

**Professor Matthew Reynolds** (Oxford University) was invited to take part in a seminar introducing a new IDEA axis entitled "transcultural and cross-border dynamics (circulation, translation and reception)". The latter aims at questioning the concept of identity through the analysis of the multiple exchanges, be they concrete or abstract, cultural or linguistic, taking place between English-speaking countries or within Europe.



Professor Matthew Reynolds, the founder and director of the Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation programme (OCCT; <http://www.occt.ox.ac.uk/>), seemed to be the ideal conference speaker to open up the debate and engage in discussions about cross-border exchanges. He is interested in how literature germinates and crosses languages; in translation as a creative process, especially as it involves Italian, French, the classics and the many languages of English; in the grounds and purposes of literary criticism; in writing about visual art; and in the practice of fiction. He has written many books on the topic, including *The Poetry of Translation: From Chaucer & Petrarch to Homer & Logue* (2011), *Likenesses: Translation, Illustration, Interpretation* (2013), and he has just finished *Translation: A Very Short Introduction* for Oxford University Press (OUP), which should come out in October 2016. He is now working on *Translationality: Literature Across Languages* for OUP's "21st Century Approaches series". Matthew has also developed a new concept which he has called "**prismatic translation**" and which he wanted to present to the audience on March, 15th at Lorraine University (Nancy).

Matthew decided to adapt his talk to the audience and therefore switch from English into French and vice versa, taking into account the place where he is delivering his speech, i.e. the audience made up of English- and French-speaking listeners, but also adapting his talk so that his language serves the contents of his speech. His paper questioned the language we all use in an academic context especially when dealing with comparative/ transnational literature. Matthew remembered that at the SFLGC congress in Amiens last autumn, there was a lot of "unhappiness about the spread of English as an international academic language", and the feeling that academics had "to inhabit a standardised international English language". He shared his anxiety about the languages we talk about and the languages which we talk about them in, especially when talking about translation and transnational multilingual writing. He shared his own uneasiness concerning the nature of his mother tongue, English, as an international language. This status imposes a standardisation of the language which we speak in. It can indeed appear paradoxical, if not contradictory, to talk and think about translation in one imposed international language, without the process of translation being visible in the critical academic discourse. The latter often does not take into account the various varieties of English. Matthew quoted a line from Antoine Berman which invites us to open up to the other through our spoken and written discourse: "l'essence de la traduction est d'être ouverture, métissage, décentrement" (quotation 1 on the handout). Matthew wished to focus on this "translational space where language differences are not necessarily problems to be overcome but perhaps resources to think with" ("des ressources pour la pensée"). He wanted to

foreground the transnationality of the space we were in here; hence his choice to speak a kind of "franglais". This gesture of "métissage", "décentrement" connects with his topic, prismatic translation. He reminded us of the old established model of translation seen as transfer (from one language to another). This approach recognises that there is always a variety of possible translations but it tends to downplay it by contrast with the idea of the ideal one translation/ of the ideal best translation (in particular contexts, for specific purposes). This singularity is linked to the idea that people speak a/one language (singular). Yet, as soon as you say that people speak languages (rather than a language), then the variety of possible translations can no longer be regulated in this way. The language which people speak can be a mix of languages (cf. globalisation) depending on the region you come from, your gender, social identity etc...The concept of prismatic translation wishes to foreground the multiplicity which translation always generates. **The aim of this talk which fell into three parts was to highlight the fact that multiplicity can be a good thing (multiplicity should be brought to the centre of our thinking of translation and our practice of it). If we value multiplicity, then the translation process is less like a channel and more like a prism (to use a metaphor).**



\* He started his development by giving us a survey of the landscape of translation (places where multiplicity generated by translation become visible) through examples of novels, plays, newspaper articles which display a prism of multiple languages. Some do try and gather versions in many languages.

(cf. The Bordeaux University Press collection "Translations" Pensées de la Traduction [http://www.lcdpu.fr/collections/?collection\\_id=2565](http://www.lcdpu.fr/collections/?collection_id=2565); and Pratiques de la Traduction [http://www.lcdpu.fr/collections/?collection\\_id=1980](http://www.lcdpu.fr/collections/?collection_id=1980)); international organisations (European Union, Europa) cf. quotation 3 on the handout

After mentioning the variety of meanings through translation opening up and being disciplined by the institution, he moved on to the studies of multiple translations of the same text (ex: Dante; versions of Dante into English). Yet, most of the time they are ranged in a chronological order, which limits the way we see the translations. They are viewed through a time prism, or prison...); whereas circumstances, publishers, the translators' imagination and chance have played a part in the translation. Time can only partly account for the changes in translation

\* Following this observation, Matthew questioned our translation practices. Time is thus often used as a reason for a new translation (cf. quotation 4 on the handout). He pointed at the paradoxical statement made by Rosamund Bartlett. She praised the fact that a translation gives us the flavour of the era but that it is rooted in the time period when it was written and therefore quickly outdated. (it is criticised for having mistakes and being stuck in the past, while this very same past is praised). This is not true according to Matthew Reynolds.

\* "So why do people say that translations get stuck in the past in a way that originals don't?" He asked. Matthew listed a couple of reasons:

-the publishing market (rhetoric needed by publishers and translators to justify new translations: like cheese and meat: "date limite de consommation").

-translations create an impetus towards more translations (une tendance). A translation is a challenge for another translator. Yet, to justify a new translation, you have to invoke time and mistakes (not enough to say you are writing a different one just because it is good to have variations and differences).

And yet, these rigid/ harsh claims are in contradiction with what Bartlett said about the fact that "foreign works of literature need the periodic transfusion of new translations in the way that musical compositions need to be continually re-interpreted" (plays and poems are perhaps more often translated than novels). Translations should be able to exist alongside one another, without transplanting them. Multiplicity should be encouraged rather than criticised.

I personally liked the "transfusion" image ("trans-" evoking exchanges, and "fusion", the merging of languages, the merging of translated texts without taking time into account; transfusion is also linked to blood, to regeneration, to reanimation, to making something alive again). Matthew Reynolds's project seems to be summed up by the word "transfusion" as he seeks to bring translations (whenever they date from, and whoever has written them) back to life, to reanimate them. "Prismatic translation" wishes to question this sort of regime and asserts that different translations can be worth reading just because they are different (they are no replacement of former translations). Alternatives are seen as equally good, which is why Matthew Reynolds places a lot of hopes in the digital humanities. The readers could be given various versions of a text, whereas the print industry tends to select one version only.

The audience asked a lot of questions on the future of published texts in a digital age (which increases translation possibilities), on the maybe necessary education of the readers, and on the academic applications of these new interpretations of translation (how do you apply these ideas in a translation class where students expect "a sample translation"?).



This seminar opened up the debate on translation and transnational multilingual writing from a **theoretical perspective**. The "transcultural and cross-border dynamics (circulation, translation and reception)" axis will then focus on the reception of one particular author, Mary Shelley, in Europe, in order to apply the concept and analyse it through a specific literary work.