Marie,[4] the diarist who imagines herself to have an intellectual insight into Antony, and by Rosalba, a female painter who, like him, is consumptive. Both women, as *ficelles* and as his empathetic alter egos, provide a reflection of his self. Marguerite reveals him textually by analyzing his character in her diary; and Rosalba, by painting his portrait, reflects Watteau's self in a visual way. But neither Abelone as Bettina nor Marguerite versus Rosalba represent a female Doppelgänger; so, where is she? Where is the Doppelgängerin?

The Doppelgängerin

. . . il n'y a pas La femme.[5]
—Jacques Lacan

Lacunae

The answer can be found in Poe. Poe's stories richly illustrate this theme which Freud would call the return of the repressed, "die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten," and which he exemplifies by noting the dread evoked by "the return of the dead, . . . spirits and ghosts" (13). Actually, in Poe it comprises two motifs. On the one hand, it is manifested through the motif of the suppressed conscience, as in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and in "William Wilson," the story whose final scene – with William trying to stab to death his Doppelgänger (or his conscience), and dying with the blade sunken in his own chest – uncannily anticipates the ending of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.[6] On the other hand, it is realized through the motif of repressing the unruly *id*, as in "The Fall of the House of Usher" or in "The Cask of Amontillado," a story which provides a metaphorical image of a self turned against itself – a pattern worth bearing

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4 The identification of the nameless diarist with the historical figure of Marguerite-Marie Pater is proposed by Martine Lambert (65).

5 This is the rephrasing of the original aphorism which reads "La femme n'existe pas" (*Le Séminaire* 68). By denying existence to *La femme*, Lacan expresses doubt whether the notion of the female should ever be preceded by the definite determiner "La." See, for instance, Evans 222.

6 Walter Pater possibly alludes to this story in his review of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, when he praises Wilde for handling the Doppelgänger motif in a comparable way to Poe's.

in mind since it will resurface in the Decadence.[7] Briefly, in "The Cask of Amontillado" jolly Fortunato, drunk, vain, and easily duped, is immured by his Doppelgänger, the sober, revengeful and remorseless Montresor. Both wine connoisseurs, they are further connected by their synonymous names, with "Fortunato" connoting "good fortune" as well as meaning "treasure," evocative of the French *mon trésor* (see also Hoffman 218-221). While Montresor kills Fortunato, his own death is foreshadowed by his coat of arms: "A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are embedded in the heel" (*CI* 117). To kill this serpent, a man has to die. By the same logic, by immuring Fortunato, Montresor walls up and kills his innermost self.

Poe's Ligeia, however, cannot be easily accommodated within these patterns. Often interpreted as a story of a Doppelgängerin, it features an archetypal pair of black and fair-haired female figures set in a vivid contrast by the first-person narrator, who recalls his despair on the loss of dark-eyed Ligeia and remembers his second marriage, to fair-haired Rowena. In his reminiscence, Rowena dies soon after the wedding. Quite distressingly, the narrator remembers that Ligeia, before her death, had expressed a wish to return to life through sheer will-power – and, monstrously, she comes back reinstated in the body of diseased Rowena. Thus, Ligeia's identity seems to waver between two bodies. This indeterminacy is given an important qualification in a psychoanalytical reading by Susan Yi Sencidiver, who notes that Ligeia is not presented as an independent entity, but "as viewed through a male optic: hence she does not designate a radical alterity within or divided states of the psyche of women, but rather the irreducible existential *lacunae within male consciousness* […]" (111; my italics); in short, she represents the void a man feels. Herself lacking identity, she cannot be *split within* – rather, she is seen as a mere splinter from a male psyche. Non-existent as an independent self, she is also "unrepresentable", thus she cannot be seen directly, only reflected and "refracted," as Medusa in the shining surface of Perseus's shield; this accounts for an allusion to mythological Medusa in the description of Ligeia with long black hair around her head (111, 113n21). By looking into Ligeia's eyes, the narrator is confronted with a depth that he reads as "something more profound than the well of Democritus" (*CI*, 169). What is perturbing about this abysmal emptiness attributed to a female is a sense of indeterminacy. Žižek notes the disturbing impact of such indefiniteness in selfhood when he speaks of a "void" in the place where one would rather see a determinate self, rendering it paradoxically as "the void which 'is' the subject" (Žižek qtd. in Sencidiver 110). Such indeterminacy in the female self, as Sencidiver reminds us, worried the notoriously misogynistic Otto Weininger. Even more than worried: Sencidiver makes the point that the denial of a subjective identity in a woman prompted Weininger to reject the possibility of there ever being a Doppelgängerin (104-5).

Multiformity

Alternatively, Ligeia can be interpreted as the disguised Doppelgänger of the male narrator. But to him, this Doppelgängerin seems as two women, as they exist in the tradition of characters ranging from Walter Scott's black-haired Rebecca and fair haired Rowena[8] to Bram

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7 For other Doppelgänger figures in Poe, see, for instance, "The Man of the Crowd," or *The Purloined Letter* (interpreted along Lacanian lines by Roland Barthes).

8 Scott introduced the term "double-ganger" into English, in a footnote to his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (Letter 6; n43).

Stoker's Mina and Lucy Westenra. As such, Ligeia presides over those 19th-century Doppelgängerins, whose function is to reflect male complexity or, as Marguerite / Rosalba and Abelone / Bettina, to *see*. When seen, she is disquieting. Though forced into a dichotomous pattern through narrative juxtaposition, the inscrutable would-be Doppelgängerin is polymorphous rather than dual. Living a double life, but multifarious rather than twofold, to the late Victorian public she was a lot more frightening than her male counterpart. As noted by the critics of Victorian Gothic, the fear of doubling was superseded by a fear of multiformity in the self, an apprehension caused by a rapid development of evolutionary theories which gave a good reason to dread the possibility of what might be the opposite: the "involution or the unraveling of a multiform ego" (Halberstam qtd. in Byron 138). This latent horror of involution and multiformity in a woman is aptly illustrated by the grotesque ending of Arthur Machen's novel *The Great God Pan*, where a divided being – a woman of great allure and terrible reputation – strangles herself and then decomposes in front of a startled witness, who reports: "I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended, and that which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being. . . , and at last I saw nothing but a substance as jelly," finally assuming the form of "a horrible and unspeakable shape" (76-77).

Though not as grotesque as Machen's Helen Vaughan, polymorphous female figures populate the works of Wilde: Lady Alroy in *The Sphinx without a Secret* – compared to "strange crystals . . . at one moment clear, and at another clouded" – the protean actress Sybil from *Dorian Gray*, the mermaid living in the ever moving oceanic world in *The Fisherman and His Soul*, and the chameleon-like dark woman of Shakespeare's sonnets, "more changeable and wavering than the moon," from *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* (*CC* 207, 338). They reflect the impossible nature of the prototypical female self of English Aestheticism as depicted by Pater through a Gioconda figure: admittedly polymorphous – "a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions" – yet also dual: at the same time, pagan and Christian as "*Leda*, . . . the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as *St. Anne,* the mother of Mary" (80). Like Pater's Gioconda, those paradoxical *personae* are both *doppelt* and *vielfältig,* double and multiform; but the paradox is easily solved if we draw a distinction between these female personae as literary characters and as allegorical representations of the self. As literary characters (such as Machen's Helen Vaughan or Wilde's Lady Alroy *vel* Mrs. Knox) they live double lives or they are rendered through a set of contrasts, but as allegorical figures they represent the notion of a multiple self. However, this multiple self, cast in the form of a Doppelgänger character, can no longer be explained by the simple dichotomy of "either/or"; it can only be described through a model of duality superimposed over multifariousness – in a formula reminiscent of that in which James McFarlane proposed to describe modernist sensibility, as "either/or and both/and."[9]

Indeed, even those male figures which in the popular view are regarded as the emblematic Doppelgängers of Victorian literature, Dr Jekyll and Dorian Gray, are covertly representative of a dispersed self. As emphasized by Glennis Byron, Jekyll fears dispersal into a multitude of elemental forms: if he states that the human "is not truly one but truly two," it is only because "the state of [his] knowledge does not pass beyond that point." But he predicts

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[9] James McFarlane describes the spirit of Modernism as arising from "the resolution of Hegel with Kierkegaard," captured in the formula "both/and and/*or* either/or" (88); the difference, then, consists in the exclusion of "or."

that "man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifariousness, incongruous, and independent denizens" (qtd. in Byron 138). The same foreboding is reiterated by Gray, sensing that a man is "a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex, multifarious creature" (qtd. in Byron, 2009: 138; see also Stevenson 68, *CC* 107). Indeed, perplexed by the premonition of multifariousness, the Decadent Doppelgängers are also cast out of balanced symmetries. Stevenson's Jekyll encounters Hyde, Stoker's Dracula looks into an empty mirror, and Dorian Gray, while watching his immutable beauty in the mirror, observes his metamorphosing in the picture. All these examples are listed by Silke Maria Weineck in support of the claim that the Decadent "self-reflectivity," unlike that of Romanticism, "is profoundly asymmetrical" (39). These figures reflect the mode of conflictual self-perception, which, as argued by Weineck, is implicit in the views of Max Nordau and Otto Weininger, and is blatant in Nietzsche. While Nordau condemns Decadent art as a "mad" form of expression, his own passion for cataloguing and classifying – by these same standards of madness which he himself proposed – should be classified as "manic" obsessive. Similarly paradoxical, Weininger suffers his personal anti-Semitism directed at his own Jewishness (37, 39). A rift in self-perception lurks also in Nietzsche when he describes himself as both a decadent and as its reverse (39-40; see also Nietzsche 10). In fact, they all – Nordau, Weininger, Nietzsche, together with imaginary Hyde, Dracula and Gray – are like this serpent from Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado": plunging its teeth into the heel by which it is crushed.

Yet, even if aware of their multifariousness, the male Doppelgängers still *hyde* behind the façade of duality. The female figures, on the contrary, are used to project the male fear of multiplicity. Haunting males with their eyes, baffling them with mysteries – in the function of *ficelles*, or set in pairs of opposites – as individuals, those female sphinxes have no workable core. There is only continuous change, metamorphosing or blurring of the boundaries between "me" and the other "me," as in the constantly changing Ligeia / Rowena specter, Wilde's indeterminate actresses, or Helen Vaughan, an image worthy of the metamorphosing Baudelairean vampire. Openly multiform, Doppelgängerins go beyond the Freudian system of comforting dualities and worry the male characters not only by watching or not watching them but, rather, by reminding them of this multiversity lurking also in males.

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Abbreviations

CC – Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde: Centenary Edition.

CI – E. A. Poe. *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*.

Introducing the *Corpus of Modern Scottish Writing (1700-1945)*

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In December 2010, the Corpus of Modern Scottish Writing (1700-1945) was formally launched by Dr Jennifer Bann and Mr David Beavan at a workshop on 'New Perspectives on Late Modern English' hosted by the University of Bergamo (Italy). Funded by the Arts and Humanities Council of the UK, CMSW is a diachronic corpus, currently holding just over 5 million words of text, taken from 249 documents over the 250-year period. It is freely available online at www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk/cmsw.

The CMSW is a successor to the earlier Glasgow University project the Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech, which now offers over one million words of speech (recordings and transcriptions) and over three million words of written text of Scottish provenance for the period 1945 to the present day. The SCOTS corpus is also freely available online (at www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk); and with scholarly access to the Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots (1450-1700) being available, we can now say that substantial digital resources exist for

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linguists and others to interrogate the changing language of lowland Scotland, over the entire period of Scottish English, or Scots. A corpus of Scottish Gaelic is also being undertaken at Glasgow University.

The landscape of corpus studies is, of course, changing rapidly. Towards the end of the three-year period covered by the CMSW project, Professor Mark Davies of Brigham Young University added the Google Books corpus to his suite of online corpora: at 100 *billion* words of text, with links to facsimiles of the source documents, Professor Davies' resource might be expected to make modest corpora, like CMSW, immediately redundant. There are, however, various reasons why the project team is confident that this will not happen.

The first, and probably least, of the advantages of CMSW is its accuracy. The project team scanned and transcribed both published and manuscript sources, manually proof-reading the transcripts and correcting for accuracy. While undoubtedly some errors will have crept into the transcripts, we are confident that there will be fewer instances of *down* appearing as *clown* or *latter* as *hitler* in CMSW. An early problem that David Beavan addressed and solved was the presence of long <s> or <ſ> in many of the early texts. Those searching for a word's frequency in the corpus can now quickly discover the instances of, say, <song> versus <ſong>, or they can simply and easily combine both allographs in a single search.

More interesting is CMSW's focus on texts of Scottish provenance and the distribution of text types. While the collection of data for the Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech was largely opportunistic, the designers of CMSW attempted to construct a more balanced corpus, sampling from a range of genres in 50-year subperiods. Users can select from administrative prose, expository prose, instructional prose, religious prose, imaginative prose, verse and drama, personal writing or journalism; they may also search the corpus as a whole. As is well-rehearsed in corpus linguistics, a fully-balanced diachronic corpus is difficult to design and deliver, given that the type and nature of text-types obviously changes over time: consider, for example, the relative scarcity of published novels in the period 1700-1750 and their omnipresence in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, the team made a determined attempt to fill enough of their sampling frame to show the development of different kinds of text-type.

While many corpora, like Google Books, sample 'blind' from the texts available in the period of interest, the CMSW project team sought to include some published material of literary interest. We were fortunate to gain access to Glasgow University Library's rare 'Kilmarnock' edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Language,* and we also digitised and transcribed early editions of publications by Ramsay, Fergusson, Smollett, Scott and Stevenson, as well as lesser-known writers internationally, such as Neil Munro. These texts now sit in a rich textual environment, alongside sermons, newspapers, journals and broadsides from the same periods. We are particularly pleased that GALE allowed us access to a considerable amount of early print journalism, a text-type that, for copyright reasons, was largely excluded from the SCOTS corpus.

A unique feature of CMSW is its inclusion of a substantial proportion of manuscript as well as printed documents. CMSW was fortunate to work with Glasgow University Archives and Library, as well as the Mitchell Library in Glasgow and the John Murray Archive in Edinburgh, held by the National Library of Scotland. We were therefore able to include in the corpus a significant proportion of unpublished material, such as diaries and letters, official and personal, by culturally prominent figures such as James Hogg and David Livingstone. The CMSW searches first show the transcript, and then there is an option to view a scanned image of the original printed or handwritten text. CMSW, then, affords the possibility of

comparing published with unpublished writings, across 250 years. Naturally, the earlier material is perhaps of broadest interest, giving as it does a glimpse into the social life of the 18th century. Among the manuscripts scanned and transcribed are records and correspondence relating to University life in Glasgow in the 1700s; for instance carefully handwritten minutes of 'student trials' for misbehaviour, such as singing lewd songs in public, or trashing rented rooms. Some aspects of academic culture, it seems, replicate themselves over the centuries. Another manuscript source is an emigrant's diary telling of his voyage to Australia, and the events that happened aboard the ship on the way there. This discovery of this document prompted the team to design a popular interactive website, which recreated the journey as a 'real-time blog' that draws on his diary extracts.

A further, more specialist feature of the CMSW project results from the early decision to incorporate a subcorpus of writing by language commentators throughout the period. From Sylvester Douglas in the early 18th century to James Murray in the late 19th century, acute observers of pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary have published accounts of Scottish usage. This subcorpus can be extracted as a whole, or integrated into the CMSW documents for search purposes. We anticipate that this resource alone will provide a linguistic resource of considerable longevity to historians of language who are interested in variationist studies.

The collection of this textual data in the form of a user-friendly, searchable corpus is all very well, but a reasonable question remains: what can you do with it? Obviously, the most immediately salient feature of the corpus is its focus on texts of Scottish provenance, and so its 'Scottishness' invites scholarly attention and investigation. An ongoing research project, currently being undertaken by Jennifer Bann and John Corbett, is to present a survey of the orthography of modern (that is, post-1700) literary Scots. We argue that, to date, little has been attempted on this subject for various reasons, a major one being that there is no 'grand narrative' of linguistic change that hitherto can easily accommodate the orthographic behaviour of poets and novelists who choose Scots as their literary medium, in whole or in part. Before 1700, the changes in orthographic behaviour across generations of Scottish writers can be comprehended with reference to a general tendency towards 'anglicisation'; however, there is no similar, general uni-directional move towards 'standard Scots' that can explain the diverse range of practices that developed in the so-called 'vernacular revival' of the 18th century and beyond. Bann and Corbett are currently taking advantage of the availability of a large number of works in CMSW in literary Scots, and the textual applications of analytical instruments such as cluster analysis, to trace the diffusion of preferred and dispreferred graphemes across a range of canonical and non-canonical writers.

We anticipate that further research on the corpus will take advantage of the unique features outlined above. The subcorpus of texts by 'language commentators' can test their claims against the larger mass of documents exemplifying contemporary usages, or at least written usages. As a variationist corpus, CMSW can obviously be used to explore syntactic variation in the periods of its coverage; Scots lexicographers will also benefit from a corpus that includes densely Scots texts by famous and little-known authors. The substantial proportion of manuscript versus print documents should stimulate research comparing those two media; the manuscript data also particularly invites research into relatively unexplored issues like the development of punctuation in handwritten and print documents.

What of the future of CMSW? While the current period of AHRC funding is over, the corpus is just beginning its active life as an available resource. Although it exceeded its targets in many respects, a number of scanned and digitised texts are still to be added; and to these

may be joined other texts, as time goes on. Those people involved in developing the project continue to work on it to produce research outputs and, on the technical side, to enhance its online delivery. It would, of course, be ideal to have both CMSW and SCOTS on a unified platform, rather than as two discrete resources. But for the moment, if you have not accessed the resource yet, go online, browse it and play around. You will come across a surprising range of material, among them a dialect novel from the north-east of Scotland, a play by a 19th-century female dramatist; a letter home from London on the occasion of the 1715 Jacobite uprising; a spiritualist tract by Arthur Conan Doyle; correspondence between the John Murray publishing firm and its authors; an 18th-century account of 'The Kingdom of Thibet' [sic] and the versified 'A True Relation of Sir Andrew Barton, Pirate and Rover' (1700). We hope this resource will be of interest and use to colleagues for many decades to come.

Breaking news:

First World Congress of Scottish Literatures (Glasgow, 2-5 July 2014)

From 2-5 July 2014, the University of Glasgow is hosting the first World Congress of Scottish Literatures in the College of Arts, with the involvement of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies and other bodies. The conference will be organized under four main themes: Authors, Theorizing Scottish literature, Gaelic, Mediaeval, Musical and Artistic Scotland, and Scotland in global culture and context. Colleagues in the US, Europe, UK and Australia have already agreed to organize panels, and the congress steering group, together with a wider internationally based committee, are planning regular updates to interested colleagues. If you would like to be on our mailing list, please contact Rhona Brown (scottishliteraturecongress2014@glasgow.ac.uk). A Call for Papers will be issued in due course. The conference will be held in an exciting month in Glasgow, with the Commonwealth Games and the major Georgian Glasgow exhibition both taking place in July. We plan to work closely with our colleagues in the city and its galleries and museums to make this a truly exciting experience for our delegates.

Mutuality and Challenges in Literature, Theory, and the Philosophy of Language: An Interview with Jean-Jacques Lecercle

Angela Locatelli
Università di Bergamo, Italy

Jean-Jacques Lecercle is Emeritus Professor of English Literature at the University of Paris X, Nanterre. A specialist in Victorian literature, he has written seminal works in literary theory and the philosophy of language. His earlier books, for example *Philosophy Through the Looking-Glass* (1985), *The Violence of Language* (1990) and *Philosophy of Nonsense* (1994), represent a radical innovation in linguistic and literary studies, proposing a view of language much richer and more relevant to the understanding of linguistic and literary phenomena than the one provided by structuralism or traditional linguistics; his latest books *Une philosophie Marxiste du langage* (2004) and *Badiou and Deleuze Read Literature* (2010) confirm and extend Lecercle's stimulating capacity of exploring the unitary nature of the humanities in their endlessly open articulation of concepts, and their firm grounding in the complexities of language.

Angela Locatelli, Professor of English Literature at the University of Bergamo (I), interviewed Jean-Jacques Lecercle for *The European English Messenger* in the summer of 2010, immediately after the publication of his latest book on Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze and literature; he generously accepted to discuss at length his perceptions of the past, present, and future of Literary Studies, as well as some of the most relevant aspects of the mutual relationship of language, philosophy and literature. Here is a transcript of the salient points of their conversation.

Angela Locatelli: W*hat were the most influential or significant elements in your academic formation? Which did you find more congenial or convincing? What is their ongoing significance today?*

Jean-Jacques Lecercle: Ok, well, there are two points. One is generational. I was at college in Paris between 1965-70 and those were exhilarating times if you were a student in the humanities. I could pastiche Wordsworth and say: "Glory was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be a student was very heaven", because in fact, the dawn question was a complete change of paradigm in the humanities. We called it then "structuralism" but in fact it goes much further, and it still has consequences today because what burst onto the scene in Paris in those years was what is known as "French Theory". We had the impression that all the human sciences were being revolutionised: psychoanalysis, and Marxism, and philosophy, and anthropology, and linguistics, and literary theory; all the names on which we feed today like, you know, Deleuze, Derrida, Althusser, Foucault, Lacan, Levi-Strauss, just to name a few, were bringing about the radical change ; and it was not purely a French phenomenon because we also discovered, in those years, the Russian Formalists, Bakhtin, the Russian semiologists, like Lotman, or the narratology of Propp, etc., etc. I am the heir of that formation, and have been working in that context ever since, and this context is still the dominant paradigm in the humanities. The second aspect of my formation which was influential was institutional. One of the techniques that one learned in the French humanities, even before the change of paradigm, was "explication de texte", that is, very close commentary of a text. Now, you

know, the English are talking about "slow reading", by which they mean not reading a text from page one to the last page, and not using a search engine to find the key words, but "explication de texte" is very slow reading, you read the text line by line, word by word, and I all my teaching life have tried to teach my students to unfold or explicate a text down to the very last semi-colon. That is a very powerful technique, which means that in the humanities, we are dealing with language all the time, and it was not only in literary studies that we did things that way (where you obviously have to do it), it was also in history or philosophy that "explication de texte" was widely practised. And it was something which the Anglo-Saxons have abandoned because it was old hat and reactionary, which to me is a great pity; so explication de texte and the change of paradigm are probably the two most important things in my formation.

A.L.: *The relationship between language and literature is a central concern in your works, from* ***Philosophy Through the Looking Glass*** *(1985) to your latest book* ***Badiou and Deleuze Read Literature*** *(2010). Would you consider yourself "a philosopher of language keenly interested literature", or "a literary theorist, necessarily involved with language"?*

J-J. L: I would like to have my cake and eat it, that is, to answer that I am both, because it is the same thing. The main point is the change of paradigm I was alluding to, which meant that, in fact, the whole division between specialisms fell, or was blurred if it didn't vanish entirely. What that paradigm taught us is that we need one single discipline for the humanities, which now goes very often by the name of "Theory", but in France in those days was simply called "Philosophy". It is a postulate on the unity of thought, and what we deal with is thought in so far as thought is expressed in language; the nexus language and thought is the object of what people like me and many colleagues do, so whether I am a philosopher, or a literary theorist, or a linguist is just different aspects of the same thing. I mean, the idea that every human enterprise which is worthy, is devoted to thinking, I am not the only one to suggest that "literature thinks", that "painting thinks", that "architecture thinks" etc. What we are concerned about is "that thought" beyond the divisions in methodology and specialities. In fact, I think that we don't need so much a methodology as various techniques of reading, and concepts which seek to capture the thought that is produced by those techniques of interpretation.

A.L.: *Since the two terms are often used indifferently, could you further specify the difference you see between "methodologies" and " techniques of reading"?*

J-J. L: Technique is a certain practice which you acquire, and which you apply to your concrete objects, like texts. So I would say that "explication de texte" is a technique, and you learn how to deal with texts. Methodology is more ambitious, and the problem I have with methodology is that it's a way for the humanities of aping the exact sciences, the hard sciences. And the disadvantage of it is that it fosters the separation between various disciplines. So there is a different methodology in sociology, in history, in literary theory. What I am trying to say is that if thought is unitary, and there are a number of what Badiou would call "conditions for philosophy" in art, in politics in science, we need not so much a methodology as techniques of reading, and a clear idea of what concepts are, and how you construct them.

A.L.: *At the beginning of* ***The Force of Language****, which you wrote with Denise Riley in 2004, you explain that the object of the book is to account for aspects of language which mainstream conceptions*

neglect or reject. What are they? And why should they be considered important in literary studies, as well as in the philosophy of language?

J-J. L: The problem with linguistics as a science of language is that it does construct its object through subtraction, that is, disregarding or discarding a vast part, and in fact the greater part, of the phenomena we understand under the term "language". Saussure's language is only a very small part of what we know and practice as language. Now, my problem with this is, in fact, that literature is dealing with all those other phenomena of language which structuralist linguistics deliberately, and for understandable reasons, ignores. I have called those aspects *remainder*, and literature is about what I call *the remainder*, the parts of language which linguistics refuses to reach. The history of linguistics can be described as an attempt to enlarge the site of *langue* by taking in a number of those phenomena which, at first, it ignored. For instance, the difference between Saussure and Chomsky is that in the case of Saussure syntax is part of *parole*, it's not part of *langue*, so it is outside the scope of scientific linguistics; whereas in Chomsky syntax is the core of competence, i.e. the core of what he understands as *langue*. And then, as a linguist, like Lakoff, I have tried to add pragmatics to this core, and linguistics is forever trying to increase its scope. My point is that there is always something that it fails to reach because of the way it is constructed, and this is what literature knows and what literature tells us about language.

A.L.: *Would you say that "the remainder" is about actual language use, and the affects, and the dimension of the struggles that are implicit in language?*

J-J. L.: Yes, it's all this, it's also language in its historical development, language in its social and political context etc., etc. There have been attempts to build hybrid disciplines like sociolinguistics or psycholinguistics, which have never really taken on because, in fact, what we really need is a way of thinking the whole of language, and not only a small part of it. This is why I call myself not a linguist but a philosopher of language, and philosophy of language for me is that we try to think language as a whole and not only bits of it, or parts of it.

A.L.: *Your criticism of current dominant practices in the study of linguistics has undoubtedly led you to the formulation of a new philosophy of language. Would you agree that it is most thoroughly expounded in* ***A Marxist Philosophy of Language (2006)****? And that the cornerstone of this innovative philosophy is a view of language as a purveyor of historical and cultural knowledge?*

J-J. L.: Yes, I would say emphatically "yes", to that question. Now, the reason why I call my philosophy of language "Marxist" is that this is my philosophical tradition, I was brought up in this tradition and have tried to develop it. But there is a further reason why it is particularly apt as a way of thinking language. My book was an attempt to fill a gap in Marxism which had only been filled a long time ago by Voloshinov, but Marxists in general have ignored language. There is little about language in Marx, Lenin and the classics of Marxism, with the two exceptions before my book being Voloshinov and Gramsci. Gramsci was a philologist, his views on language are of the greatest interest but they are dispersed in the *Prison Notebooks* in various ways. The interest of Marxism for me is that it does provide a historicist and social account of language, so that it puts into focus the way in which language operates in a historical and political conjuncture. This is why literature is important in the study of language, because, by definition, literature is aware of this, and is a response to the situation of language in history and in culture. And also, Marxism is essentially a critical theory which allows me to produce a criticism of the status quo and of the status quo in the matter of language, which, as you know, is of prime political importance in the current situation. The

ruling classes have developed an enormous industry about language, the industry of mass communication and media, and have employed thousands of specialists of language to produce an ideology of language which is in great need of being criticized, and Marxism is to my mind the most critical take on the current situation.

A.L.: *Why is this innovative view of language a desirable premise (but, perhaps I should say an indispensable premise), to our study of literature?*
J-J.L.: The answer to that can be very short: because literature is the *form par excellence* of the practice of language. If I am interested (a) in *the remainder* in language, and (b) in language as a cultural, historical, and political practice, the locus of this linguistic practice is not exclusively in literature, but in literature *par excellence*, where the most interesting and complex aspects of this practice are found. We must not neglect other kinds of texts, of course, but literature is the core of it. In my book ***Interpretation as Pragmatics (1999)*** I developed a theory of interpretation of texts which is potentially valid for every kind, but with literary texts as prime example, because in literature all aspects of language are developed to the full.

A.L.: ***A Marxist Philosophy of Language (2004)*** *is also a sophisticated meta-critical acknowledgement of a great critical tradition, and the expression of a desire to return to, and contribute to it. Does the adjective "Marxist" in the title have prevailing methodological or ideological connotations?*
J-J.L.: It has obviously both, the methodological and ideological. I do not like much the word methodology, and Marxism is the best way of providing a systematic critique of the status quo, i.e. of the approach to language we find in the media. You have understood I work in the tradition of Althusser and Gramsci and this is a political position in favour of the emancipation of human kind. What interests me in Marxism is that it provides a way of thinking emancipation. For me any kind of theoretical practice is never in the limbo of apolitical neutrality, it has to take a stance in our world, a stance for emancipation.

A.L.: *In* ***L'emprise des signes (2002),*** *which you have co-authored with Ronald Shusterman, and in several other works of theory, including your relevant contributions to the ongoing series of volumes on "La conoscenza della Letteratura/The Knowledge of Literature"*[11]*, you have debated the issue of literary knowledge and have defended the view that literature is a subject of knowledge. What sort of knowledge does literature provide?*
J-J.L.: My position on literature in the debate with Ronald Shusterman is that literature produces knowledge. His position basically is that it doesn't produce knowledge since it doesn't stand the test of scientific verification. Of course, I do not claim that literature produces the same kind of knowledge as science does. If you want to send a rocket to the moon you do not need to read Jules Verne or Cyrano de Bergerac, you need the hard sciences. Literary knowledge is a different form of knowledge. I would not like to think that literature is merely a game, or a form of entertainment. Literature provides a knowledge of experience, of life, of ethics, of interpersonal relationships. If I want to establish a link with the Marxist tradition I would call this knowledge of the "process of subjectivation" - i.e., of the way we individuals are turned into subjects by ideology, which involves language. Literature provides knowledge of language as much as the science of language, linguistics, does. A poet is a born

[11] Angela Locatelli (ed.), *La Conoscenza della Letteratura/The Knowledge of Literature* (vols.I-X), Bergamo, Sestante Editore, 2001-2011 (www.sestanteedizioni.it).

linguist, someone who, in his practice, teaches us what languge does, but also a knowledge of the constitution of individuals into subjects, which is what Althusser calls "interpellation". Interpellation is what our human relationships are made of. I am interpellated by ideology all the time and we counter-interpellate it all the time and this constitutes us as subjects. Literature is the practice that stages the dynamics of interpellation and produces a knowledge of it. A vulgar example, which must be taken as such, is this: if a young person wants to discover the experience of love, one way of getting out of the solipsism "what does she think of me" "how can I tell her how I feel" is through literature, through cinema: any first kiss is necessarily a Hollywood kiss. All this provides a knowledge necessary to live, a knowledge of what I would like to call "life", a dangerous word for a Marxist; all that Deleuze calls "life" in his essay on Dickens, a concept of life. We do not live only through our knowledge of physics. This is why both literature and the study of literature are going to survive.

A.L.: *Your position over the epistemic meaning of literature seems extremely fruitful, not least because conducive to a more critical assessment of what literature is and what it does, while avoiding the trap of essentialist definitions. Could you say something about this?*

J-J.L.: The danger of essentialism in literature is that it postulates a kind of fixed human nature, which literature would grasp, so we would admire *The Sorrows of Young Werther* because it would tell us something about the eternal nature of humankind. Because I am a Marxist, I believe that human nature is the sum of social relationships, which means that it is historically determined and that it changes: there is no such thing as eternal human nature. But, on the other hand, I do believe that literature does tell us, and is the best way to provide knowledge of, the historical state of human nature as we experience it in the present context, and literature does so by telling us how to have a clear concept of our constitution as subjects, how we are interpellated by various kinds of ideologies and how we can react and counter interpellate it.

A.L.: *You have done some wonderful and decisive work on two apparently incompatible areas of literature: i.e. "nonsense" and "realism". (How) do you "reconcile" these interests? How does each of them contribute to your view of what literature is and does?*

J-J.L.: I'll try to avoid the schizophrenia of being both an admirer of nonsense and an admirer of literary realism. I have suggested that literature gives us knowledge of experience in two related ways: (1) it gives us a knowledge of language and (2) it gives us a knowledge of intersubjectivity. The two are related because we are constituted as subjects in and through language. For the scope and aim of theory we could distinguish them in a provisional way. My interest in nonsense stems from the fact that nonsense is devoted to exploring the limits and the frontiers of our language. And the frontiers in a precise sense are shaped by questions like the following: "to what extent can we play on language, at what point exactly does meaning vanish? How can we exploit those plays on language to produce new meanings (to coin new words, etc., etc.)?". Nonsense does produce an indirect sort of knowledge of language and the reason of my attraction to Lewis Carroll has always been that he seemed to me to be a considerable linguist, in practice, not in theory. The problem of realism is similar. As you know, realism is now almost a swear word in literary studies, it has a bad reputation, mostly because it is limited to what used to be known as naturalism, the idea that what literature had to reproduce was the "real real", the same real as science. My point is that literature is a serious concern, so it does aim at producing some form of real, but <u>that</u> real is not the real of science, which is defined as cumulative, progressive and producing truths, even

if those truths are temporary. Literature does not produce knowledge that is cumulative, progressive etc., but the real literature is concerned with is the real of the practices of interpellation. When Althusser developed his theory of ideology he said that ideology: "represents the relation of human subjects to their real conditions of existence". He does not say, directly, that ideology represents the real conditions of existence, but the RELATION to the real conditions of existence, so it is a representation at a second remove. He criticizes the Enlightenment vision of ideology as a mixture of allusion and illusion. The idea being (cfr. Fuerbach) that if you discard the illusion you reach the allusion. Underneath the illusion of deity etc etc., you understand the allusion to human alienation etc.etc. Althusser wants to avoid this idea that there is a mixture of illusion and allusion in ideology, even if at first sight it does seem to work like that. He wants to show the necessity of ideology, the fact that we all are subjectified by and within ideology, that is we live, we experience our relation to our real conditions of existence in a medium of ideology. This is the kind of realism I think literature can show, i.e. the realism of representing not the world as it is, or as science decides, but the world as it is in our relation to it and in our relation to others. The realism of literature goes into describing those relationships. How is Madame Bovary a subject?, how is she interpellated as a subject?, how does she manage, or fail to manage to counter interpellate this interpellation in order to live her life?, etc. etc.

A.L.: *The political and social significance of literature and literary studies in the age of a globalized market economy seems to be highly problematic. Gayatry Spivack's grim prediction of "the Death of a Discipline" has been contradicted in practice, but also theoretically, in the works of William Paulson and others. The current dominant doxa, however, tends to view literature as a form of entertainment, hardly as respectable as technological competence or scientific knowledge. However, literature seems to have secured its position in academic curricula because, or probably as long as, it is instrumental to the achievement of specific socioeconomic targets ("governance", intercultural negotiations, collateral economic benefits). Its useful synergies with sociology, economics, political science, psychology and the neurosciences are routinely recognized, provided that literature continues to occupy an ancillary position within the cultural system. How do you see the current state of affairs? What would you say is the future of literary studies?*

J-J.L.: The future of literature is not in doubt. Everything indicates that literature is being produced to the same amount as it always was. There is no sign that the interest of the reading public for literature is waning and in so far as this is the case, the future of literary theory is also assured. As long as there is literature there will always be some form of literary theory. Of course, that form may be vastly different from what we know now, or from what I knew when I was a student, and between the moment when I was a student and now the situation of literary studies has already changed considerably. I started studying literature in the days of "the man and his work" or similar things, which now are no longer current. So the discipline is changing all the time, which is normal, but the need for the discipline is the same. Now, in your question there are a number of, and this is not a criticism of you, of course, there are a number of bureaucratic terms. The tendency, of course, of the current globalised capitalism is to technologise literature and make it instrumental to its own aims. But, from what I tried to say in answering the previous questions, I think the political importance of literature is not that it is a form of entertainment, but that it is something that produces knowledge, and not ancillary to the technical needs of current capitalism. My point is that literature is a way of producing knowledge about life and this is of the utmost political

importance, and it will ensure its survival. We need literature because we need to know how to live our life, we need to understand what it is to be a human subject, etc.etc.

A.L: *Philosophy, history, and literature appear in your works as the objects and agents of an intrinsically mutual interaction. Does this mean that you find a trans-disciplinary perspective mandatory in literary theory? If so, which competences (in which fields of study or disciplines) do you consider a (pre)requisite, or most relevant to professors of literature and literary critics today?*

J-J.L.: The answer [to the first part of your question] is "of course", and "no". Of course, we cannot be specialists of literary studies in the narrow sense and we need to widen the range of our reading. And "no" because I don't like the word "trans-disciplinary". When I was a student this was called "pluri-disciplinary" and was the object of a scathing critique by Althusser. Pluridisciplinary was based on the idea that if you added expert knowledge by composition you would reach a much better position or a much better form of knowledge. And this was based on the idea that there are fixed disciplines, with fixed frontiers, and that you cannot, or must not cross them. If you are a student of literature you are not a sociologist, if you are a sociologist you are not a philosopher, etc. etc. My point is to start <u>not</u> from the separation of the general fields of knowledge, of the humanities, into separate disciplines, but to start from the unity of thought, thought and language, which is the object of study of what we call "the humanities". If we start from the unity of thought then we necessarily will have concepts which range far and wide, and not merely in the narrow field of what we know as literary studies. As historians need literary concepts, students of literature need historical concepts, philosophers think about literature a lot. What is important is the fact that a professor of literature should <u>think</u>, i.e. should produce concepts, and not just apply a ready-made methodology to a limited range of texts. So, in a sense, when you say I am interested in philosophy, history, and literature the obvious answer is "yes", but I do not see myself as competent in several different disciplines. I try to think, I try to make concepts my object.

A.L.: *Twenty, thirty and forty years ago literary criticism was carried out in specific "schools" and formulated according to specific "approaches" (New Critics, Structuralism, Formalism, Psycho-analytical criticism, Marxist criticism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, Feminist and Queer Studies, etc.).Methods, concepts and protocols were strictly defined within each "school", and bitter contentions of both a methodological and ideological nature were à l'ordre du jour (The Marxist versus Formalist struggle is perhaps the most eloquent and paradigmatic instance). A greater methodological hybridity is now widespread and literary studies seem to be articulated with reference either around certain "founding figures" (Lacan, Foucault, Barthes, Bakhtin, Deleuze), or around a number of "key concepts" ("postcolonial", "ecocriticism", "trauma studies", "memory studies", "area studies", "literary and media studies", etc.). Could you comment on this shifts of focus? And identify some of the socio-cultural forces, within and outside academia that, in your opinion, are primarily responsible for these changes?*

J-J.L.: What I would object to in this formulation is not so much that the time of "literary schools" is probably finished. There was a time when you could be a psychoanalytic critic or a Marxist critic and only that, and so you operated within fixed frontiers and the result was, in most cases, what you had to say about your text was entirely predictable, and your readers knew in advance what you were going to say. This is fortunately no longer really the case. But, the "key concepts" you mention like "ecocriticism", "memory studies", etc. are not so much "concepts", but names of areas or fields or sub-fields of study, and this I think needs a reflection on the institution, and its need to find for each new professor a new niche in which

to develop his or her production and make a career. But it also it needs a reflection on the technologising impetus of modern capitalism, where everything has to be in a slot, that slot has to be clearly defined, so that we know exactly where we are. Now, the third type of division you mention, i.e. names like Lacan, Deleuze, Barthes and Bakhtin, is to me by far the most interesting. I have always operated according to those names, and I have two masters: one is Althusser the other Deleuze. The interest of that is that when you are interested in the production of a philosopher or critic, you are interested in the development of an origin or a form of thought which generally goes far beyond the boundaries imposed by the disciplines. How do I define Foucault? Is he a historian, is he a philosopher, etc.? How do I define Derrida? Is he a philosopher or a literary specialist, and so on and so forth; what about Deleuze? He would have to be described as a philosopher, but he has also written an enormous amount on literature, as you know. What is interesting in that is that, by working on those names, you have a comprehensive vision of your field from which you can develop your own concepts. Now, whether they range across the various subdivisions of disciplines (and they tend to do so) is of no importance. What we must do is resist the technological impetus of contemporary capitalism, which would likely restrict us to fixed subjects, disciplines, and chairs that are clearly defined, with clearly defined syllabi. My idea was that when I taught English specialists I postulated that they would be interested not only in the concepts of literary criticism, but also in philosophical or historical concepts.

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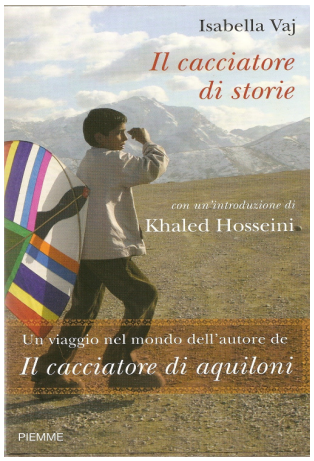
Translating Culture: An Interview with Isabella Vaj

Sara Laviosa *(Bari, Italy)*
Translated by Richard Braithwaite (London, England)

After watching the film adaptation of Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* (2003) on TV, I decided to introduce this artistic work in my language and translation classes at Master's level. Khaled Hosseini is "an Afghan living in exile" (Hosseini 2009: 7) and in the novel he expresses his transcultural identity. Also, *The Kite Runner* is an international best-seller, it has been published in 40 countries and has been variedly represented in interlinguistic and intersemiotic translations. The Italian rendering by Isabella Vaj, *Il cacciatore di aquiloni*, has been published by Piemme in two separate editions, one including a glossary of the words in Farsi, the author's mother tongue, the other containing 40 photographs, mostly by Luigi Baldelli, and a preface by Khaled Hosseini.

In 2007 Mondadori published an abridged version approved by the author as an audiobook. The movie was released in Italy in 2007. So I was all set to acquire this material for my lessons, when, one day, while I was browsing in a bookshop at Fiumicino Airport, another book caught my eye: *Il cacciatore di storie* by Isabella Vaj, with an introduction by the author of *The Kite Runner*. I bought it and read it on my way to and from Bergen. I was truly fascinated by this original book, which gave me an insight into the world of Hosseini. Moreover, at the end of each chapter, gracefully introduced by a tiny bird carrying a bulb in its beak, Isabella Vaj, inspired by the memories and emotions evoked by reading, translating and writing about Hosseini's fiction, tells her own stories as they are vividly remembered, fresh from her childhood and adolescence, and in doing so she (re)discovers her world through the world of Hosseini, bringing us close to both of them. The following interview, aimed at unveiling the relationship between cultural translation and creativity, was conducted via email on 15th February 2010.



SARA LAVIOSA: *The Introduction of* Il cacciatore di storie *and the stories you liked to tell in this book reveal various aspects of your life and your varied interests. What else can you tell us about yourself and your passion for writing in its many forms, including of course, translation?*

ISABELLA VAJ: After High School I don't think I learnt many essential things. My literature teacher, the linguist Carla Schick, author of *Il linguaggio. Natura, struttura, storicità del fatto linguistico* (1960), instilled in me a passion for language in its various aspects of individual freedom and norm established by tradition as well as a focus on historicity. As far as my character goes, I am the victim of a glaring contradiction between the desire to know one subject in depth, the Italian language, and an insatiable curiosity for many subjects: English, archeology, Islamic art and Arabic.

I stopped teaching after being faced with the difficulty of dealing with the rift between school and real life that was conveyed to me by my students. Being a pacifist, I didn't want to react violently to those who thought education was a waste of time, when I still consider it to be the greatest privilege. And yet, I had dedicated myself to English teaching, using my experience in the classroom to write several successful textbooks for the Lattes publishing house in Turin. Then I thought it would be more rewarding for me to resume my studies. To give a scientific basis to the practical skills I had gained in the field, especially at the archeological excavations of the ancient Roman city of Luni (La Spezia), I specialized in archeology in the mid 1980s, collaborating with the Istituto di Archeologia dell'Università Cattolica di Milano for a long time.

My curiosity was aroused in the early 1990s by the desire to learn Semitic languages, which I perceived to be as something mysteriously other. So I graduated in Arabic language and culture at the ISMEO in Milan. I discovered that what we call nominal predicate is defined as state complement in Arabic and takes the accusative! I discovered that the paratactic construction doesn't presuppose the simplification of thoughts, but gives order and rhythm. I discovered that repetition is not considered to be annoying, it is regarded as an elegant stylistic feature. As always, the other makes us aware of our limits.

The last turning point of my career took place about ten years ago when I had the good fortune to meet, by pure chance, an editor of the Piemme publishing house who asked me to translate English or American narrative. This chance happily took me back to my roots. As Woody Allen tells us in *Whatever Works*, life is meaningless but fate may be lucky. That's how it was for me.

S.L.: *How was the project of translating Khaled Hosseini's novels conceived?*
I.V.: I don't believe it was a project, at least not my project. Maybe I was asked to translate Khaled Hosseini's first novel because of my knowledge of Islamic culture, but I wouldn't swear by it. In 2002 nobody in Italy knew Hosseini, but when I was given the manuscript, I immediately felt I was dealing with a great narrator if not a great writer. His novels give you the pure pleasure of reading, they have the charm of fairytales. This is what I wished to preserve in the translation and readers have appreciated it. I guess I had a sort of pre-emptive right for the translation of the second novel.

S.L.: *In your book* Il cacciatore di storie *you reveal with a metaphor the concept of translation that inspires your renderings: "We know that in ferrying a text from one language and culture to another something often gets lost at the bottom of the boat: when two Italian verbs are used to translate one English verb a leitmotif which is clearly important to the author is destroyed, but sometimes something is gained too. The title* Il cacciatore di aquiloni *seems to be more evocative than the technical term* The Kite Runner. *Maybe. In any case translation teaches you to be tolerant of your own inadequacy and to feel happy for a felicitous solution" (Vaj 2009: 37). What other felicitous solutions do you remember? What other joys did you feel while translating?*
I.V.: It has been affirmed that a translator is a solitary person who is eccentric to the point of maladjustment. I fit in with this description and maybe I indulge in a myth. In translation, personality, culture and lifestyle merge. I can't remember other felicitous solutions, even though I was pleased with the title *Il cacciatore di aquiloni*, but I remember emotional solutions. I couldn't resist introducing a literary reference that was important to me but so delicate that it may go unnoticed. In *The Kite Runner* a Russian drunkard barks an ancient Afghan wedding song: *Ahesta boro, Mah-e-man, ahesta boro*. Hosseini translates: *Go slowly, my lovely moon, go*

slowly. I knew perfectly well that I was taking the liberty of translating the original verse with: *Cammina lenta, mia graziosa luna, cammina lenta*, but I couldn't talk about a wandering moon without borrowing the voice of Giacomo Leopardi. I'm well aware that in the Italian poem *graziosa* means "benign" and doesn't allude to the beauty of the moon. Maybe *lovely* could have been translated more accurately, but I thought that the Leopardian adjective would make the Italian reader think of clear skies on a windless night, making the barking, drunk Russian soldier seem even more disgusting.

My greatest pleasure was to talk about things belonging to a culture I knew and loved. Things that echoed inside me and made me feel close to the author: from the classic Persian poets to the greatest artists in XV century Herat. I also derived great pleasure from finding a delicate register to translate pages which are deeply emotional such as the part of *Il cacciatore di aquiloni* in which Amir offers his father forgiveness for his betrayal, and the part of *Mille splendid soli* where Mariam is shot dead.

Thanks to my knowledge of archeology, I've avoided making mistakes on numerous occasions. For example I find that *mud brick* is invariably translated as *mattone di fango*, an expression which to me doesn't make any sense. I've established that even well-educated native English speakers don't have a clear idea of what a mud brick is. They associate it with primitive African huts. In reality these are unbaked bricks: that's how the *kolba* on the hills of Heart is built, where Mariam, the main character of *Mille splendid soli*, is segregated with her mother. The clay mixed with straw is poured into wooden moulds and left to dry in the sun. In countries where there's no good freestone, the technique of building with unbaked bricks is widespread. It is not necessarily indicative of a poor or primitive building technique. On the contrary, it is very widespread from North Africa to the Middle East, from Iran to India and of course in Central Asia. Compared with modern materials, unbaked brick is cheaper, it can be easily produced on site, it guarantees better insulation and doesn't cause environmental damage such as quarrying or deforestation. Translators don't know everything and often they don't have time to gather as much information as they'd like. Because people who translate for a living don't earn very much, they can't devote much time to research and so maximize the quality of their translations.

S.L.: *When did translation teach you to be tolerant of your inadequacy?*

I.V.: A linguistic equivalent that is far from the cultural equivalent always poses a problem of inadequacy. I'm thinking of *tea house*. An Afghan tea house is a dark, noisy, smoky place, especially outside the big cities, frequented only by men, they squat on carpets around low tables where regular customers place their kalashnikovs and play chess, backgammon or dice. They discuss, argue and shout. Sometimes there are shootings. It smells of dust and hashish. In Italy we don't have tea houses, we have tea rooms in a few elegant bars or cake shops where smartly dressed people like to sit in a quiet, cake scented place. How can "tea house" be translated? Someone even used the word *osteria* (tavern), which expresses the idea of a rough, working class place, but an *osteria* would smell of wine in Italy, in Islamic countries alcohol is *haràm* (forbidden). Moreover, *osteria* is now an obsolete term in Italian, as is the social reality to which it refers. I chose to give up searching for an Italian equivalent and paid homage to Farsi, Hosseini's mother tongue, which he uses when he experiences the inadequacy of the English language. By using the word *chaikhana* (literally "tea house") I wanted to renounce domestication, thus preserving a foreign sound that evokes a foreign place. I thought of the saloons in Western films; though the dictionary gives the translation *bar del West* (western bar), I personally would never use it. A saloon is a saloon, not a bar (in turn

this was a foreign term which acquired a new meaning in Italian). The same applies to *chaikhana*, which can never be likened to a western tea room. Is this a defeat?

S.L.: *In the introduction we learn that* Il cacciatore di storie *is a book inspired by Khaled Hosseini's novels, in which the author aims to explore the culture and traditions of the author's country of birth. It is also a book, as Hosseini observes, which "encourages the reader to examine more closely the customs, poetry and art of Aghanistan" (Hosseini 2009: 9). For the author "*Il cacciatore di storie *is not intended to be a history of Afghanistan, and certainly not a history of the Persian literature that Hosseini's characters read; it simply aims to give the reader a glimpse of Afghan culture starting with the traces that Hosseini disseminates in his novels; it seeks to reconstruct, albeit in a sporadic way, the world that the author comes from, because, if the themes of his novels are universal, the lives of the characters are embedded in the 1000-year-old central Asian tradition" (Vaj 2009: 11). As you say, your book originates from evoked nostalgia. What is the seed that gave rise to* Il cacciatore di storie, *what did it feed on and what fruit will it bear?*
I.V.: The seed was my curiosity and that of my friends who read Hosseini's novels. When they asked me about Afghan culture I told them the stories hidden behind Hosseini's allusions such as the duel between Rostam and Sorhab. My friends encouraged me to write these stories and when I began to write the book everything became relatively easy. After all, for the previous seven or eight years my readings had focused on Afghan culture. Hosseini's nostalgia for his lost country aroused my nostalgia for the world of my childhood and adolescence, which is ignored, if not despised, by today's dominant culture, here in Italy, but similar, in a brotherly way, to the ancient and remote world of Afghanistan. Reminiscing about that past has been my way of testifying my rejection of the present, dominated by loud noise, vulgarity, shameless distortion of the meaning of words. A homage to the power of love and affection. I don't know whether my book will ever bear any fruit. If it arouses curiosity for a very rich culture unknown in the West and compassion for the tormented Afghan people, if it makes us feel the absolute necessity for peace in a country that has been living in a state of war day after day for the past thirty years, perhaps my book will have not been fruitless.

S.L.: *What is the meaning of the title* Il cacciatore di storie *(literally: the hunter of stories)?*
I.V.: There's an obvious formal reference to *Il cacciatore di aquiloni* (literally: the hunter of kites), but it doesn't refer to Hassan as in the title of the novel. It refers to Khaled Hosseini himself, the Afghan poet. It is the recognition of his talent as a narrator that is nourished by the oral tradition of his country. I was very impressed by Carlo Ginsburg's theory about the origins of narration: the first ever stories would have been told by prehistoric hunters, describing the series of tracks left by animals. The story was like a chain joining footprints and giving a sense to their following one another. My ambition is to have written a companion book, similar to those which accompanied the literature of both ancient and modern authors, from Homer to Joyce. I'd like this companion book to enhance the pleasure of reading Hosseini, offering fragments of knowledge of the world where his stories take place.
