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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2018
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-74430-1 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-18116-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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A New Translation of Proust

Dominique Jullien

The latest English translation of Marcel Proust's novel was published in England in 2002 under the title *In Search of Lost Time*. This essay will focus on the first volume, variously titled *Swann's Way* or *The Way by Swann's* (more on this variation later), translated by the award-winning translator, poet and short story writer, Lydia Davis. The translation is the collective work of seven translators distributed across the English-speaking world, and the general editor is Christopher Prendergast, himself a well-known scholar of 19th century French literature at King's College, Cambridge.[1] This important translation offers a good case study for several characteristic issues of translation studies. I will first look at the curious legal conundrum plaguing the American edition, which fell prey to the infamous Mickey Mouse Law. Next, given that the new translation was hailed as a Proust for our time, I will discuss some hypotheses regarding the periodic retranslation of the classics. Further, comparing the titles of the volumes—translated literally in the new Penguin version, in contrast to the poetic but unfaithful translations by Scott Moncrieff—leads to some interesting paradoxes on literalness. Surprisingly, these coincide with the ones thematized by Proust himself in the second Balbec episode of *Sodom and Gomorrah*. Lastly I will turn to symbiotic relations between translating and writing, exploring how Lydia Davis's choices as a translator intersect and resonate with her work as a writer, whose terse and minimalist style harks back to Samuel Beckett rather than to the ample and melodious Marcel Proust.

Marcel Proust vs. Mickey Mouse

In order better to contextualize the new Penguin translation, it may be useful to recall the main facts in the history of English translations of Proust's novel. The first English translation was the work of Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff (1889–1930), beginning in 1922 (when Proust was in the last year of his life) until his own death in 1930, with the last volume completed by Sydney Schiff, a friend of Proust's, writing under the pseudonym Stephen Hudson. Proust having died without correcting much of his unfinished

book, this first translation, entitled by Scott Moncrieff *Remembrance of Things Past*, was necessarily based on a very imperfect text—what Samuel Beckett called "the abominable edition of the NRF."[2] Later, Terence Kilmartin published a revised version of this translation on the basis of the first scholarly edition of the Pléiade (1954), which relied on a much better knowledge of both texts and variants. This edition, in three volumes, is still the most common for Anglophone readers.[3] A few years later, another revision by Dennis Joseph Enright appeared in six volumes, based on the second scholarly edition, the new Pléiade procured in 1987 by the great Proust scholar Jean-Yves Tadié and his formidable team of geneticists. The so-called "Enright six-pack" changed the title to the literal *In Search of Lost Time*.[4] The new Penguin translation is also based on the 1987 Pléiade, and contrary to the earlier ones, it is an entirely new translation, not a new revision of the Scott Moncrieff version. Its collective method is also innovative: The seven translators worked independently with a minimum of interaction and agreements, as Lydia Davis's Note on the Translation, included at the beginning of each volume, explains.[5]

A peculiar fact about the new translation is that it was affected by a specifically American legal quirk, the Copyright Term Extension Act, also known satirically as the Mickey Mouse Protection Act. The effect of this copyright law, voted in 1995 and vigorously supported by the Walt Disney Company, is to delay the entry into the public domain for works created after 1923 (birthdate of Mickey Mouse). An unintended victim of the Mickey Mouse Law is Proust's *Recherche*, whose later volumes postdate 1923: The American edition is truncated, the last three volumes (*The Prisoner, The Fugitive, and Finding Time Again*) will only be available beginning in 2019 at the earliest. Of course, readers can buy the complete set in England or Canada: but what is inevitably lost in American bookstores is the visual unity of the book as a multivolume whole, or as Peter Brooks put it in his review of the new translation, the creation of a new classic as "a simultaneous multivoiced new Proust."[6]

A Proust for Our Time

"A Proust for our time": This is what critic Robert Douglas-Fairhurst called the new translation in his 2002 review,[7] implying that a 21st century reader may want a different text from the one Scott Moncrieff gave Anglophone readers back in the 1920s, one closer to our current aesthetic preferences. The opposite position, a variation on the foreignizing aesthetics, would tend to give preference to a translation that is historically and culturally closer to the original. Thus for critic Jerry Farber, the Scott Moncrieff translation is preferable because translator and author share similar cultural backgrounds, tastes and styles.[8] Along the same lines, Julian Barnes, reviewing Lydia Davis's 2010 translation of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, is unenthusiastic about the anachronism of an Emma Bovary speaking in modern

American English, and fantasizes instead about the legendary first English translation of the novel by Juliet Herbert, then governess of Flaubert's niece Caroline and (Barnes supposes) Flaubert's lover. That lost translation, he argues, could transport readers into the past and give them the illusion of being Flaubert's contemporaries.[9] Barnes's position can be seen as a variant of Schleiermacher's foundational dilemma, which plays out, not in space (domesticating translation—bring the work to the reader vs. foreignizing translation—bring the reader to the work), but in time (historicizing translation vs. anachronistic translation).[10]

Conversely, to desire a "Proust for our time" is to desire a text shaped by a century of direct, brief, minimalist writing. According to this view, readers raised on Beckett, on Perec, or for that matter on Lydia Davis herself, will likely be drawn to a shorter, terser Proust, rather than to the melodious, lengthy, syntactically complicated Scott Moncrieff version. The translators of the Penguin version, Davis points out, reserved the right to chop up the sentences they judged to be too long for contemporary readers' tastes: "Translators decided for themselves how many liberties could be taken with the sanctity of Proust's long sentences."[11] Somewhat paradoxically, Lydia Davis claims in her introduction that Proust is "essentially natural and direct"—tighter and more concise than readers usually realize. In fact, she argues, Proust's reputation for complication is due in large part to Scott Moncrieff's translation itself, "which makes the translation at all points longer than the original." Scott Moncrieff's text, "although it "flows" very well and follows the original remarkably closely in word order and construction, is always wordier and "dressier" than the original" (p. xvii).

The following example from the famous opening sequence of Combray displays very clearly Davis's staunch fidelity to literal choices at every level, including vocabulary, grammar and word order.

> Un homme qui dort, tient en cercle autour de lui le fil des heures, l'ordre des années et des mondes. Il les consulte d'instinct en s'éveillant et y lit en une seconde le point de la terre qu'il occupe, le temps qui s'est écoulé jusqu'à son réveil; mais leurs rangs peuvent se mêler, se rompre.
>
> (*Du côté de chez Swann*, Pléiade, 1987, I, 5)

This is Scott Moncrieff/Kilmartin's version:

> When a man is asleep, he has in a circle round him the chain of the hours, the sequence of the years, the order of the heavenly host. Instinctively, when he awakes, he looks to these, and in an instant reads off his own position on the earth's surface and the time that has elapsed during his slumbers; but this ordered procession is apt to grow confused, and to break its ranks.
>
> (*Swann's Way*, translated by Scott Moncrieff/Kilmartin, Random House, 1981, I, 5)

And here is Lydia Davis's rendition of the passage:

> A sleeping man holds in a circle around him the sequence of the hours, the order of the years and worlds. He consults them instinctively as he wakes and reads in a second the point on the earth he occupies, the time that has elapsed before his waking; but their ranks can be mixed up, broken.
>
> (*Swann's Way*, translated by Lydia Davis, Penguin Classics, 2002, I, 5)

Scott Moncrieff's suave musicality goes hand in hand with amplification and embellishment. It stretches out over five lines instead of four; uses two words ("sequence" and "order") to translate one ("ordre"), yields to redundancy in the last sentence, and substitutes an elevated vocabulary ("heavenly host," "ordered procession") for a simple one ("mondes," "rangs"). By contrast, Davis's "lean literalism"[12] extends to syntax, word order, even punctuation. Davis takes particular care to replicate Proust's "economical" punctuation, which, idiosyncratic as it may be, is essential to "the breath span of the prose [. . . . the very long sentence, relatively unimpeded by stops, gives the impression of a headlong rush to deliver the thought in one exhalation" (Introduction, p. xix). She also takes pains to end her sentences on the same word as the original whenever possible ("se rompre/broken").

Another obvious example of modernization concerns sex scenes, which are direct and explicit in Davis (therefore naturally more appealing to modern readers, according to Peter Brooks),[13] whereas in the Scott Moncrieff version they are fluid and melodious, yet also periphrastic to the point of obscurity. Here is the iconic masturbation scene in the *Combray*:

> pendant qu'avec les hésitations héroïques du voyageur qui entreprend un exploration ou du désespéré qui se suicide, défaillant, je me frayais en moi-même une route inconnue et que je croyais mortelle, jusqu'au moment où une trace naturelle comme celle d'un colimaçon s'ajoutait aux feuilles du cassis sauvage qui se penchait jusqu'à moi."
>
> (I, 156)

In Scott Moncrieff/Kilmartin's translation:

> as, with the heroic misgivings of a traveller setting out on a voyage of exploration or of a desperate wretch hesitating on the verge of self-destruction, faint with emotion, I explored, across the bounds of my own self-experience an untrodden path which for all I knew was deadly—until the moment when a natural trail like that left by a snail smeared the leaves of the flowering currant that drooped around me.
>
> (I, 172)

In Lydia Davis's translation:

> while with the heroic hesitations of a traveler embarking on an exploration or of a desperate man killing himself, with a feeling of faintness, I would clear an unknown and I thought fatal path within myself, until a moment when a natural trail like that left by a snail added itself to the leaves of the wild black currant that leaned in toward me.
>
> (I, 161)

Once again the musicality of the Scott Moncrieff version is offset by length and redundancy. In addition, the perfectly straightforward phrase "en moi-même" (Davis: "within myself") becomes the quasi-incomprehensible euphemism "across the bounds of my own self-experience."

Lydia Davis is quite forthcoming about her work as a translator. Several articles and interviews and a slim volume entitled *Proust, Blanchot and a Woman in Red* discuss her choices, her principles and what she calls her "Proust translation struggles."[14] Of particular concern to her is syntactic structure, since Proust's dense and complex syntax offers a unique challenge for a card-carrying literalist such as Davis. Zeroing in on an especially difficult passage (the moonlit walk home in *Combray*), and comparing and contrasting her translations with her predecessors', Davis states her principles: to reproduce the sound effects and alliterations of the original (p. 27); to avoid watering down and expanding the original, which is always densely economical (p. 26); and consistently to respect word order and especially the final word in a sentence (p. 27). Davis justifies this last principle on philosophical grounds:

> Part of my motive for wishing to follow Proust's word order so closely has been to offer information in the same order he did, to let the images and ideas unfold and reveal themselves in the same sequence.
>
> (p. 27)

This puts her in synch with a fundamental principle of Proustian description, the primacy of sensory impressions over intellectual knowledge, as theorized in the final pages of *Time Regained:*

> By doing everything I could to give the most exact transcription, I would be able to keep the location of sounds unchanged, to abstain from detaching them from their cause, besides which the intellect situates them only after the event," [just as painters] "have done so often when they have depicted, very close or very far away, depending on how the laws of perspective, the intensity of colour and our first illusory glance make them appear to us, a sail or a peak which the rational mind will then relocate, sometimes across enormous distances.[15]

Thus Davis's literalist approach to syntax is integral to her in-depth comprehension of Proustian aesthetics.

Paradoxes of Literal Translation: The Case of Proust's Titles

For Josephine Balmer, a noted translator of Greek and Latin poets, the translator of classic texts enjoys a special status, not only as a mediator but "more as an innovator, making their own mark on an already well-known work, re-imagining it for a new generation, a new audience."[16] This is because classic texts are uniquely caught in a movement of rereading and rewriting that unfolds in time, and in a game with successive readers' expectations.

This is easily seen in the retranslations of Proust's titles, which were translated literally in the Penguin version, against the tradition established by Scott Moncrieff.

Remembrance of Things Past (Scott Moncrieff)	*In Search of Lost time* (Penguin edition)
Swann's Way	*The Way by Swann's*
Within a Budding Grove	*In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*
The Guermantes Way	*The Guermantes Way*
Cities of the Plain	*Sodom and Gomorrah*
The Captive	*The Prisoner*
The Sweet Cheat Gone	*The Fugitive*
Time Recaptured	*Finding Time Again*

According to Lawrence Venuti, Scott Moncrieff's choice of titles are an example of "domestic inscription": a strategy aimed at integrating the foreign and unknown author (Proust) into the circle of great works admired by the educated English public.[17] Substituting the overall title *A la recherche du temps perdu* with a line from Shakespeare's Sonnet 30, *Remembrance of Things Past*, is unfaithful (most problematically, it is missing the key word "time"), but it brings the new text under the tutelary shadow of the great English classic.[18] At the beginning of the 21st century, however, Proust's status as a classic is hardly in doubt, as Lydia Davis reminds us in her introduction.[19] A return to the literal title is therefore justified, even required: nevertheless, it also raises some interesting paradoxes, since the Scott Moncrieff version, with its non-literal and poetic titles, has by now founded its own tradition in the memory of the Anglophone reader.[20]

A similar paradox is discussed in the second Balbec episode in *Sodom and Gomorrah*. The Narrator compares the two French versions of the *Arabian Nights*, the classic early 18th century one by Antoine Galland and the brand new racy translation by Joseph-Charles Mardrus, which was a turn-of-the-century sensation (1899–1904). He refrains from choosing explicitly between them but instead defers to his mother's opinion: She prefers Galland, first of all, unsurprisingly, because of Mardrus's immorality

(Mardrus systematically plays up and exaggerates the tales' eroticism, in contrast to Galland who consistently bowdlerized them)—but even more out of a sense of fidelity to a tradition.

> Lighting upon certain of the tales, she had been revolted by the immorality of the subject-matter and the coarseness of the expression. But above all, having conserved as precious relics (. . .) her mother's habits of thought and of language, and searching at every opportunity for the opinion that the latter might have expressed, my mother was in no doubt that my grandmother would have pronounced sentence on Mardrus's book.[21]

The Narrator's grandmother, the mother feels, would have disliked Mardrus's new translation just as she disapproved of innovative 19th century translations of classics, such as poet Leconte de Lisle's foreignizing translations of Homer, or historian Augustin Thierry's foreignizing transcriptions of Frankish names in his history of Merovingian France:[22]

> If an *Odyssey* from which the names of Ulysses and Minerva were missing was for her no longer the *Odyssey*, what would she have said on seeing the title of her *Arabian Nights* deformed on the cover itself, and on no longer finding, exactly transcribed as she had always been accustomed to saying them, the immortally familiar names of Scheherezade or Dinarzade, or where the charming Caliph and the influential Djinns were barely recognizable. . . . (p. 236)

In her lifetime, the Narrator's grandmother made fun of and refused to read those foreignizing versions that adulterated the names to which she had grown accustomed: As a form of fidelity to her memory, the Narrator's mother now favors Galland over Mardrus. The episode displaces and recontextualizes the notion of fidelity so central to translation: In lieu of the fidelity either to the letter or the spirit of the text, it proposes an affective fidelity to the memories generated by the text (and additionally, an affective fidelity to the preferences of the loved one).

Scott Moncrieff, the book's first translator—in some ways not altogether unlike Galland, who first introduced the *1001 Nights* into the Western canon—is the one who, poetic titles and all, transformed a French novel into the world literature classic that it is now. By an ironic twist, Lydia Davis's title, *The Way by Swann's*, was rejected by the American publisher, who decided to remain faithful to the one sanctioned by tradition, *Swann's Way*.

The Lady in Pink and the Woman in Red

Lydia Davis is also a celebrated novelist and short story writer.[23] She has often recognized the key influence Samuel Beckett had on her writing, ever since she discovered *Malone Dies* at the age of thirteen.[24] To Beckett she

owes her own brevity, as well as her tendency toward metaphysical irony. The extreme condensation of her stories, some of which consist of no more than a couple of sentences, contrasts starkly with her predilection as a translator for long flowing books. And yet one feels there are secret passages between her work as a translator and her work as a writer: For her, the basic unit in Proust is the sentence. As a result, her claim of Proust's brevity is not a gratuitous provocation. The "Beckettian" qualities of Proust's prose, the concision of his syntax, the precision of his vocabulary, are showcased more prominently than in the lyrical flow favored by Scott Moncrieff, for whom the unit is not the sentence but the larger period.

Yves Bonnefoy, himself a poet, critic and translator, claims that cross-fertilization always takes place when the translator is also a poet. Tracing Mallarmé's famous "Sonnet en—yx" back to his translation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," for example, he reflects on what he calls the "dissemination" of the translated work into that of the translator.[25] "A Woman in Red," the third section of Lydia Davis's autobiographical text *Proust, Blanchot and a Woman in Red*, consists of a collection of short dream sequences in the manner of Michel Leiris, whose experimental autobiography *The Rule of the Game* Davis translated in the 90s. These micro-narratives open a poetic dialogue between the writer and the authors she translates, suggesting adventures in reading or in translation.[26] Thus the entry "The Moon" ends on a feeling of uncertainty between the light of daybreak and the light of the moon, recalling the famous episode in the opening pages of *Combray*, where an invalid suffering alone in a hotel room mistakes the gaslight for the dawn:

> Then I am back in bed, and I have been lying there awake for a while. The room is lighter than it was. The moon is coming around to this side of the building, I think. But no, it is the beginning of dawn.[27]

"The Woman in Red" features a tall woman in a red dress, intimidating yet also oddly protective of the translator:

> Standing near me is a tall woman in a dark red dress. (. . .) I am a little afraid of her. A red snake in front of me rears up and threatens me(. . .) To protect me from the snake, the woman in red lays three broad-brimmed red hats down on the surface of the puddle of water. (p. 42)

This ambiguous figure could be read as a hybrid of the Duchesse de Guermantes with her notorious red dress and red shoes, in one of the most iconic party scenes in the *Recherche* (*The Guermantes Way*, p. 594) and of the intimidating yet seductive lady in pink, the future Odette Swann, who introduces the young Narrator to the devious ways of grownups in *Combray* (*Swann's Way*, p. 77).

Less obviously Proustian but clearly metaphoric of the translator's predicament is the dream titled "In the gallery":

> A woman I know, who is a writer, has created a piece of visual art. She is trying to hang her work for a show. Her work is a single line of text pasted on the wall, with a transparent curtain suspended in front of it. She is at the top of a ladder and cannot get down because she is facing the wrong way—out instead of in.
>
> (p. 42)

Here—with this image of translation as a transparent curtain in front of the original text, with her hapless translator stuck in an impossible position between languages—Davis gives us, half-way between a dream and a parable, her tongue-in-cheek self-portrait of the writer as translator.

More recently, a short story titled "The Walk," published in the 2007 collection *Varieties of Disturbance*, gives a fictionalized account of the translation of *Swann's Way*. The narrator spends an evening in a foreign city where a conference is taking place, in the company of a critic who has recently trashed her translation of an unnamed book (a transparent allusion to André Aciman's vicious review of *The Way by Swann's*).[28] Despite the tension existing between them, they decide to walk around the old city together after dinner; the story narrates their walk and their awkward conversation. At the heart of the story we find this sentence, which practically compels us to read metatextually, as a sentence about the task of the translator:

> She found it an interesting exercise to explore a place with a person she did not know well, following not only her own impulses but also his.[29]

In light of the poetic dialogue set up between translation and creation, this story, then, asks to be read as an ironic parable on the translator's situation: The translator attempts to find her way in the foreign work (the unfamiliar city) taking into account both her own instincts and those of her reader (her companion, whose tastes obviously differ from hers).

***

Ultimately, I would suggest, *Swann's Way*, Scott Moncrieff's version, and *The Way by Swann's*, Lydia Davis's version, meet up in the end like the two *côtés* in Combray. Retranslation of classic works affords an opportunity, not to denigrate this version or that, but rather to celebrate the rich multiple presence of the translated text. Antoine Berman stresses the enrichment that new translations bring both to the original text and to our reading pleasure: Translation, he claims, is best played out in the polyphony of the various retranslations, whether successive or simultaneous.[30] Proust's *Recherche* is now poised to become a text whose value resides at least in part in its

plurality, rather in the same way that Homer's *Odyssey* was for Borges, who did not read the original Greek, "an international bookstore of works in prose and verse."[31] The *Recherche* multiplied by its retranslations (in English among others) is swept up in this vast movement of globalization which sets in motion the specific space of the book, but also, cross-wise, its intemporal status as a classic, permanently stored in the reader's memory but also perpetually in motion.[32] Corroborating David Damrosch's definition of world literature as "writing that gains in translation," Lydia Davis's *Swann* enriches the source-text by joining in its constantly expanding space of resonance.

Notes

1. Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, General Editor Christopher Prendergast (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).
2. Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1990), 19.
3. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London: Chatto & Windus; New York: Random House, 3 volumes, 1981). In addition, there exists another stand-alone English translation of *Du côté de chez Swann*, by Marcel Proust and James Grieve, *Swann's Way* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1982). James Grieve is also the translator of *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* in the new Penguin translation (*In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 2002).
4. Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by Dennis Joseph Enright (New York: Modern Library Edition, 6 volumes, 1992).
5. Translators of the Penguin edition include Lydia Davis *(Swann's Way)*, James Grieve *(In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower)*, Mark Treharne *(The Guermantes Way)*, John Sturrock *(Sodom and Gomorrah)*, Carol Clark *(The Prisoner)*, Peter Collier *(The Fugitive)*, and Ian Patterson *(Finding Time Again)*. For more information on the history of translations and editions of Proust in English, see Lydia Davis's "Introduction" and "A Note on the Translation," as well as essays by Jerry Farber, "Scott Moncrieff's Way: Proust in Translation," *Proust Said That*, no. 6, March 1997, 18–21, and Peter Brooks, "The Shape of Time," *New York Times*, January 25, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/25/books/the-shape-of-time.html.
6. Brooks, "The Shape of Time," 3.
7. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, "In Search of Marcel Proust," *The Guardian / The Observer*, 17 November 2002.
8. Farber, "Scott Moncrieff's Way: Proust in Translation," 21.
9. Julian Barnes, "Writer's Writer and Writer's Writer's Writer: Review of *Madame Bovary, Provincial Ways*, by Gustave Flaubert, translated by Lydia Davis." *London Review of Books*, 18 November 2010, 7. For a similar line of argument, see Marshall Olds's justification for choosing Lafcadio Hearn's translation of Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint Anthony* (when more recent ones were available) for the 2001 Modern Library edition: Gustave Flaubert, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), foreword by Marshall C. Olds, ix–x.
10. Friedrich Schleiermacher's essay "On the Different Methods of Translating" (1813) is included in Laurence Venuti's anthology, *The Translation Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 43–63. Venuti also analyzes

Schleiermacher's theses in the first chapter of his book, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

11. Davis, "A Note on the Translation," xxii.
12. Siân Reynold, *Proust, Blanchot and a Woman in Red.* By Lydia Davis; *Proust's English.* By Daniel Karlin, *Translation and Literature* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 2008), 258–261,258.
13. Brooks, "The Shape of Time."
14. Lydia Davis, *Proust, Blanchot and a Woman in Red* (Paris: American University of Paris, 2007). The first section of the book is devoted to her translation of *Swann's Way*.
15. Marcel Proust, *Finding Time again*, trans. Ian Patterson, *In Search of Lost Time*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), volume 6, 354–355.
16. Josephine Balmer, "What Comes Next? Reconstructing the Classics," in *The Translator as Writer*, Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, eds. (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 184.
17. Venuti applies a similar analysis to the translation of Giuseppe Ungaretti by Allen Mandelbaum: see "Translation, Community, Utopia," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, Venuti, ed., 482–502 (494).
18. When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

    I summon up *remembrance of things past,*
    I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
    And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste. . ..

    (Shakespeare, Sonnet 30, lines 1–4)

19. *Swann's Way,* Introduction, 1, vii.
20. André Aciman makes this point most vigorously in his review of the Penguin translation: "*Remembrance of Things Past*, derived from Shakespeare's Sonnet 30, was a good enough title, and changing it was like deciding to change the title of the Book of Genesis to *In the Beginning*" ("Far From Proust's Way," *New York Review of Books*, 15 December 2005, 74).
21. *Sodom and Gomorrah*, trans. John Sturrock, 4, 235–236.
22. Romantic historian Augustin Thierry substituted Germanic forms of the names of Merovingians kings for the more traditional Gallicized ones, in the name of local color, in his *Récits des Temps Mérovingiens: Preéceérdeés de Consideérations sur l'histoire de France* (first published in 1840). Parnassian poet Charles Marie Leconte de Lisle did the same with Greek names both in his translations of Greek poems and tragedies, and in his own *Poèmes antiques* (first published in 1852).
23. Her awards include the MacArthur Prize (2003) and the Man Booker International Prize (2013). In 1999 Lydia Davis was made *Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters* by the French government in recognition of her stories and translations.
24. Davis modeled her sentence structures on Beckett's: "He was very important to me in my early twenties. I studied him. I was really picking apart sentence structures, seeing exactly how he constructed a sentence. Why it worked so beautifully. I suppose I wanted to do it as well as Beckett. So if I was going to do it as well as he did, I had to learn how he did it" (Lydia Davis interviewed by Francine Prose, "Artists in Conversation" *Bomb Magazine* 60, Summer 1997, 50).
25. Yves Bonnefoy, "La traduction au sens large: à propos d'Edgar Poe et de ses traducteurs," *Littérature* 150 (June 2008), 9–24 (11).
26. Davis's, *Proust, Blanchot and a Woman in Red* was published in *Cahiers du Center for Writers and Translators de l'American University in Paris*, a series that is "largely devoted to the space between text and translation," according to Siân Reynolds, *Review of Proust, Blanchot and a Woman in Red*, 258). On Davis and Leiris, see Jonathan Evans, "Davis's Poetic Dialogue with Leiris's Autobiography," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 14, no. 1 (2012): http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1755

27. Lydia Davis, "The Moon," *Proust, Blanchot and a Woman in Red*, 40–41. Compare *Swann's Way*, 4.
28. Aciman, "Far From Proust's Way," *art. cit.*
29. Lydia Davis, "The Walk," *Varieties of Disturbance* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 75.
30. "Toute première traduction est à la fois introduction et traduction. C'est dans la retraduction, et mieux, dans les retraductions, successives ou simultanées, que se joue la traduction. Non seulement dans l'espace de la langue/culture réceptrice, mais dans d'autres langues/cultures" (Antoine Berman, *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne,* Paris: Gallimard, 1994, 84).
31. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Homeric Versions," in *Selected Non-Fictions*, Eliot Weinberger, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 70.
32. On the paradoxical interplay between successive retranslations and the intemporal essence of the classic see Lawrence Venuti, "World Literature and Translation Studies," in *Routledge Companion to World Literature*, Theo D'Haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir, eds. (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), 180–193.

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7 "what happens letting words dance from one language to another"

Translating Giovanna Sandri's *clessidra: il ritmo delle tracce*

Guy Bennett

In the mid-1960s Italian poet Giovanna Sandri (1923–2002) began using dry-transfer lettering to create abstract graphic compositions that would come to be featured in exhibitions of visual and concrete poetry internationally, as well as in the Quadriennale di Roma (1968) and the Biennali di Bolzano (1969), di Venezia (1978), and de São Paulo (1981). Her unique visual texts, which would soon share the page with verbal texts, were also the subject of two solo exhibitions: "alfabeto/albero del Tempo" ["alphabet/tree of Time"] at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Modena, Palazzo Te, Mantua (1977), and "erörtern (occhi/tarocchi per estrarre segni)" ["erörtern (eyes/tarots for extracting signs"] in the Libreria Internazionale oolp, Turin (1978). Though she also wrote purely verbal poems, her entire body of work is characterized by an exploration of the graphic qualities of written signs and a preoccupation with the formal composition of the poetic text, traits that present interesting challenges for the translator.

Sandri's books range from volumes of strictly visual poetry, to strictly verbal poetry, to a hybrid of the two.[1] In all cases, the poetic text is like a drawing or painting in that its unique shape and position on the page are integral parts of its overall composition. Furthermore, in certain of her books the basic poetic unit is not the single page but the two-page spread, and in such cases the notion of the poem expands to include the binary of texts appearing on facing verso and recto pages. It goes without saying that all of these elements, in addition to semantic "content" of course, must be taken into account in the translation of her work.

I began translating Sandri in 1995, when Paul Vangelisti asked me for an English version of her poem "origine lunare dell'alfabeto" (1978) for a journal he was editing at the time.[2] I have translated other works of hers over the years, both individual poems and complete books, for publication in journals, as chapbooks, and most recently in the volume of her selected poems.[3] In the remarks that follow, I would like to focus on the translation of one book in particular—*clessidra: il ritmo delle tracce*—and share excerpts from an exchange I had with the author during the translation process.[4]