

LA QUESTIONE ROMANTICA: TRANSLATION AND REVOLUTION (2017)

EDITORIALE – Patrick Leech

There should be no need to labour the point that the enlightenment and revolutionary period in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was an internationalist one. At least since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a general acceptance of the facts that a full understanding of the French revolution requires a wide perspective, a certain distance from the spectacular events of Paris and careful attention to the commonalities with other revolutionary or reform movements. Thus R.R. Palmer's «democratic revolution» put the French experience and the revolt of American colonies in the same analytical framework, and the French historian Jacques Godechot gave an «Atlantic» vision of the French revolution which to some extent foreshadowed the later growth of Atlantic Studies [PALMER 1959, GODECHOT 1971, BAILY 2005]. more recently, the social and political upheavals of the late eighteenth century have been seen as the result of the long shadow of a pan-European «radical enlightenment» rooted in the thought of Baruch Spinoza, Pierre Bayle, Baron d'Holbach, Denis Diderot and others, a democratic tradition that has been side-lined in many accounts of early modern philosophy [ISRAEL 2001, 2006, 2011, 2015]. The articulation of enlightenment thought in general in a variety of different national contexts throughout Europe has been the focus of attention since the work of Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich [1981]. Maintaining a sense of an overall and identifiable entity called 'enlightenment' for example, John Robertson has usefully traced the links between its Scottish and Neapolitan varieties [ROBERTSON 2005]. Other work has similarly emphasized the extent to which the enlightenment was premised on an international and cosmopolitan outlook [SCRIVENER 2007].

This international perspective in studies of the enlightenment and the revolutionary period presupposes mobility of texts and people: ideas and behaviour can be seen manifesting themselves in different contexts from those in which they originally appeared. The movement of ideas from one cultural and linguistic context to another inevitably involves translation. Most major texts of the revolutionary period found immediate reception in other cultures through translation. The English debate over the French Revolution, for example, found a ready audience, through translation, in Paris. Edmund Burke's fundamental counterrevolutionary text *Reflections on the revolution in France* (1790) was translated into French by a councilor of the Paris Parlement, Pierre Gaétan Dupont [GODECHOT 1972]. Thomas Paine's rebuttal, *Rights of Man* (1791), was translated and republished in the same year in Paris with a preface by the author for the French edition [PAINE 1791]. Migrants too are vectors through whom cultures are 'translated'. The revolutionary period saw a large number of migrating individuals: aristocratic émigrés fleeing France as well as enthusiasts and supporters of the revolution such as Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft who moved to Paris. Much work has been carried out on the transnational experiences of many of the protagonists of the era including, for example, the journalistic activity in the pre-revolutionary period of Jacques-Pierre Brissot in England [DARNTON 1968], the activity of French journalists in exile in Britain [BURROWS 2000] and the social and literary relations of Helen Maria Williams in Paris [KENNEDY 2002]. But there has been little direct focus either on the specificities of translated texts (modifications, paratextual elements, particular translational choices) or on the translators themselves, their motivations, the particular readership they were translating for and so on.

This issue of *La Questione Romantica* aims to be a first step in a process of focusing attention on the movements of ideas in translated texts and on translators working in the revolutionary period. It pays attention not only to the texts themselves but also to context – to translators' aims and strategies, to editorial policies and productive processes, to readership. The articles collected here make no claim to any general statement but rather hope to shed light on the movement of ideas and information from one culture to another in a number of specific cases.

The opening essay, by Raffaella Tonin, charts the translation of Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764) into Spanish. It focuses on the ways in which this fundamental work of the European enlightenment, far from being a stable text, was heavily dependent on the different contexts of its translations into French by the Abbé Morellet, and into Spanish by Juan Antonio de Las Casas and later by Juan Rivera. This emerges in particular from the careful analysis of the prefaces to the translations. Rivera's, in particular, makes it clear that the political context of his translation, the Spanish *trienio liberal* of 1820-23, was fundamental in his choice of text and methodology. The translation, in fact, constituted a precise act of intervention in the debate over justice which was one of the particular characteristics of this brief liberal regime. A picture of a strongly 'activist' translator emerges (cfr. MILTON and BANDIA 2009; BAKER 2015), one in which Rivera's own political militancy and commitment was a major determinant of his translational activity.

Mary Wollstonecraft's translations for Joseph Johnson's *Analytical Review*, the subject of the second article, by Serena Vantin, takes us to the specific context of British radical publishing in the 1790s. The *Analytical Review* had a marked cosmopolitan intention [cfr. SCRIVENER 2007, pp. 56-66] and Wollstonecraft's translations from French but also German and Dutch were functional to this overall aim. The editorial context, here, is paramount – the demand on the part of an English readership for current literary news from the continent but also of translated editions of the work of important figures such as the former French minister of finance Jacques Necker. The translational activity of Wollstonecraft also was important to her own growth as an intellectual, Vantin argues, enabling her to refine both her own particular approach to political and social rights and her literary style.

Sylvie Kleiman's study of the translational activity of Theobald Wolfe Tone in Paris during his period in the 1790s as a lobbyist for the cause of Irish independence takes us to a realm of translation which is far removed from literary contexts and into one where practical political and administrative concerns were the principal determinant of translation, in particular regarding the relations of the French Directorate with Ireland. Tone, subsequently to become «pantheonised» as a nationalist hero after his death in the rebellion of 1798, is here found struggling with his imperfect French, assisted by a Bureau de Traduction whose particular mission was to aid the French Directorate to promote itself abroad and to interact with potential allies such as the United Irishmen. The day to day activity of translation can be glimpsed here as a crucial element for those in revolutionary circles who worked actively within an international political context.

The extent to which this context was dominant in the Ireland of the 1790s is the subject of the next essay by Patrick Leech. This provides an overview of the material translated from French which appeared in significant quantities in a short-lived tri-weekly newspaper entitled *The Press*, edited by the aristocratic republican and United Irishman Arthur O'Connor. The general interest in French affairs demonstrated in the newspaper provides an important backdrop to the activity of Wolfe Tone and others in Paris: their work of lobbying was not an isolated political and strategic activity but rather part of a widespread interest and «affection» for French culture and politics. That an Irish newspaper could devote such attention to French affairs demonstrates the extent to which the political conjunction was perceived to be of international and not simply national significance, bearing witness once again to the «Atlantic» nature of the revolutionary period.

These essays exemplify, then, both the international and cosmopolitan frames in which revolutions were taking place and in which those involved in one way or other as political actors or interested spectators operated. These frames imply the transfer of meanings and ideas from one 'original' context to another, by means of translation. This awareness of specific national and cultural contexts, of the need to transfer ideas and meanings from one linguistic context to another, of the omnipresent fact of translation and the problems associated with this, dovetails with a growing sense of the general nature of translation, or in other words, an awareness that the act of translation is merely a particularly evident case of the complexities involved in transferring meaning, through language, from one context to another. This

awareness of the general nature of translation can be found in approaches to translation characterizing romanticism, and is the focus of the final article, by Cesare Giacobazzi, which traces this approach in the work of Schleiermacher and Benjamin. Translation, a ubiquitous if neglected activity of the revolutionary period, emerges as a general paradigm for the production and evolution of meaning. The centrality of translation to the revolutionary period, in this reading, is no more than a particularly visible example of a general activity of translation, to be encountered during any act of speech or writing involving, as it does, the transformation of a given sense into another dependent on the unique context of its utterance. The variety of contents we have seen influencing the movement of ideas in the revolutionary period in a cosmopolitan and international perspective turn out to be normal and unexceptional parameters of human communication.

The essay in this issue emphasises, then, the importance of context in the analysis of translational activity. The final essay provides theoretical support for this emphasis. The others, instead, focus on specific contexts or translational activity: the use of translation for a political purpose, translation as a means of deepening an Anglophone readership's awareness of literary and philosophical developments in Europe, the negotiation of meanings in the context of political lobbying and the general attention to news from France in Ireland in the 1790s. All might be seen as fitting within an overall framework of «thick description» in translation studies as proposed by Theo Hermans, one which sees translation as a highly visible activity «counteracting the illusion of transparency or neutral description» [HERMANS 2003, p.387].

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