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## Translating the Middle Ages

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In his address to the December 2001 meeting of the Council for College and University English, the poet and critic Robert Crawford gave an impassioned speech on the monolingual assumptions that underpin 'English' literature. 'English', as a concept and as a discipline, has been historically constructed to appropriate within its canon other literatures written in English but not produced in England or even in Great Britain (e.g. Irish and Anglo-Indian literature, the writings of American poets such as Eliot and Pound). At the same time, this 'English' silences and systematically excludes the literature produced in England or Great Britain in languages other than English, such as Anglo-Norman writings in French, early modern Latin poetry, works written in Scottish or Welsh; these are hardly ever mentioned, let alone reproduced or translated, in anthologies and histories of English literature. The modern pluralist emphasis found in recent areas of study, such as postcolonial, does not extend to the past of English literature, from which plurilingualism is systematically erased in what Crawford called

‘English’s Alzheimer disease’. And this, Crawford argued, is symptomatic of a persistent imperialist construction of ‘English’.

Despite the different focus, Robert Crawford’s contention may ring a not too distant bell for those familiar with Lawrence Venuti’s argument on the translator’s invisibility.<sup>1</sup> For Venuti, the historical privileging of a scientific, transparent English language has worked to elide any differences within the language itself and to normalize foreignness. Thus the best translations are reputed to be those that sound and feel ‘fluid’, as if they had originally been written in English. The translation is expected to be transparent; the translator invisible; and English, implicitly, to remain solidly monolithic and easily recognisable.

Crawford’s and Venuti’s concerns enable us to return to a question frequently discussed by criticism on modernism: its ‘elitism’. Such accusations ultimately stem from a traditional, and indeed canonical, requirement of ‘accessibility’ predicated on the use of a transparent, plain, recognisable language. This demand can be traced to the ideal of linguistic simplicity and anti-metaphorical bias of the founders of the Royal Society in the seventeenth century, but also, further back, to the medieval description of the vernacular as the simple, natural, common language of the people. However, this requirement of transparency bespeaks a much more complex problem than can be brushed aside through a homogeneizing description of modernism as elitist and inaccessible. Indeed, if we follow Crawford’s argument on the determinedly monolingual nature of English and its canon, the requirement of simplicity and linguistic accessibility becomes the uncomfortable ally of an exclusionary tradition that silences the voices that

disturb its homogeneity. It will be useful therefore to review the modernist construction of a 'common language' and of its relationships with other languages.

The international dimension of modernism, with its attendant thematization of exile, displacement, unsettling linguistic and cultural encounter, has received much critical notice; equally well known is the attention that modernism's three canonical authors, Eliot, Pound and Joyce, have paid to the Middle Ages and its chief figures.<sup>2</sup> Translation, a central and much studied feature of Pound's activity, has also generated a respectable body of criticism on Joyce's writing.<sup>3</sup> Less work has been done on the extent to which past, and more precisely medieval conceptions of translation and linguistic difference are explored and transposed into a specifically modernist aesthetics. It is therefore at the intersection of medievalism and translation (broadly understood as a way of conceptualising relationships between languages, crossing linguistic borders, defining such borders, sometimes prescribing the possibility of their crossing) that I wish to situate my inquiry.

### Overbearing writing

In the Middle Ages – the period when modern European languages develop and emerge as 'national' tongues – linguistic choices always require selections between different possibilities, all of them charged with social and political as well as poetic and literary import. Latin is the language of theology, philosophy, science and international politics, but as vernaculars develop, its dominance is increasingly challenged. Even then the alternative is rarely a simple one of Latin vs. vernacular: in Italy for example writers

generally choose between vernacular forms of Italian and Latin, but some turn to the more polished French (see Brunetto Latini's rhetorical treatise *Tresor*, of which he wrote the simpler Italian version *Tesoretto*); in England the choice is between Latin, Anglo-Norman French or Anglo-Saxon English. The majority of writers is in fact, to some extent at least, bilingual or polyglot, and much medieval writing is concerned with questions of multi- or inter-lingualism. Indeed, it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that in the Middle Ages every linguistic act involves a choice, and this choice in turn implies a political, social, or more broadly cultural statement. This is an extremely rich but also fraught panorama for the writer, who often feels the need to justify the choice to write in the vernacular, especially when his subject has been traditionally dealt with in a different language. Such explanations can be intriguingly ambivalent, and justifications can turn into a bold statement of the validity, if not the downright superiority, of the vernacular,<sup>4</sup> while the availability of different ranges of vocabulary, linguistic or literary forms stimulates the literary creativity and innovative practices of writers who do not have many qualms about hybridisation and neologisms. In the Middle Ages, writing is in effect an inter- or trans-linguistic practice based on programmatic translation and inventio(n). Vernaculars are thus both established languages and languages 'in progress', open to various influences and able to appropriate materials for their own expansion. This gives a new impetus to the classical concept of *inventio*, not only in the sense of 'finding' materials in the appropriate *loci* of the tradition, but also of inventing them through the 'turning' (*vertere*) and 'troping' of the range of available languages. If literary experimentalism means doing something that has not been done before (at least in one's literary tradition), then the condition of the medieval vernacular

writer is 'experimental' almost by definition, and it should not surprise that modernism turned to this period for inspiration in its bid to 'make it new'.

It would be difficult however to recognize such a heterogeneity of forces in the monolithic description of the Middle Ages that we encounter from the Renaissance on. 'The medieval', constructed as a homogeneous, organic period, became a political, social, cultural and literary category that later epochs used as a yardstick to measure either their modernity or their failure to match up to its more stable, higher values. Whether it is used negatively or positively, medievalism thus represents a language that can 'translate' the Middle Ages into whatever current idiom of political, social or cultural self-definition. This undifferentiated construction – not unlike Crawford's monolingual canon or Venuti's invisible translator – has consistently prevented the great variety of medieval interlingual theories and practices from being acknowledged, and has thus contributed to stifling the later periods' own linguistic self-awareness.

As Brian Stock puts it, 'The Renaissance invented the Middle Ages in order to define itself; the enlightenment perpetuated them in order to admire itself; and the Romantics revived them in order to escape from themselves.'<sup>5</sup> To a good extent, modernism also shared in this cultural monolingualism; indeed, much of its programme of renovation is informed by an ideal of linguistic, literary, cultural and social translatability (as direct appropriation and bearing over) of the past, and of the medieval past in particular. Eliot's writing on Dante is a case in point. His 1929 'Dante'<sup>6</sup> starts from the seemingly innocent enough claim that knowledge *on* Dante is not necessary for an appreciation of his poetry; but it is worth following more closely how Eliot structures this strand of the argument, because the oscillation between 'scholarship' or 'knowledge' and

‘language’ underpins a conception of the medieval as an organic set of conditions that can point the way towards healing the wounds of a split modernity.

For Eliot, no previous knowledge of biographical or critical scholarship is necessary to appreciate great poetry; scholarship in fact interferes with such appreciation. Eliot concedes that writers belonging to a very distant language and culture (e.g. Greek and Latin) may require some mediation, but poets in one’s language and great moderns, such as Dante, do not. That is so because Dante’s poetry can speak to us with the directness of a ‘common language’ (*SE* 252). With the focus redirected on language and linguistic accessibility, ‘scholarship’ becomes implicitly equated with interpretative translation. Eliot brings language and (critical) knowledge together even as his words appear to offer a disclaimer: ‘I do not counsel anyone to postpone the study of Italian grammar until he has read Dante, but certainly there is an immense amount of knowledge which, until one has read some of his poetry with intense pleasure – that is, with as keen a pleasure as one is capable of getting from any poetry – is positively undesirable’ (*SE* 237). Linguistic instruction is acceptable only in as far as it is purely technical (grammatical) and not contaminated by any more broadly cultural-linguistic awareness. Scholarship and broader linguistic awareness are constructed as mediators of (therefore obstacles to) the immediacy of ‘poetic emotion’ (*SE* 238); whereas great poetry, and specifically the great poetry of the medieval master, should require no translation insofar as it operates at an emotional and intuitive rather than at an intellectual level: ‘genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood’ (*SE* 238).

Dante’s alleged easiness (‘What is surprising about the poetry of Dante is that it is, in one sense, extremely easy to read’, *SE* 238) is due to his being ‘the most *universal* of

poets in the modern languages' (*SE* 238). This universality is again made to rest on linguistic factors: Dante's medieval Italian vernacular is the immediate product of Latin, a 'fine language' that 'had the quality of a highly developed and literary Esperanto' (*SE* 239) and which allowed the medieval European mind to 'think together' in an unbroken continuum no longer available in the divided modern Europe: 'When you read modern philosophy, in English, French German, and Italian, you must be struck by national or racial differences of thought: modern languages tend to *separate* thought [...]; but medieval Latin tended to concentrate on what men of various races and lands could think together' (*SE* 239).

Several issues are raised, and clouded, by Eliot's argument. Although medieval Italian is of course in many ways very close to medieval Latin, Eliot sidelines the question that was central for most medieval writers and in particular for Dante (see in particular the treatises *De vulgari eloquentia* and *Convivio*, the former mentioned, and perhaps to an extent echoed, by Eliot<sup>7</sup>): that the relationship between Latin and vernacular is almost always one of tension, competition, and desire for vernacular self-assertion, and that much vernacular production often starts from such inter-linguistic reflection. Dante's project is one of deliberate competition with and assertion of superiority over Latin, and his language is therefore always defined *in opposition to* Latin. Even when Dante describes his *vulgare illustre* in terms of similarity or analogy with Latin, he never forgets the competition between the two, or his bid to be the poet and forger of the new language. Eliot needs to elide Dante's political and cultural positioning in order to promote *his own* ideological and cultural stance, which requires universality and homogeneity at the expense of individualism and self-definition. In

short, Eliot's agenda is to enlist Dante to support his argument on the 'dissociation of sensibility' that took place after the end of the Middle Ages.

Eliot's case also tends to cloud the issue of the relationship of Dante's language with the medieval world and its universality by apportioning value on the basis of two related but somewhat contradictory criteria. One is the ability of the medieval mind to 'think together' beyond its ethnic and geographic differences; the other is the proximity of the vernacular to Latin and to its universalising effect. Thus, although all medievals are part of a unified sensibility (Eliot quotes Chaucer and Villon as examples), Dante is the closest to Latin through his Italian language, and he is consequently more universal than Chaucer or Villon – somehow, Dante thinks more together than the others. But the real point of fracture is another: by Dante's time, vernacular languages are already well advanced on the road of linguistic and intellectual differentiation, and have already broken the universality that Eliot ascribes to the Middle Ages; but Eliot does not address the question of why what he declares to be the greatest medieval poetry was written as vernaculars emerged as major new languages, different from and independent of Latin. It is as part of this context that Eliot needs to assert (and he does so repeatedly) the greater similarity of medieval Italian to Latin than to modern Italian, a statement that may have some broad intellectual purchase, but that linguistically makes very little sense.

In his presentation of Dante's similarity to Latin, Eliot needs to elide other important features of Dante's central place in Italian literature. One of these is the sheer magnitude of Dante's linguistic creativity and his unprecedented expansion of the linguistic range of Italian; another is Dante's claim to individuality as a poet of and a thinker on the language – indeed, what Eliot represses is Dante's radically innovative use

of the conventions, forms and vocabulary of his time:<sup>8</sup> ‘He not only thought in a way in which every man of his culture in the whole of Europe then thought, but he employed a method which was common and commonly understood throughout Europe’ (*SE* 242).

The dubious assertion that ‘more is lost in translating Shakespeare into Italian than in translating Dante into English’ (*SE* 241) supports the poetic argument that ‘most English poets are *inimitable* in a way which Dante was not. [...] The language of each great English poet is his own language; the language of Dante is the perfection of a common language’ (*SE* 252). Paradoxically, it would seem that Dante requires almost no translative effort and can therefore be literally trans-lated, ‘borne over’ into one’s modern language unchanged and unaffected, as organically whole as the period from which it emerged; while the more individual and modern, and therefore more difficult Shakespeare requires translation but is almost impossible to translate (‘How can a foreigner find words to convey in his own language just that combination of intelligibility and remoteness that we get in many phrases of Shakespeare?’, *SE* 241). (The other obvious question would be, how can Dante’s organic language be translated unproblematically into the divided language of modernity?) Eliot’s argument is based not so much on a direct reading of Dante, but on an imposition on Dante of his (Victorian, Ruskinian) understanding of the medieval and of Dante – an understanding that in turn feeds into the theory of the dissociation of sensibility (see *SE* 240), which requires the construction of an unbroken European commonality of culture and language that cuts across horizontal (contemporary) linguistic barriers. And this in turn has two further contradictory corollaries: on the one hand it interrupts the vertical temporal continuity between medieval and modern language (see the emphasis on Dante’s Italian being more

similar to Latin than to modern Italian); on the other it requires Dante's Italian to possess a universality and a transparency that enables it to be immediately translatable, transhistorically, into the language of the modern reader.

This 'translation' (in the literal sense of transporting, bearing over) of the medieval into modernity is for Eliot what modernity needs to restore itself: the universality that bypasses the need for linguistic translation offers a Pentecostal solution to the divided, Babelian condition of modernity. But this desired 'bearing over' of the medieval becomes an overbearing writing that denies to the Middle Ages its linguistic specificity and the internal tensions and differences that produced much of the best and most interesting medieval writing.

### The Pentecostal Spirit of Romance

If Eliot praises above all else in medieval literature the proximity to Latin that enables him to establish a hierarchy of linguistic, poetic and philosophical values, Ezra Pound's interest in the new Romance languages rests in their departure from Latin and their challenge to its monolingual authority. Pound's life-long engagement with the Middle Ages finds its first consistent expression in his earliest work of criticism, *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), a book that pursues the interests developed as a student of romance philology and which sets many of his future themes, strategies and passions (such as Provençal and Tuscan poetry). One instance of this continuing and constantly revisited interest in medieval poetry is his work on Guido Cavalcanti, extending from a dedicated chapter in *The Spirit of Romance* to the essays and many re-translations of his poetry

over several decades and to two critical editions of Cavalcanti in Italian in 1931 and 1949.<sup>9</sup> The parallel interests of poetry and philology lead him to expand, through a direct poetic response to the rhythms and forms of medieval poetry, the otherwise rather conventional philological framework through which he studies Romance literature. At the same time, his philologist's training directs him to check the precise meanings and resonance of words against their uses in the works of medieval philosophers or to collate different manuscripts in order to decide on the best *lectio* for difficult words or lines, contributing to Pound's insistence on clarity of expression and precision of meaning in poetic writing.<sup>10</sup> Poetry and philology thus combine in Pound's sense of tradition, and it is in this context that it is useful to re-examine Pound's theory and practice of translation, elaborated as a way of conceptualizing the relationship between medievality and modernity, as an instrument of linguistic exploration, and as a tool in the definition of poetics.

Paolo Cerchi has suggested that Pound's use of the word 'Spirit' in *The Spirit of Romance* reflects a widespread usage of the concept in turn-of-the-century philology and is especially resonant in the German, post-Hegelian context, where it corresponds to a search for the *Geist* of a literature or culture.<sup>11</sup> Other associations add to its complexity. In the 'Praefatio Ad Lectorem Electum' Pound claims to be examining 'certain forces, elements or qualities which were potent in the mediaeval literature of the Latin tongues, and are, I believe, still potent in our own'.<sup>12</sup> After distinguishing the scientific study of literature from Art, Pound declares: 'Art is a fluid moving above or over the minds of men' (*SR* 7). The emphasis on a commonality of tongues even in difference and the definition of (capitalized) Art as a force moving across temporal, spatial and linguistic

differences that speaks through diverse peoples and poets, evoke a desire for the xenoglossia of a redemptive language, a Pentecost ('They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves'<sup>13</sup>) whose potency can still 'save' modernity.

This 'Spirit' first manifests itself in the Provençal 'Alba' (literally, 'dawn'), a short bilingual poem dating from the tenth century which alternates Latin stanzas and a refrain written 'in the tongue of the people' (SR 11). Wishing both to dissociate himself from the philologists of his time and to dissociate poetry from other forms of linguistic expression, Pound mentions the first known vernacular document, the Oath of Strasbourg, but denies it any particular relevance for his purposes, dismissing it as 'some treaty oaths signed at Strasbourg in A.D. 841' (SR 11).<sup>14</sup> In light of Pound's later career, such severance of politics from literature is all the more intriguing; after all, the political ability of a people to use its language as expression of its 'spirit' and identity also subtends Pound's value-judgement on Provençal poetry, and Pound himself links it, briefly but significantly, to the Albigensian repression of the Troubadours (SR 90). But at this point Pound is interested to distil a specificity of poetic language, and the 'Alba' is of greater interest to him as a literary expression and as a suitably metaphorical image for the rise of the polyglottal 'Spirit' of Romance. The 'dawn' also has the additional advantage of echoing the salvific advent of Dante's vernacular language in *Convivio*: 'Questo sarà luce nuova, sole nuovo, lo quale surgerà là dove l'usato tramonterà, e darà lume a coloro che sono in tenebre e in oscuritade per lo usato sole che a loro non luce.' ('This shall be the new light, the new sun, which shall rise where the old shall set, and shall give light to those who are in darkness and in obscurity for the old sun that does not shine for them.')<sup>15</sup>

What captivates Pound is the bilingualism of this short poem, the co-existence in it of different traditions, the eclectic and foreign nature of this cross-linguistic gesture, the challenge that the language of the people poses to the dominant Latin culture. This of course is what Pound's modernist project of linguistic and cultural renewal also urges, similarly relying on bilingual or multilingual language within his poetry and within his critical works, where translations are not substitutive of the original texts or simple relocation of meaning from source to target but accompaniments that locate meaning in the interrelations between the original and the translations.<sup>16</sup>

Pound only translates the Romance lines, not the Latin; then he launches into a digression that abandons the 'Alba' and fails to return to it, trying instead to highlight a contrast between different modes of poetic expression that cut across horizontal historical lines and undermine the claim to a medieval specificity for this literature. The difference that one may have expected to lie in the historical emergence of vernacular literatures is now relocated in the opposition between the two forms of popular and scholarly poetry, already present in Classical times and perpetuating themselves through literary history. We find a paradoxical situation where the 'Alba', the literal and metaphorical dawn of Romance poetry, is also *not* a beginning at all (not unlike modernist writing, required to be both new and inscribed in a continuing, re-asserted tradition). Pound's argument seems to be pulling in two directions: one is the medievalist version that locates the split in a geo-linguistic area (Romance vs. Latin, Mediterranean vs. rest of Europe) temporally delimited by a historical conjuncture (the emergence of vernaculars); the other divides along parallel historical lines that coincide not with languages but with modes of expression, and which signal continuity between antiquity, medievality and modernity.

This latter split, though it bypasses the historical question of beginnings, is however homologous to the geo-linguistic one if we consider that its main cipher remains ‘the language of the people’: an inventive idiom, creative and unrestrained to the point of polyglottism, ‘barbaric’ (*SR* 18; I take this to mean, etymologically, ‘foreign’) and posing a challenge to the stable, scholarly language of classicism. Thus it would seem that at this historical juncture, the horizontal and vertical axes line up as the cultural continuity of the two parallel but opposed traditions juxtapose with the horizontal division between popular Romance and scholarly Latin. This ambiguous split that valorizes the new language while authorizing itself through a continued tradition also brings together the medieval and the modernist projects of making it new. Translation has a fundamental role in such *renovatio*.

The practice of translation in the Middle Ages has been largely disregarded by literary criticism and literary history, or dismissed as an unsophisticated prescription of fidelity to sense or word, but as several recent studies have shown, it produced a large body of writing and was a major contributing factor in the shaping of vernacular poetics.<sup>17</sup> In particular, Rita Copeland’s seminal work in this field has shown that medieval translation, as practice and as theory, is an activity of both continuity and rupture. The terminology of medieval translation theory derives from Roman theoretical statements, where translation was seen as part of both rhetoric and grammar. Insofar as it belonged to grammar, translation’s role was to contribute to the *enarratio poetarum*, the glossing and interpreting of poetic texts. Insofar as it belonged to rhetoric, it was an activity of textual production, with *inventio* as its core procedure. Although the Middle Ages often radically transformed the significance of the terminology that they took over

from Roman theory, the dual function of translation contributed to its fluid status and its different uses, and participated in making translation one of the most productive textual activities. Translation also partakes of rhetoric's agonistic model of eloquence, and it can heighten the sense of rivalry between the original text or language and the new one:

'translation can only be theorized in interlingual, intercultural terms. [...] As a necessarily interlingual project it is predicated on cultural difference.' For the Romans, 'translation can scarcely be theorized without reference to conquest as a component of rivalry, or aggressive supremacy in the challenge to Greek hegemony. Translation [...] is figured [...] in terms comparable to the structure of metaphor (Latin, "translatio"), as a paradigmatic pattern of transference, substitution, and ultimately displacement of the source.'<sup>18</sup> 'Translated' to the Middle Ages, translation contributed to the assertion of vernacular autonomy from Latin while recognizing the cultural hegemony of the latter.

However, the contest is now played out between a multiplicity of new languages and states emerging from the decline of the one language that had belonged to a unified political body no longer in existence, and whose power has been divided between a spiritual entity (Christian Rome) and a political one (the Holy Roman Empire, which progressively fragments into a multiplicity of centres of power). Medieval translation is thus a fraught field, underpinned by the Roman rhetorical agonistic model but oscillating between its acknowledgement of the spiritual and cultural superiority of Latin on the one hand and the assertive expression of vernacular and national identity on the other.

Compounded within the concept of translation are a wide range of activities and associations, reflected in the variety of terms used to describe it.<sup>19</sup> Among these, emphasising the etymological sense of 'carrying across', are *translatio* (in Latin also

‘metaphor’, from the Greek *metapherein*, ‘to transfer, carry across’) and *traductio* (as ‘leading over’, a term that came into usage in the later medieval period and which was adopted by most romance languages). ‘Version’, from *vertere*, associates translation with the concepts of turning and troping, while *interpretatio* (from which the modern sense of ‘interpreter’ as ‘translator’) relates it to ‘hermeneutics’, on whose Greek root the word is modelled.<sup>20</sup> Within the range of meanings we also find the idea of ‘transferral’, as in the concept of *translatio studii et imperii*: the transferral of culture and of power from east to west – for instance from Greece to Rome, and later from Rome to the Holy Roman Empire.

Commenting on a late medieval English description of the activity of translation as ‘ouyrberyng et exposition sentencie’, Roger Ellis has pointed out that ‘overbearing’, in its early usage in the Wycliffite Bible, described the physical removal of something from one place to another, or the destruction of a physical or moral state, as in the overthrowing of an Empire or the forgiveness of sin: ‘Translation, that is, changes an existing boundary, turns one thing into another, refashions an original as totally as God’s forgiveness annihilates sin.’ In other words, the role of the medieval translator is not to be transparent or invisible; on the contrary, translation confers the status of *auctor*: ‘Translation, an act not of not of continuity but of rupture, confers a status akin to that of authorship to the translator’.<sup>21</sup> ‘Translation’ was in fact only one within a continuum of activities that include editing, writing, compiling, interpreting, exposing, emulating, and which extended from word-for-word rendering to the (re)creation of a new text with sources functioning simply as prompts.<sup>22</sup> These activities overlap, often within the same work, and there is no clear-cut line to define and distinguish them.

Given the multilingual context of medieval writing, where the exchange is often between languages that can hardly be described as ‘foreign’ (e.g. Italian and Latin; English and Anglo-Norman), translation unsurprisingly acquires a central and productive role, turning all known texts in all known languages into a repository of knowledge and forms that can, through *inventio*, be found, used, adapted, departed from in the invention / creation of a new literature and in the expansion and increase of the new vernacular languages. None of this should sound unfamiliar to those used to modernism’s active plundering and recycling of ‘the tradition’ in order to ‘make it [i.e. the tradition], new’. For both the Middle Ages and modernism, writing and translation identify the site of meaning not so much in a text that the new version tries to match as closely, faithfully and invisibly as possible, but in the encounter of the texts. This allows the *invention* (as discovery and creation) of one’s own language through the imitation, encounter, and replacement with/of another. As Copeland writes, by challenging the authority of Latin hegemony, medieval vernacular translation represents a ‘preliminary discovery of literary language’ that ‘enables future texts’.<sup>23</sup>

This is what Pound’s translations – exercised of course on a much wider range than just medieval Romance literature – also seek to achieve. The critical debate has moved on from the merits or demerits of Pound’s translations, and the preceding discussion should confirm that, in the light of medieval practices, assessing Pound’s faithfulness to his source or the level of linguistic competence is beside the point; the way he departs from the original to turn (*vertere*) the text to his own creative or interpretative agenda also profits from being considered within the context of the medieval theory. Pound’s translations appear to function as ways of finding / founding (‘inventing’) a new

language for the cultural renovation of modernity while shedding the evaluative bias based on ‘fluency’ and ‘transparency’ that Venuti denounces in traditional translation criticism. With this however I do not wish to suggest that Pound was consciously or intentionally following medieval practice – in fact, I do not believe that he recognized this similarity; but the analogy of methods and scopes remains illuminating, and it is to some of the uses and fluid definitions that Pound gives of his own translations that I now turn.

In *The Spirit of Romance*, translation is largely serviceable, and its main function is to give readers a flavour of the language, forms and ranges of materials included in Romance literature. Pound describes the ‘atrocities’ of his translation of Cavalcanti’s canzone ‘Donna me Prega’ as being ‘for the most part intentional’ and ‘committed with the aim of driving the reader’s perception further into the original than it would without them have penetrated’. With his translations, Pound explains, he has ‘provided the reader, unfamiliar with old Italian, an instrument that may assist him in gauging *some* of the qualities of the original’ (*LE* 172). And, as I have already mentioned, the introduction to the ‘Cavalcanti Poems’ describes the translations as ‘of accompaniment’ – that is, aimed at making the modern audience in some measure aware ‘of the mental content of the older audience, and of what these others drew from certain fashions of thought and speech’.<sup>24</sup> In 1934, Pound dismisses the translations dating to the 1910s on grounds that his vision of the poems had been obfuscated by the language of the Victorians: ‘My perception was not obfuscated by Guido’s Italian, difficult as it then was for me to read. I was obfuscated by the Victorian language. [...] What obfuscated me was not the Italian but the crust of dead English, the sediment present in my own available vocabulary –

which I, let us hope, got rid of a few years later.’ (*LE* 193). At the end of the same essay, Pound makes a distinction between the ‘interpretative translation’ that he has offered and ‘the other sort’: those cases when ‘the “translator” is definitely making a new poem’ and which ‘falls simply in the domain of original writing’ (*LE* 200).

Pound’s descriptions thus tend to represent his translations as useful hermeneutic moves functional to the better, deeper comprehension of the originals for readers who do not have a knowledge of Italian. In this sense translation is ‘a tool’ – a tool, however, that always remains partial and inadequate. Apart from the emphasis on the italicized ‘*some*’ in the quotation above (‘an instrument that may assist him in gauging *some* of the qualities of the original’), the very fact that Pound returned to his translations time and time again for over two decades, each time retranslating the same poems with different rhythmic, lexical, semantic and poetic emphases, suggests that any act of translation can only be provisional, and is never self-sufficient. Translation is a dynamic process constantly in progress, never completed. Each *version* (in all senses of the word) is an opportunity for revisiting language – one’s own as well as the other’s. In this context, the suggestion that translations function as ‘accompaniments’ for the original acquires a much stronger sense than that of useful tool; it indicates that meaning resides in neither of the two texts alone, but in their interaction, or even in the distance between the texts and in the gap between the languages: translation is an exploration of such space, and its most literal representation is the blank area of the page between the parallel printed texts. Thus if Pound’s distinction between the ‘interpretative’ and the ‘other sort’ of translation may appear as a reasonable, convenient way of distinguishing different types and their different functions, both ‘sorts’ are in fact constantly at work in Pound’s writing, and his

practice is as variously distributed along the line that stretches from original writing through to compiling, interpreting, illustrating, and emulating, as that of his medieval precursors was.

Although, as I have indicated above, I do not believe that Pound is intentionally adopting the medieval translative practice, he is certainly looking to medieval literature and language as useful sources or models of linguistic renewal. The Middle Ages offer an ideal lens thanks to the historical fluidity of languages in the making, sloughing off the weight of Latin as they acquire cultural autonomy – just as Pound believes that he had to slough off the ‘obfuscation’ of the ‘dead crust of English’ to found a new language adequate to modernity. Translation offers itself as one of the forms through which modernity can mediate the medieval, and the three – modernity, medievality and translation – are brought together in the strikingly similar images that Pound uses to describe them. In ‘Cavalcanti’ Pound regrets modernity’s loss of the medieval ‘radiant world where one thought cuts through another with a clean edge’ (*LE* 154) and attributes to Guido’s poetry ‘the neatness of scalpel-cut’ (*LE* 159); he then attributes to his translation the task of ‘driving the reader’s perception further into the original than it would without them have penetrated’ (*LE* 172). This is the language of Imagism and of Vorticism, of the clear, hard-edged, precise poetic language that is called for in order to renew the tradition and shed the accretions and the dead crust of the past.<sup>25</sup>

Given the premises from which Pound starts his discussion of the Spirit of Romance (the bilingualism of the ‘Alba’ and the advent of the new Romance literatures) it is surprising that he does not do more with, for instance, Marie de France’s preface to her twelfth-century *lai*, which he quotes (*SR* 80), where Marie explains why she chose

not to translate ‘histories’ from Latin into French and decided instead to collect popular stories and re-tell them in rhyme. After all, this would have been a perfect chance to highlight Romance self-assertion against the linguistic and cultural hegemony of Latin, and to value the more spontaneous stories of the people over official histories. Equally surprising – given that Pound follows Dante’s precepts on the merit of Provençal and other medieval poets quite closely, using Dante’s canon and hierarchies to contradict the accepted wisdom of contemporary Romance philology<sup>26</sup> – is that he neglects to give more emphasis to Dante’s statements on vernacular, Latin and their respective values, or to refer to Dante’s comments on his own poetry, his choice of the vernacular, and the political significance of the vernacular language. To return to the point I was making earlier, Pound seems to be concerned with dissociating the poetics from the politics of interlingualism, and he does not respond to the suggestions of the strong link between the two in the Middle Ages (his dismissal of the Oath of Strasbourg can be seen in this context).

So, if Pound’s reading of medieval literature did point him in the direction of the coexistence of a multiplicity of discrete poetic and linguistic forms that find in their linguistic heterogeneity a powerful means of self-assertion, yet there remains in his writing an unresolved tension between a rich multilingual, translative, transitional and inherently unstable language and the desire for universality and linguistic stability that would in turn enable modernity to stabilize itself. Ultimately his following of Dante’s canon; his simultaneous failure to fully exploit Dante’s thinking on the relationship between politics and language; his faithful, Victorian reverence towards his medieval heroes<sup>27</sup> (and, we may add, his failure to take critical advantage of the striking analogy

between the medieval practice of translation and his own) – all this suggest that Pound, not unlike Eliot, wished to implement a ‘translation’ of an idealized Middle Ages according to a predetermined agenda that ultimately homogenizes the multiplicity of medieval voices. The ideal universality of Eliot’s ‘common language’, based on its proximity to Latin, is recuperated by Pound through the clarity and radiance of medieval vernacular thought and poetry, the qualities that make it translatable through a process that ‘penetrates’ into the original and searches for an equivalent clear, clean-edged image for modernity. Despite the fact that no single translation is or can be definitive, Pound’s investment remains in a desired Pentecostal ‘Spirit’ that would coagulate around the universality of Romance vernacular poetry and be able to transcend its linguistic differences. But in the implicit co-extensiveness of the medieval world, medieval poetry, a mediating translative practice, and the called-for modern poetic language, the term that is missing is an integral, coherent modern world: translation is entrusted with the restorative function of finding (*inventing*) ways to bring it about through the transferral of the medieval into the modern, yet the fragmentation of modernity ultimately frustrates the feasibility of such translation, and this tension remains unresolved.<sup>28</sup>

### So familiar and so foreign

The tension between a ‘common speech’ of the people and a universal language that predicates its commonality on its transnational and transhistorical status is a preoccupation that we also find throughout Joyce’s writing, where it is however coupled with a scepticism towards rhetorical claims staked out on such ideological constructions. The Irish Channel also seems to interpose a larger distance from English for the Irish

writer than does the Atlantic for the American Eliot and Pound. For Joyce, as for Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*, English was always going to be ‘an acquired speech’, spoken with an accent, like a foreigner – a foreigner who however had no other language, and for whom any act of speech would always require a form of translation: ‘The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine’, says Stephen of the language in which he is conversing with the English dean of studies.

How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! 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. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.<sup>29</sup>

Language becomes the knot that ties together political, spiritual, and literary matters, and it will be useful to contextualize this point within another aspect of the complex conglomeration of medieval translation theory: the concept of *translatio studii et imperii*.

*Translatio imperii* was a fundamental concept of medieval historical theory that explained the renewal (*renovatio*) of empire with Charlemagne as the transferral of Roman *imperium* to another people.<sup>30</sup> The notion of *translatio* ensures that this *imperium* is framed in terms of legitimacy, providing self-authorization and the self-inscription in a glorious and glorifying genealogy, while also attributing universality to the renewal of the empire. The formula of *translatio imperii* was later associated with that of *translatio*

*studii*, and this transferral of empire and learning were seen to have taken place throughout history along an axis that goes from east to west. According to Otto von Freising (Frederic I Barbarossa's uncle, and the first scholar known to have made the association explicit), 'the temporal power passed from Babylonia to the Medians, then to the Persians, afterwards to the Greek and last to the Romans and under Roman name has been transferred to the Franks [*ad Francos translata est*].' The claim was that 'God had given *sacerdotium* to the italians and *imperium* to the Germans, and that Charlemagne himself had brought "*studium philosophiae et liberalium artium*" to Paris'.<sup>31</sup> But the translative voyage of *studium* did not stop there. In his famous preface to *Cligés*, Chrétien de Troyes recalls this translation of *sapientia* and *potentia* from Greece to Rome and then to France; for Chrétien however 'France' did not mean Paris but 'Engleterre. | Qui lors estoit Bretaigne dite'.<sup>32</sup> 'This manifesto of a new literary form', Stierle observes about the *romanz*, 'opening a new and final epoch in the history of *translatio studii* represents a revolution in the relation between Latin and vernacular language, in which for the first time the latter claims superiority.'<sup>33</sup>

The seat of learning has thus come to England, in the French language, and the challenge to the dominant tongue sets the question of language against that of political *imperium*, opening the door for the later frequent association of linguistics and politics. The theme of *translatio studii et imperii* would in fact go on to frame much of the discourse of linguistic / political power and legitimacy in the following centuries, and it may also help us outline a context for the many instances of eastward and westward travel in Joyce's fiction, from 'The Dead' to *Finnegans Wake*.

In the final story of *Dubliners*, Gabriel Conroy, who plans to take his annual

cycling holiday on the continent to ‘keep in touch with the languages’ is reproached by Miss Ivors for neglecting his language (‘And haven’t you your own language to keep in touch with – Irish?’) and his country (‘And haven’t you got your own land to visit [...] that you know nothing of, your own people, and your own country?’). Gabriel retorts with increasing irritation, first denying that Irish is his language, then declaring himself sick of his country (‘O, to tell you the truth, retorted Gabriel suddenly, I’m sick of my own country, sick of it!’),<sup>34</sup> anticipating Stephen’s similarly impatient remarks about home and tongue (‘You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets’, *P* 203).

Gabriel and Stephen may eventually turn to opposite geographical directions, Gabriel acknowledging the need to ‘go westward’, Stephen deciding to go east to Paris. For both however the question is not to accept or reject one of two linguistic / cultural / political alternatives, but to negotiate a form of linguistic and cultural plurality. Gabriel’s ‘The time had come for him to set on his journey westward’ (*D* 223) is neither an acceptance of Miss Ivors’s Irish nationalist creed, nor a simple acknowledgement of the need to confront his own Irish roots, and it goes beyond a recognition of the common humanity and mortality of all beyond political, linguistic, social or cultural differences. I take it, rather, as the implicit recognition of the untenability of his earlier, lame denial that literature, politics and identity have anything to do with each other (*D* 188), and of the necessity to face this relationship and its implications. The topos of journeying thus coalesces the meaning of *translatio studii et imperii*, but for Gabriel, Stephen, and Joyce the myth of a vernacular Gaelic that would displace English and thus give a cultural, spiritual and political form of *imperium* to Ireland was just that: a myth. Only by working

*within* the imperial language, by contaminating it from the inside, by breaking down its boundaries (internal as much as external), can a political and cultural *renovatio* take place. The most compact expression of this idea comes from the inventive, translative language of *Finnegans Wake*, where Shem the Penman, waging his war on English, claims that ‘he would wipe alley english spooker, multaphoniaksically spuking, off the face of the erse’:<sup>35</sup> wipe, among other scatological things, all English spoken / any English speaker / spook off the face of the earth / wipe it all out of Anglo-Irish language (Erse). What is especially important for our context is Shem’s manner of achieving such goal: ‘multaphoniaksically spuking’ may suggest that this is just a metaphorical manner of speaking, but the meta-phoricity of this operation is founded on a multiphonic, multilingual speech that requires a continuous activity of translation. (Roland McHugh helpfully points out that *-ksi* is the Finnish translative suffix.<sup>36</sup>)

Without this translative, multivocal, multilingual, internally per-verting and per-versive practice, the question would remain that of languages frozen into static borders: two mutually exclusive languages (and therefore cultures and political communities) requiring a form of interpretative translation that risks being an ‘overbearing’ solution in which one is obliterated by the other – just as it happens to the old Irish-speaking peasant accused of murder in ‘Ireland at the Bar’, who requires an interpreter to mediate between him and the law, but whose extravagant, bewildered voice is systematically reduced to a dry monosyllable, effectively silenced by the interpreter and repressed by the system in which he has no linguistic – let alone civic or political – status.<sup>37</sup>

The desire for a universal language would appear to be the logical outcome of this predicament. Yet in *Finnegans Wake* the thematizing of Babel and of Pentecost or other

forms of ‘remedial’ languages never leads to promoting such universality.<sup>38</sup> Joyce is equally wary of any claims made in the name of a vernacular constructed as natural but exclusive, and it is useful, before returning to *Finnegans Wake*, to examine some of the thoughts that lead up to Stephen’s meeting with the dean of studies, when he acknowledges his dispossession from the ‘acquired speech’.

As Stephen walks to his physics class, his route offers many occasions to remind him of the English domination of Ireland: ‘The grey block of Trinity [the Protestant University] on his left, set heavily in the city’s ignorance like a great dull stone set in a cumbrous ring, pulled his mind downward; and while he was striving this way and that to free his feet from the fetters of the reformed conscience he came upon the droll statue of the national poet of Ireland’ (*P* 180. Stephen’s thoughts may be tinged with irony here, as Thomas Moore, the ‘national poet’, spent most of his life in England.). A few pages later, Stephen’s encounter with the girl selling flowers concludes with his walking away quickly from her, ‘wishing to be out of the way before she offered her ware to another, a tourist from England or a student from Trinity’ (*P* 184). Between these two episodes Stephen thinks of his friend Davin, the candid, nationalist peasant student who ‘worshipped the sorrowful legend of Ireland’ (*P* 181):

His nurse has taught him Irish and shaped his rude imagination by the broken lights of Irish myth. He stood towards this myth upon which no individual mind had ever drawn out a line of beauty and to its unwieldy tales that divided themselves as they moved down the cycles in the same attitude as towards the Roman catholic religion, the attitude of a dullwitted loyal serf. Whatsoever of thought or of feeling came to

him from England or by way of English culture his mind stood armed against in obedience to a password: and of the world beyond England he knew only the foreign legion of France in which he spoke of serving. (*P* 181)

The question of Irish, which Davin drew as it were with his milk from his nurse's breast, is set squarely within the two twin faiths of nationalism and Catholicism, imbibed just as unquestioningly. The nurse teaching him Irish can of course be simply a realistic detail, but it also belongs to a long tradition of theorising the vernacular language as natural and nourishing. I shall give two examples of this, one couched in positive terms, the other in implicitly negative ones.

Dante employs the topos of the vernacular as milk at the start of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, highlighting the affectionate character of the natural relationship between an individual and his language: 'vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infantes assuefiunt ab assistentibus, cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt; vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus, quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipimus.' ('We call the vulgar tongue that to which children become accustomed through those who are about them when they first begin to distinguish sounds; or, to put it more shortly, we assert that the vulgar tongue is that which we acquire without any rule by imitating our nurses.')

<sup>39</sup> Dante's treatise, whose aim is to establish a history and poetics of the vernacular, is immediately charged with intense emotional tones that transform the theoretical aim into an equally personal one.

My second example comes from a very different context: the association between vernacular language and the doctrine of the Incarnation, framed in terms of mother's /

spiritual milk. Nicholas Watson has argued that in certain contexts, and often as a consequence of the debate sparked by Lollardism and the Wycliffite Bible, ‘language politics and incarnational theology became coterminous’, and ‘the very act of writing in the vernacular had theological implications, while the symbol of the “mother tongue” could be linked to quite specific theological positions and controversies.’<sup>40</sup> Watson shows that Christ’s humanity was increasingly considered as a more suitable topic for reflection and emotive identification by the less educated than the theological subtleties of discussions on his divinity, and was thus almost *a fortiori* expressed in English. Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (c. 1409) addresses this specific audience with the intention of providing ‘symple creatures the whiche as childryn haven nede to be fedde with mylke of lyghte doctryne and not with sadde [serious] mete of grete clargye [learning] and of hye contemplacion.’<sup>41</sup> As Watson remarks, Love’s language generates two parallel but contrasting chains of meanings in which theological complexity, spiritual maturity and Latin are set in opposition to limited education, intellectual simplicity, spiritual childishness, and English. ‘Love presents his *Mirror* not only as a means of spiritual and intellectual education but as a bastion *against* such education. To learn its lesson, the reader must emulate the passivity of the infant, receiving nourishment from a clerical writer who retains full control over what he dispenses and how he dispenses it’.<sup>42</sup>

I am not suggesting that Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist* refers, explicitly or implicitly, to Nicholas Love’s treatise or to this specific debate, and I only use this passage as an example of the ideology that can underpin rhetorical claims about the vernacular; it is however intriguing to find Davin’s ‘dullwitted’, childish and blindly

faithful nature conforming to the characterisation of the audience targeted by Love, and a similar register being used. Equally significant is that Stephen's thoughts commingle the empathic recognition of an emotive relation with the language, such as we find in Dante (after all, Davin *did* learn Irish as a child), with the uncompromising denunciation of the limits of a linguistic mythification attended by cultural and political obtuseness. In this cluster of associations the natural language may give emotional comfort while blocking, instead of enabling, access to other forms of knowledge (*translatio studii*) without making a *translatio imperii* possible.

This is not to say that Joyce does not take pride in the alleged ancient and glorious origins of the Irish and their language. Less idealistically, however, he also recollects the many conquests suffered by his country and the subsequent history of miscegenation and hybridisation in which it found a stronger identity, rising as one people to oppose English colonialism.<sup>43</sup> The positing of rival languages as mutually exclusive alternatives can only disempower the weaker, pushing the Irish in the position of the peasants at the bar, condemned to rely on an interpreter whose interpreting is tantamount to silencing. The resurgent Ireland Joyce aspires to is both bilingual and self-centred: 'a rival island near England, a bilingual, republican, self-centred and enterprising island' (CW173). It is worth pointing out that the original Italian text of this address reads 'un'isola emula', of which 'a rival island' is a correct but partial rendering, as the word that Joyce uses also signifies emulation. Joyce was not setting up an opposition but a dynamic tension.<sup>44</sup>

While the Stephen Dedalus of *A Portrait* may have been better disposed, despite his uncompromising scepticism, towards his friend's Davin's association of Irish with his nurse, the image takes a decidedly less sympathetic turn with Stephen's later and more

embittered incarnation in *Ulysses*. Here the old milkwoman, carrying ‘white milk, not hers’ is also entirely ignorant of ‘her’ vernacular Irish tongue, which she mistakes for French.<sup>45</sup> The milkwoman’s ‘old shrunken paps’ (*U* 12) become symbolic of the unnatural predicament of an Ireland ‘servant of two masters’: just as Stephen defined himself as the servant of ‘the imperial British state [...] and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church’ (*U* 18), the old woman pouring the milk for the Englishman Haines and the Irish mocker Buck Mulligan is for Stephen ‘serving her conqueror and her gay betrayer’ (*U* 12). Ireland, idealized into a sorrowful legend by Davin and symbolized for Stephen by the old milkwoman, futilely seeks its renaissance in the recovery of old myths and of a language that have dried up, lost their nourishing power, and – shrunken to nothing – are ready to be distracted and seduced by the empty mocking rhetoric of the Irish ‘gay betrayer’ and the British ‘conqueror’.

So, if Joyce remains sceptical of the facile myth of linguistic universality, he also remains constantly alert to the dangers of claims made in the name of the ‘language of the people’. Such vernacular ‘common language’ is exposed in Joyce’s work as a comforting but shallow myth that can in fact repress, deceive and betray as much as it comforts. At the same time, translation, as a vehicle of ‘transferral’ of knowledge, is shown to be an instrument that can control and limit access to knowledge. This is explored in a bilingual (if such a word makes any sense in the context of Joyce’s novel) passage in *Finnegans Wake*, where the artist figure Shem the Penman wishes to create an indelible ink to write eternal poetry. Shem’s actions are also those of the alchemist seeking to produce precious gold from more vulgar materials through a transformation that, traditionally, also carries spiritual meanings, and his activity in *Finnegans Wake*

must be seen both as a continuation of Stephen's desire to transubstantiate the everyday and the vulgar into the eternity of art, and as an extension of his theory of the epiphany, whereby revelation resides in 'vulgarity'.<sup>46</sup>

Shem, said to have 'winged away on a wildgoup's chase across the kathartic ocean' (a flight that allies him with Gabriel's and Stephen's translative journeys) is shown in the process of making 'synthetic ink and sensitive paper for his own end out of his wit's waste' (*FW* 185.05-06). The procedure, described in Latin with English interpolations, includes relieving himself in his own hands, putting his excrement in a funereal urn, pissing in it while chanting invocations and a psalm, mixing the materials, baking and cooling them so as to produce '*encaustum [...] indelibile*' (*FW*185.25).

While Shem's alchemical transubstantiation enacts, even under its scatological theme, the spiritual dimension of art and the transformation of matter into word / Word, the bilingualism of this episode suggests a further reflection on the question of language and of translation, now also compared to an alchemical reaction capable of transforming the (linguistic, cultural) matter on which it operates. The episode contains several references to Thomas Norton's fifteenth-century *An Ordinal of Alchemy*, a manual purporting to describe in detail and lay out the correct sequence of alchemical procedures, as an ordinal would do for the Church's liturgical year.<sup>47</sup> Norton comments extensively on his choice of writing in plain English, and Joyce's references to the treatise thus inscribe Shem's distillation of indelible ink in the medieval debate on Latin and vernacular as alternative languages, each with its own audience, subject-matter, specific nature and hierarchic values. I have discussed elsewhere how Joyce alludes in this episode to Dante's project of elevating his *vulgare* to a standard of perfection.<sup>48</sup> One

could reasonably assume that Shem's adoption of Norton's homology between his language and the alchemical processes he describes signifies that the poet can transcend linguistic and artistic limitations by transforming his language into the 'gold' of eternal art. But there is a sting in both tales.

In the *Prohemium* Norton addresses his book to 'laymen' and 'clerkis also' (ll. 2-3), saying that it 'shuld al commyn peple teche' (l. 58), and that it is therefore written in 'playne and comon speche' (l. 59). At the end of the treatise, Norton reiterates these concepts, inviting his readers not to marvel that this book is written in plain English ('Mervaile not lordis, ne ye frendis all, | Whi so noble science as all men this arte call | Is here sett owte in englishe blonte & rude', ll. 3087-89), as his purpose is 'to teche a multitude of rude peple' (ll. 3090-91) the truth of alchemy, and prevent them from falling into poverty through its unwise practice.

Norton invites readers to be diffident of ancient books, as they are written in an obscure language that will confuse and deceive (or simply bore) many (ll. 62-85). This is a radical claim: Latin and Greek authorities are derided, and the traditional topos of *translation studii* is undermined; yet the sources Norton condemns are also the ones from which he is drawing his knowledge. A curious dynamic is being established in the opposition between his 'comon speche' (l. 59) and the writing of the 'many auctours' (l. 70) of the past, whereby Latin is tagged as deceitful, while the vernacular offers truths of a material and spiritual kind. Norton qualifies English both as the common, base metal that his own alchemical / linguistic practice can turn into gold, and as the best language that can describe such process. But there is a bigger paradox. The 'common speech' is praised because of its accessibility, yet Norton is at pains to discourage almost anyone

who is not already wise and educated from approaching the science. He warns future editors about changing anything in his words because where some may not see any meaning, wiser men may find ‘selcouth priviyte’ (marvellous secrets), and even changing a syllable may make the book unprofitable (ll. 170-75). In other words, while Norton equates his vernacular with an alchemical practice that needs to be followed verbatim and exactly (like an ordinal) in order to effect the transformation of a ‘rude’ material into precious knowledge, the simultaneous emphasis on the secret meaning of his words discredits the promised accessibility to the knowledge of alchemy. Such promise is also restricted from the start by the long list of exclusions of all those that would do better not to meddle with it; by the warning represented by the examples of failed attempts with disastrous consequences; and, implicitly, by the difficult language employed (including some key passages in Latin) that makes the proffered information less accessible. Norton further explains that practitioners need God’s ‘grace’, must be honest, and should have money (ll. 120-25). The multitudes who this book promises to help dwindle by the line, and a text that claims to be a *translatio* of knowledge and of power (economical as well as spiritual and scientific) through the common speech for the benefit of the laymen ends up being the defence of an exclusive, ‘elitist’ access to it.

Shem’s production of the alchemical ink is described in Latin, with short English interpolations that appear to offer the English (vernacular, ‘vulgar’) translations of the activity for the ‘lay’ person (‘(Highly prosy, crap in his hand, sorry!) [...] (did a piss, says he was dejected, asks to be exonerated)’, *FW* 185.17-18; 23). Despite Shem’s aspirations of transcendence for his ‘indelible ink’, the language in which his creative process is ‘cloaked up’ (*FW* 185.09) remains inescapably bilingual (and surrounded by

an inescapably multilingual context), and the ‘translations’, while capturing the essence of the operation, set up a new and different meaning which echoes but fails to translate the original language – see for example the way the Latin ‘*divi Orionis*’ is ‘translated’ into the convincingly Irish sounding, but not quite authentic, brand name ‘O’Ryan’: ‘(faked O’Ryan’s, the indelible ink)’ (*FW* 185.25-26).

The interpolated Latin passage with its own English interpolations raises further interesting questions. The fact that it is written in Latin inscribes it in the tradition of an ancient practice that wishes to be seen as simultaneously scientific and hermetic, and it also reproduces Norton’s decision to leave some key passages of alchemical procedure in Latin (despite his promise to open up the discipline’s hermeticism). It also evokes the custom of leaving risqué passages ‘cloaked up’ in a foreign tongue or difficult language, so as not to make it accessible to the less educated, who are just like children that can only be addressed in the simple language of the vernacular; at the same time, the scurrilous English interpolations within the Latin passage reverse precisely this custom. Examples of it can be found in Gibbon’s *Autobiography* (‘My English text is chaste, and all licentious passages are left in the obscurity of a learned language’)<sup>49</sup> and in J. M. Rigg’s 1906 translation of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, which leaves the most daring passages in the original Italian, but collects their translations, together with explicit illustrations of the sexiest tales, in a separate folder that husbands and fathers can safely lock away to protect the innocence of their families.<sup>50</sup>

In Gibbon’s case, untranslated or difficult language is used to control access to knowledge, and the assumption behind this practice is that the educated will have the intellectual ability to understand, discriminate, and therefore not be corrupted while the

more vulnerable will be 'protected' by their ignorance. Rigg's 'bilingual' translation of Boccaccio has different implications: it divides its readership not along the line of competence but through the use of a 'crib' for the men (or those who have purchased or control access to the book), as the English translation of the sensitive passages is available, though it can be kept hidden. The assumption seems to be that men are intrinsically not in need of protection from corruption, and they are therefore not expected to possess the superior learning: they can just pretend to have it. Knowledge is transferred selectively through the access to the different versions. Translation here *is* a means of empowerment, but it is the key to the right drawer, rather than to the right language, that grants access and makes all the difference. The irony in all this is that Boccaccio's declared intent was to entertain women with tales written in a vernacular language they could understand and enjoy, while men were occupied in other pursuits, such as war or commerce. Rigg's Edwardian translation betrays the medieval author's intention by restricting access from those for whom it had been written.

#### The forged cheque of the vernacular

The question of accessibility vs. elitism is thus clearly more complex than simply one of easy vs. difficult language or erudite references. Eliot's presentation of Dante's medieval idiom as a universal common tongue of easy imitability and translatability because of its proximity to Latin, ignores the widespread and vivacious medieval debates on the nature of language and on linguistic relationships, and reverses the more traditional association of 'common speech' with the vernacular. The construction of

medieval language as a homogeneous, coherent whole that can be carried over into modernity with little or no adaptation is one of the foundations on which Eliot's overbearing desire for a transcendent universality rests. Pound's aim is broadly the same: a *renovatio* of modernity's language, in which the study of new medieval languages and literatures can play an effective part. In his greater awareness of linguistic alternatives, Pound acknowledges the impossibility of stabilizing a language so as to effect a satisfactory translation, and the relationship between the present and the past remains one of dynamic and continued rewriting and linguistic investigation. Although, as I have tried to show, Pound's translations place him much closer to the medieval practice than he probably realized, his construction of a Romance literature unified by a common Spirit that transcends linguistic and intellectual differences still leads to a distorted view of the Middle Ages and of the possibility of its relation to modernity. Ultimately, neither Eliot nor Pound can detach themselves from the (Victorian) vision of 'the medieval' as a coherent and undivided intellectual unity.

In exposing the frequent ambiguity implicit in the rhetoric of *renovatio* and of 'natural' languages, Joyce not only dismisses the myth of universality, but – through his exploration of the origins of such rhetoric and its contemporary use – he also shows the dangers inherent in the myth of the vernacular, and the ultimate exclusionary nature of a linguistic politics that claims to empower the 'common people' through an ideal of linguistic purity. So how does one mediate between familiar and foreign language, between the affective relationship to one's tongue and the need to avoid the pitfall of linguistic mythification? Stephen's solution to 'fly' to Paris carries ambivalent implications, as the artist's leaving Ireland may align him with the figure of the 'national

poet of Ireland' that had chosen the imperial capital as his home – or does this choice after all bring him closer to Davin's vague desire to serve in the foreign legion of France, a legion in this case peopled by the bohemian, anticonformist circle of artists (such as Wilde)? The only way to negotiate between the emotive regard for the language and its ideological use rests for Joyce in turning all 'familiar' language into a 'foreign' one that surprises, does not fall into habit, and therefore asks its speaker to listen, 'multaphoniaksically', to the multiplicity of its voices. Stephen's artistic mission 'to forge [...] the uncreated conscience of [his] race' at the end of *A Portrait* (P 253) is a direct result of his realisation of the necessity of this permanent, sub- and per-verting 'intra-linguistic' translation that can negotiate between his language and that of the English dean of studies, where the same words become the symptoms of linguistic, cultural, social, political dispossession. (The dispossession is of course that of the conquered, but there is a touch of compassion in Stephen's reluctant recognition that the English dean too, 'a poor Englishman in Ireland' (P 189), is denied a comfortable linguistic identity by the colonial asymmetry.) Does this emphasis on the necessity of what I have just called a 'permanent, sub- and per-verting intra-linguistic translation' solve the problem of the old Irish peasant at the bar? Certainly not. Although the tension between alternative languages remains yet again ultimately unresolved, Joyce's response is different from Eliot's or Pound's because it refrains from searching for a cure in the artificial (and impossible) transposition of an idealised (and false) healing medieval homogeneity into the modern. Instead, it chooses to focus on the historical conditions that are the cause of the modern linguistic, cultural and political asymmetry, and acknowledges that the discourse about linguistic difference has always constituted a theatre for cultural, political

and ideological battles. Stephen's forging of the new conscience of his race is thus indeed equivalent to a form of translation, as linguistic practice and as transferral or reclaiming of power; but Joyce warns of the dangers inherent in the uncritical, ideological investment in such forging, since its result can turn out to be nothing more than an 'epical forged cheque' (*FW* 181.16) that can bounce at any time.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> See for example Dominic Manganiello, *T. S. Eliot and Dante* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1989); Stuart Y. McDougal, *Ezra Pound and the Troubadour Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); James J. Wilhelm, *Dante and Pound: The Epic of Judgement* (Orono: University Press of Maine, 1974); Georg M. Gugelberger, *Ezra Pound's Medievalism* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1978); Stephen Sicari, *Pound's Epic Ambition: Dante and the Modern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); *Dante e Pound*, ed. by Maria Luisa Ardizzone and Mario Luzi (Ravenna: Longo, 1998); William T. Noon, *Joyce and Aquinas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Mary T. Reynolds, *Joyce and Dante: The Shaping Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Umberto Eco, *The Middle Ages of James Joyce: The Aesthetic of Chaosmos* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989); Lucia Boldrini, *Joyce, Dante and the Poetics of Literary Relations: Language and Meaning in Finnegans Wake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); *Medieval Joyce*, ed. by Lucia Boldrini (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, forthcoming (2002)); Jennifer M. Fraser, *Dyptich: Dante / Joyce. Dynamics of Literary Initiation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, forthcoming (2002)).

<sup>3</sup> For Pound the bibliography is very large; see for instance J. P. Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius: A Study in Creative Translation* (London: Faber, 1964); Charlotte Ward, *Pound's Translations of Arnaut Daniel* (New York: Garland, 1990). As well as chapters in books listed in the previous footnote, see also those in *Ezra Pound and Poetic Influence*, ed. by Helen M. Dennis (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), and the many articles in *Paideuma: A Journal Devoted to Ezra Pound Scholarship*. For Joyce see

in particular Fritz Senn, *Joyce's Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation*, ed. by John Paul Riquelme (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli, 'Beyond Translation: Italian Rewritings of *Finnegans Wake*', *Joyce Studies Annual* 1 (1990), 142-61; Laurent Milesi, 'Finnegans Wake: The Obliquity of Translation', in *Joyce in the Hibernian Metropolis*, ed. by Morris Beja and David Norris (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1996), pp. 279-89; and the many articles in the *James Joyce Quarterly*, including the special section 'Joyce and Translation' in vol. 27, 3 (Spring 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Dante's championing of the vernacular in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, written in Latin, and his almost contemporaneous assertion of the superiority of Latin in the *Convivio*, written in Italian, is perhaps one of the most striking examples of such tightrope walking. *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor and Ruth Evans (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999) offers a very comprehensive selection of Middle English vernacular writing, with useful annotations of the texts and excellent discussions of the issues they raise.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 69

<sup>6</sup> In *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn (London: Faber, 1951), pp. 237-77. Hereafter, *SE* followed by page number. Eliot had already published an essay by the same title in 1920. See *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1950), pp. 159-71.

<sup>7</sup> The *De vulgari eloquentia* claims superiority of language of 'sí' (Italian) over 'oil' (French) and 'oc' (Provençal) on the grounds that it is more similar to Latin, and Eliot claims that Dante's Italian is closer to Latin than, and therefore superior to, Villon's

French and Chaucer's English. Dante describes Latin as a language that enables different people after Babel to communicate through time and space, and tries to forge his *vulgare illustre* as the language of Italy that can unify and transcend its many dialects; this seems reflected in Eliot's argument on Latin's universality and Dante's common speech.

However, Latin was for Dante an artificial language whose proximity to Italian was not due to the latter's derivation from the former, but on the fact that Latin must have been modelled on Italian. I discuss Dante's theories in relation to Joyce's in *Joyce, Dante* (esp. chapters 2 and 3).

<sup>8</sup> I have discussed these aspects and their relevance to modernism in *Joyce, Dante*, chapter 4.

<sup>9</sup> Some have credited these with reviving Guido's fortunes in Italy. See Georg M. Gugelberger, 'The Secularization of "Love" to a Poetic Metaphor: Cavalcanti, Center of Pound's Medievalism', *Paideuma* 2 (1973), 159-73 (pp. 161-62).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. 'Cavalcanti', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954), pp. 149-200 (pp. 173-91). Hereafter *LE* followed by page number. This essay was published in *Make it New* in 1934 but, as a footnote to the title says, 'must be dated 1910-1931' (*LE* 149).

<sup>11</sup> Paolo Cerchi, 'Pound and *The Spirit of Romance*', in *Dante e Pound*, ed. by M. L. Ardizzone and M. Luzi, pp. 47-61 (p. 50). Cerchi's discussion of this point is more wide-ranging than I can represent here, and takes up the contrast between French and German philology and the nationalist substratum of contemporary philological studies.

<sup>12</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (Revised edition, London: Peter Owen, 1952), p. 7. Hereafter *SR* and page number.

<sup>13</sup> *The New Jerusalem Bible, Acts, 2:4*

<sup>14</sup> In fact, 842. In the Oath of Strasbourg the brothers Louis the German and Charles the Bald, rulers of the eastern and western Frankish kingdoms, swore joint opposition to their elder brother, the Emperor Lothair I, each making their oath in the language of the other's followers.

<sup>15</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ridotto a miglior lezione e commentato da G. Busnelli e G. Vandelli. Con introduzione di Michele Barbi. Seconda edizione con appendice di aggiornamento a cura di Enzo Antonio Quaglio (Florence: Le Monnier, 1964), I.xiii.12, my translation.

<sup>16</sup> In the 1910 Introduction to the 'Cavalcanti Poems' Pound writes, 'It is conceivable the poetry of a far-off time or place requires a translation not only of word and spirit, but "of accompaniment", that is, that the modern audience must in some measure be made aware of the mental content of the older audience, and of what these others drew from certain fashions of thought and speech.' *The Translations of Ezra Pound*, ed. by Hugh Kenner, 2nd edn (London: Faber, 1970), p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. the work of Rita Copeland, esp. 'Rhetoric and Vernacular Translation in the Middle Ages', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 9 (1987), 41-75; 'The Fortunes of "non verbum pro verbo": or, why Jerome is not a Ciceronian', in *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Roger Ellis (Cambridge: Brewer: 1989), pp. 15-35; and *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). See also the collections of essays in *The Medieval Translator* series, esp. the 1989 volume cited above and *The Medieval Translator* 4, ed. by R. Ellis and Ruth Evans (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994); and the work of Jeanette Beer in *Studies in Medieval Culture*, esp. the edited volumes *Translation and the Transmission*

of *Culture 1300-1600*, ed. with K. Lloyd-Jones (vol. 35 (1995)), and *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages* (vol. 38 (1997)).

<sup>18</sup> Copeland, 'The Fortunes of "non verbum pro verbo"', p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> See Giancarlo Folena, '“Volgarizzare” e “tradurre”', in *La traduzione: saggi e studi* (Trieste: Lint, 1973), pp. 57-120.

<sup>20</sup> Folena, "Volgarizzare" e "tradurre", p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> R. Ellis, Introduction, *The Medieval Translator* (1989), pp. 1-14 (pp. 3-4).

<sup>22</sup> See J. D. Burnley, 'Late medieval English translation: types and reflections', in Ellis ed., *The Medieval Translator* (1989), pp. 37-53 (p. 48).

<sup>23</sup> 'Rhetoric and Vernacular Translation', p. 62.

<sup>24</sup> *The Translations of Ezra Pound*, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Pound's Prefaces to the *Some Imagist Poets* anthologies of 1915 and 1916 and 'A Few Don'ts By An Imagiste'; all these are reprinted in *Imagist Poetry*, ed. by Peter Jones (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 130-40. On Pound's imagist agenda in *The Spirit of Romance* see Cerchi, 'Pound and *The Spirit of Romance*', esp. pp. 52-53 and 60-61. On Pound's idea of art as 'carving' see Richard Humphreys, Introduction, *Pound's Artist: Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts in London, Paris and Italy* (London: The Tate Gallery, 1985), pp. 13-23 (pp. 18-19).

<sup>26</sup> See Cerchi, Pound and *The Spirit of Romance*', pp. 51-53.

<sup>27</sup> The 'Praefatio' of *The Spirit of Romance* more than smacks of Carlyle: 'The history of an art is the history of masterwork, not of failures, or mediocrity. [...] The study of literature is hero-worship' (SR p. 7).

<sup>28</sup> See Pound's irritated attribution of the *Cantos*' lack of coherence to modernity's failure to identify a coherent philosophy comparable to the medieval: 'Don't have an Aquinas map. Aquinas not valid now.' *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, ed. D.D.

Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 323. On this, in relation to Joyce's different conception and use of the medieval, see Reed Way Dasenbrock and Ray Mines, "'Quella vista nova': Dante, Mathematics, and the Ending of *Ulysses*", in *Medieval Joyce*, ed. by L. Boldrini, pp. 73-85.

<sup>29</sup> 'James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*. Text, Criticism and Notes by Chester G. Anderson (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. 189. Hereafter *P* followed by page number.

<sup>30</sup> See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1953), p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Karlheinz Stierle, 'Translatio Studii and Renaissance: From Vertical to Horizontal Translation', in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, ed. by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 55-67 (p. 57).

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Stierle, 'Translatio Studii and Renaissance', p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> Stierle, 'Translatio Studii and Renaissance', p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> James Joyce, 'The Dead', in *Dubliners*, ed. by Robert Scholes in consultation with Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1967), p. 189. Hereafter *D* followed by page number.

<sup>35</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber, 1939, 1950), p. 178.06-07. Hereafter *FW* followed by page and line number.

<sup>36</sup> Roland McHugh, *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*, 2nd edn (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 178.

<sup>37</sup> James Joyce, 'Ireland at the Bar' (1907), in *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, ed. by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), pp. 197-200. Hereafter *CW* and page number.

<sup>38</sup> See Laurent Milesi, 'L'idome babélien de *Finnegans Wake*: Recherches thématiques dans une perspective génétique', in *Genèse de babel: Joyce et la création*, ed. by Claude Jacquet (Paris: CNRS, 1985), pp. 155-215; and 'Finnegans Wake: The Obliquity of Translation'.

<sup>39</sup> Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, Ridotto a miglior lezione, commentato e tradotto da A. Marigo, con introduzione, analisi metrica della canzone, studio della lingua e glossario. Terza edizione con appendice di aggiornamento a cura di P.G. Ricci (Florence: Le Monnier, 1957), I.i, 2, my translation.

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Watson, 'Conceptions of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God', in *New Medieval Literatures*, ed. by Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland and David Lawton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 85-124 (p. 90).

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Watson, 'Conceptions of the Word', p. 94.

<sup>42</sup> Watson, 'Conceptions of the Word', p. 95.

<sup>43</sup> See Joyce, 'Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages', *CW* 153-74 (p. 161).

<sup>44</sup> The Italian text, first published in *Il Piccolo della Sera* in 1907, can be read in James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical and Political Writing*, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by Kevin Barry, Translations from the Italian by Conor Deane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 244-59 (p. 258).

<sup>45</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Bodley Head, 1937), p. 12. Hereafter *U* followed by page number.

<sup>46</sup> In *A Portrait* Stephen aspires to the role of 'priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life' (*P* 221). In *Stephen Hero* Stephen defines epiphany as 'a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture, or in a memorable phase of the mind itself.'

James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. by Theodore Spencer, rev. edn by John. J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon (London: Paladin, 1991), p. 216.

<sup>47</sup> *Thomas Norton's 'Ordinal of Alchemy'*, ed. by John Reidy. Early English Text Society No. 272 (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). Subsequent line references will appear parenthetically in the text. *Finnegans Wake* alludes to this fifteenth-century treatise for instance in 'Let manner and matter of this [...] be cloaked up in the language of blushfed porporates that an Anglican ordinal, not reading his own rude dunsky tunga [...] ' (*FW* 185.09-11); see also the *Ordinall's* 'englishe blonte & rude' (l. 3089), which turns out in fact to be a difficult language cloaking up a complex, secretive science; among other echoes compare Norton's 'terram fructiferam' in the interjected Latin passage (between ll. 1246 and 1247) with the *Wake's* 'terram viviparam' (*FW* 185.14) in the passage written in Latin to describe the production of the alchemical ink.

<sup>48</sup> In *Joyce, Dante*, esp. chapter 3, 'Distilling vulgar matter'; and 'Ex sterco Dantis: Dante's Post-Babelian Linguistics in the *Wake*', in *James Joyce and the Difference of Language*, ed. by Laurent Milesi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>49</sup> Edward Gibbon, *Autobiography* (London: Macmillan, 1930), pp. 173-74.

<sup>50</sup> *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio*, faithfully translated by J. M. Rigg; with illustrations by Louis Chalon (London: Henry F. Bumpus, 1906).