

The Translational Poetics of Extraterritorial Joyce¹

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Abstract

Whereas James Joyce's fiction is located in Dublin, it was away from his native city that he wrote most of the stories of *Dubliners*, all of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. In this respect, Joyce's resorting to what has often been considered a "foreignizing" poetics must necessarily be interpreted in reference to his extraterritorial experience. Joyce was indeed a foreigner most of his life, speaking "acquired languages" and having to translate himself constantly as he moved across different European territories. Drawing on Joyce's extraterritoriality, the article explores the implications of his condition as a permanent foreigner in connection with the theme of modernism's engagement with migration, exile, displacement and new forms of transnational affiliation and translational poetics.

Keywords: Transnationalism, poetics, translation, modernism, James Joyce

Or was the jesuit house extraterritorial and was he walking among aliens? The Ireland of Tone and of Parnell seemed to have receded in time and space.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

In the foreword to his emblematic *Extraterritorial*, George

Steiner identifies a clear convergence between the “language revolution” and the crisis of “morals and formal values” which immediately precedes and follows the First World War. The critic argues that this unprecedented “language revolution” is characterized by the emergence of linguistic pluralism or “unhousedness” in representative figures in the literature of exile: “These writers stand in a relation of dialectical hesitance not only toward one native tongue [...] but towards several languages.”² Drawing on Steiner’s suggestion that modernism can be seen as a strategy of permanent exile, a condition of extraterritoriality, other authors have referred to the modernists as homeless citizens whose artistic identity seems to have been predicated upon an erasure of national identity.³ Certainly, many modernist writers belonged to a group of cross-cultural individuals who aspired to contest cultural, national and social homogeneity and, therefore, sought to express their defiance through the articulation of a radically new language. Thus, it can be argued that stylistic experiment goes hand in hand with the experience of exile and linguistic displacement for a large group of modernists ranging from Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot to James Joyce and to the Lost Generation. Yet, the conflicts of identity crises and divided consciousness which are exposed in their narratives of movement and migration more often than not problematize their position as subjects writing about their places of origin *in absentia*. Doubtless, Joyce was one of those exiles and émigrés, whose impermanent, extraterritorial existence “between” languages and cultures provided him with a broader background against which to examine his conflicts of origin and belonging.

As has often been remarked, the Irish writer travelled and lived in a continuous transit through Europe, fleeing from domestic impositions —“nationality, language, religion”⁴— eager to explore the availability of alternatives away from home. Ultimately, Joyce’s geographic, cultural and linguistic

dislocation became essential in his development as an Irish artist. The indications of time and place of composition given for *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Dublin 1904-Trieste 1914), *Ulysses* (Trieste-Zurich-Paris 1914-1921) and *Finnegans Wake* (Paris 1922-1939) make evident that for Joyce, who clearly emphasized that his books had been written abroad, Ireland is represented through a juxtaposed series of foreign physical and mental landscapes.

As if celebrating the abandonment of one sided cultural attachments, Joyce, like other significant modernists, cultivated heterogeneity by resorting to a foreignizing poetics which, far from being a mere play with aesthetic formulas, stands as a symptomatic foregrounding of his engagement with the unfamiliar and speaks about his own experience of “foreignness.” The incorporation of a foreign perspective and consciousness becomes essential in a large number of modernist creations, both manifesting a new inter-textual poetics which deviates from standard literary values and simultaneously making an explicit statement about the multilingual dimension of the modern world. In their attempt to defamiliarize their medium of expression through quotation, juxtaposition, pastiche and parody, the modernists frequently rely on the employment of other languages and dialects.⁵

In this context, Joyce’s dislocational form of writing, by now a commonplace, has been associated with the typical modernist attempt to account for the multiplicity of reality and the equally modernist concern with the undermining of rigid social and ideological constructs. However, perhaps more importantly, I would argue that one of Joyce’s major accomplishments lies precisely with the way in which he creates a world that exists only through the multiple uses of languages, thus exposing and expanding the boundaries of English and specifically exploring its relationship to other foreign tongues through his engagement with what I call “translational poetics.”

Significantly, during the first years of the twentieth

century translation appealed to a large number of modernist writers who found in foreign languages and cultures, not only sources of inspiration and models for renewing their own culture but also ways of further developing the possibilities of expression. The fact that translation played a crucial role in the development of modernism has been explored in depth by critics such as Steven G. Yao. In his *Translation and the Language of Modernism*⁶ Yao explains that translation constituted a fruitful autonomous literary activity that deeply inspired and influenced modernist cultural agendas.

As a young man initiating a literary career, Joyce was extremely concerned with reading and translating foreign masterpieces,⁷ an inclination he cultivated throughout his life. First at Belvedere, and later at University College, Joyce studied Latin, French and Italian and taught himself Dano-Norwegian and German in order to be able to read the works of Henrik Ibsen and Gerhart Hauptman. Joyce's early polyglot experience, Yao reminds us, became an important part of his individual and personal identity and included a vast reading experience of foreign literature in the languages for which he received formal training: "Flaubert, Verlaine, Huysmans, translations of Sudermann and Björnson in Italian, d'Annunzio, Ferdinando Paolieri, Fogazzaro, and, of course, Dante." (196) In his insightful discussion of Joyce's versions of Hauptman's play *Before Sunrise*, which Pound dismissed as "juvenile indiscretions" (196), Yao appropriately remarks that the Silesian dialect is rendered through the employment of an Irish country dialect. Thus, the critic concludes that Joyce's interest in Continental drama seeks to contribute to the formation of an Irish dramatic culture specifically through the act of translation since, "in addition to wanting to expose Ireland to an example of modern continental drama, Joyce pursued through the practice of translation a study of linguistic difference both within and between languages." (196)

Both as an amateur young translator and also as an incipient writer, Joyce was actively exploring the notion of translation as a form of experimenting with the creation of resemblances — “[probing] the relationship between languages as they converge and diverge in their conventions for expressing meaning” (196). This exploration would be developed further when he engaged in the translation of Anna Livia Plurabelle into Italian, much later in his life and already as an established author. Tellingly, Joyce’s intention as a translator of his own original was beyond the notion of a strict mechanical operation of semantic conversion. Rather, he seemed mainly concerned with resembling the effect of the sound and rhythm of Anna Livia for Italian readers through a very imaginative recreation which dissolves rigid boundaries between original and translation and, ultimately, between writer and translator. As Rosa Maria Bolletieri Bossinelli has claimed, Joyce, the translator, acts here as a successful Italian writer:

The Italian translation is a re-codification of the washerwoman’s dialogue into an Italian-like-language, full of Italian proverbs, idioms, fixed expressions, literary allusions, songs, opera arias, regional accents, dialects , Italian place names, Italian river names, Italian proper names.⁸

In his groundbreaking *The Years of Bloom*, John McCourt reminds us that Joyce’s eagerness to improve his knowledge of languages is clearly demonstrated in one of the writer’s notebooks, “Italiano” (1904-1910), where he copied numerous passages in Italian and also exercises dealing with idioms, and French and German vocabulary.⁹ As McCourts discusses, the circumstances of Joyce’s exile moving among Dublin, Pola, Rome, Trieste, Zurich and Paris expose a geographic, linguistic and cultural dislocation, which encouraged and reinforced his

own experience as a polyglot. Furthermore, I would contend that, subjected to the condition of what Steiner described as “the writer as linguistic polymath, as actively at home in several languages” (26), Joyce was not only learning to speak new languages all the time, but living *between* those acquired speeches and constantly having to translate himself. For Steiner, this movement from language to language, which Joyce and other “extraterritorial” multilingual writers experienced is nowhere better illustrated than in the act of translation:

Joyce’s employment at Berlitz and Nabokov’s residence in a Swiss hotel may come to stand as signs for the age. Increasingly, every act of communication between human beings takes on the shape of an act of translation. (26-27)

Thus, as I will discuss, Joyce’s writing, which often adopts the perspective of the foreign speaker, maybe seen as embodying the unsettled position of the translator. As stated above, Joyce’s exile, like anybody’s expatriation or migration, implied a physical movement from one language environment to another and also a movement between different worldviews. In this context, it comes as no surprise that multilingualism becomes a commonplace in the Joycean oeuvre in which references to foreign languages are among the most sustained motifs. The issue of foreignness is recurrently present in Joyce’s texts through his deployment of linguistic and stylistic defamiliarization, from *Dubliners*’ attention to the strangeness of language to *Finnegans Wake* radical engagement with translation as a form of composition.

At the beginning of *Portrait* young Stephen’s considerations on foreign languages are directly associated with his own musings over the notion of translation:

Dieu was the French for God, and that was God's name too; and when anybody prayed to God and said Dieu, God knew at once that it was a French person that was praying [...] there were different names for God in all the different languages [...] God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages. (*P* 16)

Through the process of developing his own consciousness, Stephen confronts the strangeness of his mother tongue as if translating from a foreign language, “Who ever heard of ivy whining on a wall? Yellow ivy [...] and what about ivory ivy?” (*P* 179). Moreover, his meditations on the existence of different words in different languages —“ivory, ivoire, avorio, ebur” (*P* 179)— show him acutely conscious of language differences, just as every translator experiences them but, more importantly, alert him towards the inter-linguistic and inter-cultural exchanges which underlie every act of translation:

One of the first examples that he had learnt in Latin had run *India mittit ebur*; and he recalled the shrewd northern face of the rector who had taught him to construe the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid in courtly English ... He had learnt what little he knew of the laws of Latin verse from a ragged book written by a Portuguese priest. (*P* 179)

Clearly, *Portrait* attests to Joyce's early engagement with translation, undoubtedly associated with his interest in other cultures and his polyglot erudition. Furthermore, it is through translation that Joyce ultimately negotiates his own cultural and linguistic alienation. “I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so

foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech” (*P* 189) complains Stephen, whose attempts at puzzling out the demands of an alien linguistic environment seems to echo the anxiety of the translator’s task —“That? said Stephen. Is that called a funnel? Is it not a tundish?”(*P* 188)

In its panoramic one-day trip through language *Ulysses* features a dozen of foreign languages, mainly to build up motifs and themes but also for the purpose of characterization. In this respect, it is not accidental that Bloom, cast as an outsider in “Cyclops” when his foreignness becomes problematic, is presented later in “Ithaca” as experiencing a moment of communion with Stephen, precisely as they join in their concerns with the “points of contact”¹⁰ between Hebrew and Irish. Unsurprisingly, the trope of translation as a form of hospitality¹¹ emerges in the episode when, at the moment of their most profound connection, Bloom and Stephen, host and guest, engage in a translational exchange: “What fragments of verse from the ancient Hebrew and ancient Irish languages were cited with modulations of voice and translation of texts by guest to host and host to guest?” (*U* 17. 724-6)

The desire to host and welcome the other through translation is also thematized in Molly’s fantasies of a “linguistic affair” with Stephen: “I can tell him the Spanish and he can tell me the Italian” (*U* 18.1476). Likewise, Bloom imagines Molly as the heterogeneous outcome of an exotic mixture of foreign nationalities, a sort of hybrid translation which hosts a vast array of geographies and languages: “Spain, Gibraltar, the Mediterranean, the Levant” (*U* 4. 211-212). Molly, for her part, evokes memories of her “other” past through fragmented and faded verbal reminiscences of her former command of the foreign language, Spanish, which are incorporated, untranslated, disrupting the dominant language of her stream of thought: “Como está usted muy bien gracias y usted see I havent forgotten it all I thought I had” (*U* 18. 1471-3).

The scholar John Paul Riquelme has observed that while teaching at Berlitz, Joyce “was able to exchange language lessons with his colleagues and thereby extend his knowledge not just of one language, but of several, either simultaneously or in overlapping succession.”¹² It is easy to imagine Joyce, exposed to a large variety of languages, pronunciations and accents, taking pleasure in the possibilities arising from such a multilingual interaction. Unsurprisingly,

Joyce’s writing invokes in different ways the position of one who must be cautious with a language that is never completely his/hers and, thus, must communicate at the expense of taking risks with words, often making mistakes and unintended errors,¹³ misappropriating and corrupting a language that he/she can never fully grasp yet may reinvent creatively, as in the case of metempsychosis which Molly re-inscribes within her own idiolect translated as “Met him pike hoses” (*U* 8, 112).

Joyce’s signature is marked by a perpetual movement in which series of places and languages collide and converge. In 1915, when the Joyce family moved to Zurich, at the time a city of international refugees, the writer found himself in a country whose linguistic identity relied then, as now, on diversity as German, French and Italian comprise the intertwined elements of its multilingual fabric. Earlier on, as mentioned before, during his years in Trieste Joyce enjoyed life in a place that was then a modern Babel where he encountered a large variety of languages and accents.

In this respect, Triestino, the local lingua franca that Joyce eventually learned and spoke at home, McCourt reminds us, reunites elements of many other dialects as well as other foreign tongues, Armenian, English, Spanish, Turkish, Sicilian, Maltese, German, Hungarian, Slovenian, Croatian, Czech and Greek; a linguistic wealth which prefigures not only the polyglot playful experience of *Finnegans Wake* “an

exaggerated, exploded version of Triestino” (53) but is also present in *Ulysses*, particularly in the “Circe” episode since:

With the exception of Irish, the range of languages spoken during this episode –French, Spanish, Speranto, Latin, German, Yiddish and Italian—are more representative of a Triestine reality than any Dublin one [...] precisely the sort of mixture of languages Joyce would have heard late at night in the old city, where the Slovene members of the Austrian police struggled to use their little bit of German to keep drunken Italians in order. (54)

The influence of being abroad, learning, speaking and writing in foreign tongues would prove fundamental for Joyce, the Irishman, as his memory of the national culture was to be filtered through the experience of other places and languages. As Eric Bulson has discussed, long before beginning to write *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce’s drive to find another language in which to express himself was manifested in his early journalism in Italian:

Italian became the vehicle that would allow Joyce to explore his own vexed relationship with the English language [...] Joyce found in the Italian language a place in which to engage with a series of political issues.¹⁴

Thus, when T. S. Eliot said in reference to “Oxen of the Sun” that Joyce’s achievement in *Ulysses* was “to show the futility of all the English styles,”¹⁵ he was, among other things, remarking that Joyce’s attitude to the English language was the one of an Irishman in Europe. As has been noted, translating the canon of British and Anglo-Irish Ascendancy literary styles

into pastiche, Joyce questions both the assumption of cultural supremacy and the myth of authenticity:

It is that act of translation, that middle passage, that movement *between*, that Joyce stages in “Oxen of the Sun”, estranging the languages of totalizing imperial and colonial culture through parody, pastiche and citation, re-inscribing history through the writing of difference.¹⁶

Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, with its mixture of places and identities and the inclusion of lines in German, French, Italian, Latin and Hindi, self-reflexively reveals itself as a multilingual modernist text marking the speakers’ position as strangers, always being somewhere else, always translating themselves into someone else and thus standing in opposition to clearly defined identities speaking in the “original” authentic language. In the same vein, in *Ulysses*, the different chapters operate in a space in which English repeatedly intersects with other foreign languages and Joyce parodies and mocks a large range of styles, registers and speech patterns avoiding expressing himself in one single language.

Fritz Senn has claimed the Joyce’s novel can only be understood as a “continuous intratranslation” since the different chapter modes function as translations, illustrating “the idea of a conjugation of all languages’ potential and all stylistic ranges.”¹⁷ Joyce who, in a conversation with Stefan Zweig, remarked “I’d like a language which is above all languages”¹⁸ is thus anticipating in his own adaptation of the Greek epic the major linguistic principle of *Finnegans Wake*, written in “universal, polyguttural, sordomutics, florilingua, flayflutter [...] and anythongue athall.”¹⁹ As if embodying the impermanent condition of the Homeric wanderer, in perpetual exile, without a fixed home, Joyce’s writing becomes here the utopian idiom of the “translated being” who, while calling into

question the possibility of an originary identity, aspires to bridge the gaps between all languages and cultures.

As I have argued elsewhere, the notion of translation as a self-conscious act of intercultural communication which constantly interrogates its nature and function informs epistemological modernist concerns.²⁰ My discussion draws on Walter Benjamin's reflections on the act of translation as a form of dismantling the stability of the original thus laying bare the original's mobility and instability. As for Joyce, his interest in the play of signifiers and the employment of textual features that frustrated immediate intelligibility and transparency in the composition of his works seems particularly concerned with this benjaminian notion of translation; a process in which language can be seen modifying the original text, estranging and displacing it. If for other modernists translation was much more of an implicit practice since it conformed to a whole array of aesthetic experiments through which they challenged established concepts of self and otherness, Joyce's engagement with translation becomes a more literal one. *Ulysses* acts as a translation of Homer's heroic epic, an appropriation of a foreign text which Joyce invests with domestic interests since the classical myth is rewritten to function as a chapter in Irish History in the context of Joyce's investigation of Ireland. But, beyond this understanding of translation as re-appropriation and re-inscription, Joyce's concern with translational poetics is evinced in his exploration of the representation of otherness through texts which emerge as dialogic and hybrid. As discussed earlier, Bloom and Molly may well be seen as the embodiment of what translation ultimately entails: the inscription of the foreign in the native culture through the disruption of hierarchies, the estrangement of the dominant values and the resistance to linguistic and cultural authority.²¹ It is, thus, how *Finnegans Wake*, characterized by deviant and eccentric forms of trans-lingual writing, can be better understood as the ultimate expression of Joyce's translational

poetics, an attempt to expand the possibilities of English by imaginatively translating it into a nonexistent “autonomous” language which, paradoxically, manages to effectively multiply its endless relation to many other foreign languages and cultures. Through the carnivalesque fantasy of a world in which different languages and cultures mingle to create a new one, simultaneously unique and multiple, original and derivative, Joyce dismantles monolithic linguistic structures and calls into question the concept of origins. In *Finnegans Wake* the very notion of frontier between languages seems to have been dissolved to the extent that, as has been argued, Joyce progressively instructs readers to recognize English as a foreign language,²² ultimately forcing native speakers to adopt the humble position of the disoriented foreigner through a sort of reversal of roles.

The translation scholar Alexis Nouss has eloquently written about ethics in translation in the following terms: “When I translate, I translate as much the other into myself, as myself into the other.”²³ Nouss envisions translation as a form of *metissage*, a “navigation” between languages and cultures, and insists that to translate should always mean to receive the foreigner, who takes refuge in one’s language, as one simultaneously takes refuge in the other’s. Seen in this context, Joyce’s texts, which noticeably aspire to touch and to be touched by other languages, read like ideal translations: they become hybrid sites where difference and otherness are not only allowed to emerge but are encouraged and celebrated.

Notes

¹ A preliminary version of this paper was read at the XXIII James Joyce Symposium held in Dublin during June 10-16, 2012.

² George Steiner, *Extraterritorial. Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) 9-10.

³ This clearly the case of the classic study by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane eds., *Modernism 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

⁴ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Text Criticism and Notes*. Eds. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann. (New York: Viking Press, 1959) 203. All future quotations will be documented parenthetically.

⁵ For an exceptionally lucid and well documented study on the relationship between the cultural challenges of modernism and linguistic estrangement see Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language and Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994).

⁶ Stephen Yao, *Translation and the Languages of Modernism*. (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2002) 7. All future quotations will be documented parenthetically.

⁷ According to Ellmann, Joyce's father gave him money to buy foreign books "whether or not the family had enough to eat." See Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford UP, 1959) 75.

⁸ Rosa Maria Bolletieri Bosinelli, "Anna Livia's Italian Sister" in *Transcultural Joyce*. Ed., Karen Lawrence. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 193-197.

⁹ John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste 1904-1916*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin P, 2000) 76. All future quotations will be documented parenthetically.

¹⁰ James Joyce, *Ulysses*. Ed. Hans Walter Gable. (New York: Vintage, 1986) 17. 745-6 All future quotations will be documented parenthetically.

¹¹ I'm invoking here the concept of "hospitality" in its interaction with language and translation as formulated by Derrida. See Jacques Derrida, *On Hospitality*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000)

¹² See John Paul Riquelme's introduction to Fritz Senn. *Joyce's Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation*. Ed. John Paul Riquelme. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984) xvii.

¹³ For a study in depth of the aesthetic possibilities and implications of errors in Joyce's texts see, Matthew Creasy, ed. *Errears and Erroriboose. Joyce and Error*. (New York: Rodopi, 2011).

¹⁴ Eric Bulson, "An Italian Tongue in an Irish Mouth: Joyce, Politics and the Franca Langua." *Journal of Modern Literature* 24.1 (2000) 68-69.

¹⁵ Quoted in Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. (London: Grafton, 1978) 75.

¹⁶ Ellen Carol Jones, "Border Disputes," in *James Joyce and the Difference of Language*. Ed. Laurent Milesi (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 154.

¹⁷ Fritz Senn, *Joyce's Dislocations: Essays on Reading as Translation*. Ed. John Paul Riquelme. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984) 52-53.

¹⁸ The full quotation reads, "I'd like a language which is above all languages, a language to which all will do service. I cannot express myself in English without enclosing myself in a tradition." See Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography* (New York: Viking Press, 1943) 275.

¹⁹ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*. (New York: Penguin, 1987) 117.
12-16.

²⁰ See my "Polyglot Voices, Hybrid Selves and Foreign identities: Translation as a Paradigm of Thought for Modernism." *Atlantis* 30.1 (June 2008) 53-67

²¹ For an exceptionally lucid and well informed discussion of Molly's Spanish-Irish hybridity and its implications in the larger context of Anglophone modernism's construction of Hispanicity, see Gayle Rogers,

Modernism and the New Spain. Britain, Cosmopolitan Europe, and Literary History (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012) 65-77.

²² Jean Michel Rabaté, *Language, Sexuality and Ideology in Ezra Pound's Cantos*. (Albany: State U of New York P, 1986) 31

²³ Alexis Nouss, "Translation and Métissage," in *Translation, Reflections, Refractions and Transformations*. Eds. Paul St. Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007) 251