

Literature and the Possibilities of Language Function

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Abstract. The variety of human activities and needs gives rise to a plurality of language functions, among them communication. However, communication is so highly rated that for many this is not merely a function, but the key factor that defines the reality of language. This high rating of communication has important consequences. For example, the variety of functions tends to be reduced to forms of communication. On the other hand, it leaves language in an environment to function in anonymity and pure transparency, becoming a point of serious discussion only within academic linguistics. Among literary scholars, it is either ignored just as in the common usage or it is discussed under one theme or another of academic linguistics. Between these two extremes, however, lies a deep question as to what language is to literature. This is the question opened up in this paper; and it is postulated that an adequate account of the relation of language and literature may only be attempted within a theory of literature.

Keywords: form, language functions, literary language, literary translation, representation.

Introduction

The attitude that literature is used to convey messages is common in African institutions and it is tied to the view of language as a means of communication, which does not encourage better than ordinary, that is, conversational awareness and sensitivity towards language. This, however, is not seen as disturbing even among literary scholars since the language of this literature is that of the former colonists. Close attention to literary art inevitably discloses deep questions about language, questions which arise in different ways for the reader-critic, for the literary artist and for the literary translator. The artist and the translator seem to be charged in a special way with watching over language, the translator over the language the work is going to take a body in, to ensure that the work retains its identity and vitality in the new language. The literary artist, on the other hand, watches over the language he works with, in which his artwork must come to life. Therefore, what the language is to the literary artist and the translator must be different things. The evidence from the Polish writer Czesław Miłosz, a long-time resident in the West, is a relationship of deep responsibility to his native Polish in which he writes and into which he translated major cultural, religious, and literary texts of different languages, including biblical Hebrew and Greek. The question of language in African literature was raised at the emergence of modern African writing more than half a century ago by Obiajunwa Wali. This new literature was in the language of the former colonists; and so the question was whether the writers could genuinely serve art or serve the adopted language. It comes down to this: whether African literary art could be art in the same way for artists working in their own native languages; therefore, what is literary art, and what is the nature of the configuration to language?

Intentional Object

In Aristotle's *Ethics*, art is described in terms of human practical activity, and consists of 'a certain state of mind, apt to Make, conjoined with true Reason [and] employed upon

Contingent matter' (133). Here he is chiefly concerned with *the* artist, the one with 'a certain state of mind, apt to make', and not immediately with 'the made thing', the artwork, which results when the appropriate state of mind 'conjoined with true reason' is 'employed upon contingent matter'. A work of art does not come by accident, but requires the exercise of reason: it is *intentional*. The artwork is an intentional object insofar as it is by exercise of intention upon 'contingent matter' that a work comes forth: the work is directly what the artist intends.

Aristotle's theory of art requires to be carefully studied. The basic principles he enunciates remain valid today, but they are often taken amiss and thus lead to widely divergent views of art. For instance, the question of intention here. The humanist account of intention is that the work contains an intention, namely something the artist wishes to get across to the audience. But in Aristotle, the employment of 'true reason' upon 'contingent matter' can succeed or fail to the extent that the product comes out as or falls short of art. We shall also see a problem of the same kind in explaining the role of language in poetry. But we must take it that not everything an artist produces by exercise of 'true reason' is necessarily an artwork; nor are artworks indifferent as to scale: some may command 'more serious attention' (*On the Art of Poetry*, chapter 9) than others. Aristotle's discussion of the good and the bad in tragedy is instructive:

The poet's aim, then, should be to combine every element of interest, if possible, or else the more important and the major part of them. This is now especially necessary owing to the unfair criticism to which the poet is subjected in these days. Just because there have been poets before him strong in the several species of tragedy, the critics now expect the one man to surpass that which was the strong point of each one of his predecessors. One should also remember what has been said more than once, and not write a tragedy on an epic body of incident (i.e. one with a plurality of stories in it), by attempting to dramatize, for instance, the entire story of the *Iliad*. In the epic owing to its scale every part is treated at proper length; with a drama, however, on the same

story the result is very disappointing. This is shown by the fact that all who have dramatized the fall of Ilium in its entirety, and not part by part, like Euripides, or the whole of the Niobe story, instead of a portion, like Aeschylus, either fail utterly or have but ill success on the stage; for that and that alone was enough to ruin a play by Agathon. Yet in their Peripeties, as also in their simple plots, the poets I mean show wonderful skill in aiming at the kind of effect they desire—a tragic situation that arouses the human feeling in one, like the clever villain (e.g. Sisyphus) deceived, or the brave wrongdoer worsted (*On the Art of Poetry*, chapter 18).

Success or failure in executing the intention clearly is the kind of question the critic discusses and demonstration is by relating the work in question to established artistic principles and those pertaining to the specific art form.

Aristotle's art forms comprise a total of six, including architecture, which he names in the *Ethics*. The others are listed in *On the Art of Poetry* as painting, sculpting, music, dancing, and poetry. Our specific concern in this paper is with poetry – the art form which depends on language alone (*monon logois*). In Aristotle's terms, language pertains to the conditions of possibility of art when that art is poetry. Other conditions of possibility are mentioned in the definition of art above: the appropriate state of mind, exercise of true reason, and the contingent matter. There is also the existence of *form*, which he partially discusses in the above passage.

Poetry (literature) is alone among the arts in displaying in physical form its affiliation to an ethno-linguistic group. Technology is of course involved in all the arts, but technology spreads and is quickly learned and may even be adopted so that links to the place it was innovated are easily forgotten and cease to matter. The notes on the musical bar are the common property of human kind, but a specific timbre may be the contribution of a specific technological innovation. The equipment may be locally adapted or obtained in the open market. Henceforth its resources may be fully exploited. The technology of dye making may similarly be acquired, or the dye itself, which may be

exploited and applied anywhere, without necessarily betraying its original source. Language spread, however, has not yet been able to endow any language with the same sense of homelessness. This is why Obiajunwa Wali's question about the language of African literature which was first raised in 1961 remains relevant today. A similar sense of the native tongue caused the Nobel Laureate Czesław Miłosz who lived as an exile in the West during the Cold War to feel a constant need to 'return to the sources of his poetry ... to the roots of the Polish language' (Klaus 169). Miłosz was native of a country the repeated partitioning of which at the end of the eighteenth century may have provided the blueprint for the European Partition of Africa a century later. The same country had been overrun by Russia during the Second World War and colonized as it were.

For Miłosz, therefore, language is not just the medium of poetry: it is the *source*. It is not clear whether the scholars who debated Obi Wali's dilemma understood him in that spirit. For instance, B.I. Chukwukere's *answer* is that what matters is the writer's 'integration ... of the diverse aspects of the novel, i.e. character, plot, story, language or style in general. Such an association yields high quality results – a novel rich in texture, artistically coherent and therefore enjoyable'; for the 'acid test for our African writers in English is the degree to which each proves himself a real master of his medium, for such is the gateway to entertainment – a prime object of literature' (17). In the light of Miłosz's practice and attitude towards his mother tongue, Chukwukere would seem to be missing the point altogether. The question has much less to do with what the reader does or is enabled to do by the work than with the identity of the work itself.

On the other hand, people like Ngara argue that although Obi Wali has a valid point in advocating African literature and criticism in African languages, failing which only 'sterility, uncreativity, and frustration' may be expected (Ngara 6), 'we have seen the rise of a great literature during the last twenty years' and 'the signs are that, far from being frustrated, African writers writing in European languages are growing from strength to

strength' (6-7). Ohaegbu is in agreement with Ngara on this point, but notes that people like Ngugi and Sembene Ousmanne 'have now taken bold steps in using African languages as the medium of expression in their creative works' (2000: 10). I note, however, that for Miłosz art is not a medium of expression; it is a reality standing on its own ground; a *creation* that needs to be characterized for what it is in itself or – following the phenomenologists – as it appears. Lewis Nkosi, however, has another view of art, maintaining that 'if in trying to rehabilitate their smashed-up cultures African writers are forced to write in a foreign language, their task must obviously remain incomplete' (7). This view of literary language as nothing more than a 'tool to be used by craftsmen of the word responding to "social orders"' is called by Rzhevsky 'totalitarianism' (405).

There may be a problem with the manner of statement of the problem of language by Wali; for if there is such a thing as 'a particular language whose peculiar mode of being is "literary"' (Foucault 2002: 326), a key aspect of leadership in the development of African literature must be the evolving of a vernacular 'literary language'. For example, Pushkin is said to have played a pioneering role in Russian literary history, and has wound up, 'the acknowledged "father of Russian literature" and of the modern Russian literary language' (Cornwell ix). This requires a language mastery at a level beyond the facility to translate from one language into another or the mere capacity to describe in a language. It will not happen without the 'first bold step' taken by the likes of Ngugi and Sembene Ousmane, but whether or not they have achieved that 'literary language' will be determined by scholarly effort. The evolution of a literary language in the West and Eastern Europe is connected to evangelization and translation of religious texts. The role of the King James Version of the Bible in the English tradition is well known. Similarly, Russian literary language is connected to the translation of religious texts. We read:

The arrival of Christianity in Rus' was accompanied by the new religion's inseparable concomitant, a fully-fledged literary language known to us as Old Church Slavonic. The 'Apostles to the Slavs', Cyril and Methodius, with their assistants, devised Old

Church Slavonic as a written language to express the conceptual world of the Bible, the Church Fathers, theology, and late-antique 'high culture' generally (through complex structures and a large abstract vocabulary, for example), basing this language on the South Slav speech of the hinterland of Thessaloniki, from which they came (Milner-Gulland 15)

The opportunity to evolve a literary language based on the highly complex biblical world has not been made use of in Chinua Achebe's land mainly because of quarrels over the dialect of Igbo to serve the entire region. In Russia, as elsewhere, literature was to free itself from the religious language; and that is where the innovative poets in the local language come in. It is reported that the first movements of change in the evolution of Russian literary language were in refining the metrics through 'the combined efforts of Trediakovsky and Lomonosov' (Jones 29). But there was political leadership as well, as official documents were prepared in colloquial Russian from the time of Peter the Great onwards. Literary language is therefore not a matter of register or effects. It has a poetic and is capable of speaking not by means of what it says alone but also by the rhythm and the cadence native to or supported by that language. The literary artist makes contribution to the evolution of a literary language not by exercise of power to *manipulate* the colloquial or 'everyday' language, as the Formalists call it, but by having and exercising a certain 'sense of language' (Rzhevsky 404). The literary artist is in the strongest position of all the language workers to grow and evolve this *sense*, since according to Foucault, listening is a very important aspect of his mission:

the poet is he who, beneath the named, constantly expected differences, rediscovers the buried kinships between things, their scattered resemblances. Beneath the established signs, and in spite of them, he hears another, deeper, discourse, which recalls the time when words glittered in the universal resemblance of things (2002: 55).

Thus the German poet, Paul Celan's 'You Lie in the Great Listening' seems to address itself in a special way to the poet.

Functioning of Language in Literature

Courses in literary theory are designed to present theoretical approaches, usually derived from other disciplines mainly within the Human and social sciences, which open certain doors in literary works or help to throw light on aspects of literature, such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, history/historicism, philosophy and ethics, cultural anthropology, and gender studies. By use of these approaches and concepts there is often a richer understanding of character or incident, discourse or power relations, but language is usually explored in these approaches for its information content about the specific object of interest, whether it be the hidden motivations of character or the ideological basis of decisions which appear on the surface to be disinterested. These differ from *theories of literature*, which are general statements that attempt to answer the question, *what is literature?* These kinds of statement are relatively few in number and whatever they say about literature is a total statement aware of the work as a linguistic event, aware of language as 'the mode of being of literature' (Foucault 418).

The being of language in literature complicates the question of literature. Is literature the same as its language or are they two different things? Foucault's formulation above, however, unveils the language element as a factor of *being*, not just existence, with respect to which there could be alternatives. For instance, we could follow up Foucault to the effect that painting, sculpting, music, and poetry are modes of existence of art, but spirit and matter are modes of being. Accordingly, literature is language or nothing. It is not any language at all, however, that is in question, but that 'whose peculiar mode of being is "literary"'. Here again it is a question of being. In Foucault there is a coincidence between literature and language, provided it is the specific linguistic form. The features of this language are carefully mapped in *The Order of Things*, but it is also shown that this language has been going through an evolutionary process:

It may be said in a sense that 'literature', as it was constituted and so designated on the threshold of the modern age, manifests, at a time when it was least expected, the reappearance, of the living being of language. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the peculiar existence and ancient solidity of language as a thing inscribed in the fabric of the world were dissolved in the functioning of representation; all language had value only as discourse. The art of language was a way of 'making a sign' – of simultaneously signifying something and arranging signs around that thing; an art of naming, therefore, and then, by means of a reduplication both demonstrative and decorative, of capturing that name, of enclosing and concealing it, of designating it in turn by other names that were the deferred presence of the first name, its secondary sign, its figuration, its rhetorical panoply. And yet, throughout the nineteenth century, and right up to our own day ... literature achieved autonomous existence, and separated itself from all other language with a deep scission, only by forming a sort of 'counter-discourse', and by finding its way back from the representative or signifying function of language to this raw being that had been forgotten since the sixteenth century. It is possible to believe that one has attained the very essence of literature when one is no longer interrogating it at the level of what it says but only in its significant form: in doing so, one is limiting one's view of language to its Classical status. In the modern age, literature is that which compensates for (and not that which confirms) the signifying function of language. Through literature, the being of language shines once more on the frontiers of Western culture – and at its centre – for it is what has been most foreign to that culture since the sixteenth century (48-49).

Two key points, therefore, to note are (1) evolutionary change in this language; (2) differences in function even within the same era. By the first, literary language does not necessarily behave in the same way in every literary work, as the language has changed in structure over time, first, some time between the sixteenth and the seventeenth

centuries. Then it changed again in the nineteenth century. What is called *realism* marks a phase in the evolution of literary language, but that phase passed, opening a different situation of language in which, according to Foucault here, it 'compensates for' instead of confirming 'the signifying function of language'.

With respect to the differences in function, language is seen to signify, to illuminate, to conceal, to name, to compensate for signification, and so on. The common view that language is constituted for communication says but little about the capabilities of language. And the capabilities are many and varied. But, according to Heidegger, to think of the capabilities is only to start a reflection on language which will lead ultimately to the question, *who man is*. The right understanding of language is in the resolution of this question. He writes,

Language serves to give information. As a fit instrument for this, it is a 'possession'. But the essence of language does not consist entirely in being a means of giving information. This definition does not touch its essential essence, but merely indicates an effect of its essence. Language is not a mere tool, one of the many which man possesses; on the contrary, it is only language that affords the very possibility of standing in the openness of the existent. Only where there is language, is there world, i.e. the perpetually altering circuit of decision and production, of action and responsibility, but also of commotion and arbitrariness, of decay and confusion. Only where world predominates, is there history. Language is a possession in a more fundamental sense. It is good for the fact that (i.e. it affords a guarantee that) man can exist historically. Language is not a tool at his disposal, rather it is that event which disposes of the supreme possibility of human existence (*Existence and Being* 299-300).

The concept *world* is fundamental in Heidegger. It includes consciousness of one's space, one's time, one's relatedness by reason of which 'man can exist historically'. Because man has language, and is in fact immersed in it, he exists historically, which also means, in a shared history with others of his kind. A linguistic act, in other words, is first and

foremost self-actualization, or perhaps self-disclosure. As Paul Ricoeur puts it, the word 'becomes word at the moment when man becomes speech, when speech becomes discourse' (1974: 92). Human existence is fundamentally rooted in language; and language expresses itself in functions which, for that reason, are factors in interpretation. It was inevitable that language should enter into that practical activity of making by true reason acting on contingent matter. Some of the ancient forms of these productions are *narrative*, first encountered 'when the world of the mythical begins as it were to flow ... when it becomes a world not of mere being but of action' (Cassirer 105). As an archetypal form, narrative, as much as drama and lyric, represents 'what is present as immediate reality in the sacred action' (210). Northrop Frye highlights a second evolutionary path not directly connected to ritual as in Cassirer's account. He teaches that 'patterns of imagery ... or fragments of significance are oracular in origin, and derive from the epiphanic moment, the flash of instantaneous comprehension with no direct reference to time' which are ultimately received 'in the form of proverbs, riddles, commandments and etiological folktales' (1976: 429).

Literature is an *act* of language: what it here makes is directly an artwork, which is at the same time representation. According to Bathes, it is basically,

geometrical discourse in that it cuts out segments in order to depict them: to discourse (the classics would have said) is simply 'to depict the tableau one has in one's mind'. The scene, the picture, the shot, the cut-out rectangle, here we have the very condition that allows us to conceive theatre, painting, cinema, literature, all those arts, that is, other than music and which could be called dioptric arts.... The tableau (pictorial, theatrical, literary) is a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view (1977: 70).

The function of language in representation can clearly be made out, namely to be the means of representation taking place. There is yet another function which is discernible in Frye's account of imagery. For the content of the tableau in riddles and etiological folktales is really language itself. In theories of literature, the explanation of language is either as the *medium* of representation (Aristotle), or the *matter* of representation (Formalism, Heidegger). In Foucault, this event of language becoming matter is the turn in which modernism is born, whereby literature achieves autonomy. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the age of realism, 'The art of language was a way of "making a sign" – of simultaneously signifying something and arranging signs around that thing; an art of naming.... [During] the nineteenth century, and right up to our own day ... literature achieved autonomous existence, and separated itself from all other language with a deep scission, only by forming a sort of "counter-discourse", and by finding its way back from the representative or signifying function of language to this raw being that had been forgotten since the sixteenth century' (48). The autonomy in question is from everything that traditionally surrounded poetry: the action, as object of representation, the poet as the owner of the vision, the target audience eagerly awaiting a message, and thus 'from the strict binding to the deictic field' (Bühler, 2011: 425). There is also unbinding from the normal operations of tense; hence the 'narrative present includes an indefinite now sphere within which the person now speaking and the one addressed have duration' (433).

Thus textual autonomy demands a different way of reading literary works than the one which prevailed under realism in which a distinction was often tenable between 'form' and 'content' and worked on the idea that 'language is the expression, produced by men, of their feelings and the world view that guides them. Can the spell this idea has cast over language be broken?' (Heidegger, 2001: 194.) In a reading of Hölderlin's 'A Winter Evening', which does not fall under what is known as modernist poetry, Heidegger shows that poetry's relationship to language is altogether free of that spell:

We expect from [the poem's title] the description of a winter evening as it actually is. But the poem does not picture a winter evening occurring somewhere, sometimes. It neither merely describes a winter evening that is already there, nor does it attempt to produce the semblance, leave the impression, of a winter evening's presence where there is no such winter evening.... Everyone knows that a poem is an invention. It is imaginative even where it seems to be descriptive. In his fictive act the poet pictures to himself something that could be present in its presence. The poem, as composed, images what is thus fashioned for our own act of imaging. In the poem's speaking the poetic imagination gives itself utterance.... The language of the poem is a manifold enunciating (194-195).

Heidegger is not speaking about what happens in European poetry, but what happens in *poetry* and part of the expectation that the critic brings along in reading. For a critic's regard of a literary work is inevitably focused on language. What he sees before him is language: the poem is the *art* of language.

Chinua Achebe who first made African literature a space of interplay of African and Western European literatures with his *Things Fall Apart* overlying Yeats's 'The Second Coming' as a background formation and model for re-thinking of history was also to announce that language would become a spectacle in African literature – and he meant English:

Most African writers write out of an African experience and of commitment to an African destiny. For them that destiny does not include a future European identity for which the present is but an apprenticeship. And let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English for we intend to do unheard of things with it. Already some people are getting worried (1988: 50).

For Achebe, writing 'out of an African experience and of commitment to an African destiny' is enough answer to Obi Wali's question about African literature in non-African languages. Literary language is 'a milieu in which ... cultural ideals could reside'

(Verburg, 1998: 228). It is as if language does not matter all that much, except insofar as one would make a spectacle of it. But his concerns, African cultural identity and writing *out of* an African experience are genuine concerns for an artist. He is indicating here the double destinations of literature on which Miłosz is somewhat more explicit where he remarks: 'I have always felt that a poet participates in the management of the estate of poetry, of that in his own language and also that of world poetry' (1996: xv).

In sub-Saharan Africa, much of what may be called poetry in one's 'own language' is really traditional oral poetry and associated verbal arts. Modern literature remains dominantly in the languages of the former colonists. The literary tradition of a country like Nigeria is covered by writing 'out of an African experience'. In practice, this boils down to the nationality of the writer – there is no way of assessing or ascertaining *the African experience*, since it seems not to have any recognizable and describable features. The *out of*, however, seems to carry a sense of a contribution coming from Africa. The poetic tradition to which these writers contribute belongs to the whole world. Because of the bond of literature to language, this world literature is made up of a host of languages and engagement with it in such a way as to share in its variousness necessarily requires translation.

Literary Translation

Translation is a known language function and the task is special when the matter for translation is literature. Other kinds of translation often treat language as a medium, with a content which may be put in one set of words or another or conveyed in one language or another without suffering damage. But there is no literary translation that is anything but provisional. Another translation with *something* to recommend it is always possible. But if there are two translations, both acceptable to specialists, but differing in some ways, are they both the same work?

There is a deeper problem, which depends on what is determined as the nature of literature, and therefore what theory of literature one follows. In the Aristotelian tradition, translation should be a matter of putting together another set of words in the target language which would adequately mediate the action of the original. But translation would seem to be impossible in the Heideggerian, where 'language speaks'. His book *Existence and Being* containing both his discussion of Hölderlin's 'A Winter Evening' and the poem itself is in English translation. A good translation of the philosophical part of his book is expected to continue to be acceptable for many years to come. But the poem is different; and one must ask: does the English version speak in the same way, speak the same words as the original German? Although Heidegger and the Formalists treat language as the raw material of poetry the dilemma does not seem as irreconcilable for Formalism, since in the latter case poetry does no more than make language strange and difficult. There is no reason why the same strangeness and difficulty could not be recreated in the target language. But as far as Heidegger is concerned, what exactly is being translated? Is translation served by substituting one language by another? Does the poem remain, in that case, or have we a new poem?

It is recognized in translation studies that poetry poses special challenges in translation. A poet like Czesław Miłosz was for long considered 'untranslatable', but in recent times 'a co-operative effort of several people including poets and translators has made it possible to find Miłosz's poetry published in English and French' (Biolik 163). Poetic translations involve 'scoping out a situation and adjusting to it' (Robinson, 1997: 187). And there is also need, according to Wechsler (1998), 'to reproduce the materiality of the signs, its physical properties'. But the difficulty of translation subsists precisely in this, according to Derrida:

Materiality is precisely that which translation relinquishes. To relinquish materiality: such is the driving force of translation. And when that materiality is reinstated, translation becomes poetry (2001: 264).

There is some suggestion here that a translation may indeed become a poem. Some suggested guidelines are to attempt to replicate the effect of the original (Fawcett, 1997: 114); 'to experiment, to tamper, to extend the creative act of writing "difficultly" or "abusively" into the target-language text' if 'conforming to source-language usage' produces an undesirable 'complicity' with the original (Robinson 134), or 'leaves the least latitude for paraphrase and interpretation' (Wechsler 54). But if a translator will recapture the vitality of the original, 'a total immersion in the work' is needed so as 'to have some kind of affinity' with it (32).

The need for interpretation exists for the translation as much as for the original because of the problem of meaning in all art. In Derrida, the specificity of the work is that: it is the totality of form and meaning, for what is in question, in this case, is meaning rethought as form; and structure is the formal unity of form and meaning. It will be said that this neutralization of meaning by form is the author's responsibility before being the critic's (*Writing and Difference* 4).

The work is one form or another: it is bound up with its own form; and the form shapes both the meaning and the language intertwined with it, being wholly 'woven into the very fabric it is unrolling' (*The Order of Things* 87). Derrida does not forsake Aristotle in accounting for art as meaning rethought as form, for as we have seen, it is a guiding principle in Aristotle for the artist to submit to the rule of form in his compositions. He should also remember not to 'write a tragedy on an epic body of incident (i.e. one with a plurality of stories in it), by attempting to dramatize, for instance, the entire story of the *Iliad*. In the epic owing to its scale every part is treated at proper length; with a drama, however, on the same story the result is very disappointing'. Form is therefore not primarily a term of classification but a category 'of production and of labour' (Ricoeur, 1981: 136).

The lyric form, for instance, involves a figural rethink of meaning. Such is undoubtedly the case with Paul Celan's 'I Know You'. The German original is:

(Ich kenne dich, du bist die tief Gebeugte,
 ich, der Durchbohrte, bin dir untertan.
 Wo flammt ein Wort, das für uns beide zeugte?
 Du— ganz, ganz wirklich. Ich— ganz Wahn.)

In his study of this poem, Bellm presents four versions in addition to his own, which is deliberately close to the words of the original – as follows:

(I know you—you're the one bent low,
 and I, pierced through, am your underling.
 Where does a word flame forth, to witness for us both?
 You, so completely real—I, completely not / a complete illusion.)

The other translations he presents seem to be farther removed from the words of the original:

Pierre Joris:
 (I know you, you are the deeply bowed,
 I the transpierced, am subject to you.
 Where flames a word, would testify for us both?
 You—all, all real. I—all delusion)

Felstiner:
 (I know you, you're the one bent over low,
 and I, the one pierced through, am in your need.
 Where flames a word to witness for us both?
 You—wholly real. I—wholly mad.)

Nikolai Popov and Heather McHugh:
 (I know you: you're the one who's bent so low.
 You hold me—I'm the riddled one—in bondage.)

What word could burn as witness for us two?
You're my reality. I'm your mirage.)

Robert Hass:

(I know: you are the one
Pierced through. I'm the one
Bent low beside you, trying
To peer into your eyes.)

Another Celan scholar, Paul Coates, has his own translation, which is close enough to the words in the original, but shows more signs of interpretation than Bellm's:

(I know you: you are the one bowed deeply,
I am the pierced one, subject unto you.
Where does a word flare out as both our witness?
You—quite, quite real. And I—mad through and through.)

There is no doubt that interpretation is part and parcel of the translation effort in each case and none is a simple literal interpretation. While Robert Hass's version seems to interpret exhaustively, some of the others both interpret and leave more room for further interpretation. For instance, Paul Coates's 'I know you, you are the one bowed deeply' seems to me to involve both fellow-feeling and accusation, which renders the 'subject unto you' of the second line deeply ironic.

It may be assumed that the driving force for new translations where other translations exist is the need to effect the poetry of the original, a new 'expression of the poem's essence' (Wechsler 140) – although some are driven by the need to make sense of a very difficult original. But it serves a key function: it creates or affirms the sense that there is a world poetry which belongs to humanity, to which every human being has a right of access. This challenges the claim often encountered in comparative literature circles that one must access the poem in its original language. On this view, nobody would have read,

really read Homer's *Odyssey* or Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* if they had only seen a translation. This claim is a restatement of property rights: the cultural-linguistic group is thereby affirmed as properly *owning* its literature, with mastery of the language conferring admission rights. In such a situation, classical Latin literature would be without a proper owner.

Conclusion

The main functions of language envisioned by the theories of literature; that it mediates representation; that it is the contingent matter of the making (*poiesis*) called literature; that it is the means of rethinking of meaning as form have outcomes in criticism. Aristotelian criticism focuses on the action and the character involved. Heidegger explores the linguistic event as a speech act of *language*, while Derrida is exercised by the meaning structures being constructed, as to their holding together and how. These theories of literature also advert to the other arts for their contribution in a clearer perception of literary art. In Aristotle, the doctrine on language neatly falls into place in an economical model of art in which all are modes of representation (*mimesis*), differing only in the medium, language for poetry, colour for painting, shape for sculpture, sound and rhythm for music, rhythm alone for dancing. But this model leaves out architecture, which is counted in his *Ethics* among the arts. The Formalists restrict their discussions to the traditional arts, but there is no reason why their idea of 'self-sufficient matter' should not apply to things like cotton, wool, and other inputs in technological productions. Heidegger differs from them in this regard in that he has a method for distinguishing 'art' from other *made things* which he calls 'equipment'. But Derrida's theory is *traditional* in a surprising way because the forms for rethinking of meaning are given by tradition, going back to the time when 'Myth, language and art [made up] a concrete, undivided unity' before they 'gradually resolved into a triad of independent modes of spiritual creativity' (Cassirer, *Language and Myth* 98). In this mythic environment, form is the content of art:

one might follow Witkiewicz and say 'pure form'. The humans who have thus emerged as a group with myth, language, and art begin their history as a group accompanied by this symbolic language, which both carries and bears witness to their cultural and historical experiences, the cadence and echo of which will continue to be 'heard' (Foucault), by the one lying 'in the great listening'. It should be expected that 'African experience' going into world literature is the one tempered by this listening and combining the sensitivities of the poet who works in his own native tongue and that passion of the translator for the poem to come alive in another language than the birthplace.

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