THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES

Amphionic Translation

LEAH MIDDLEBROOK

In Greek myth, Amphion plays his lyre so sweetly that boulders gather from across the Cadmean plain to build walls around Thebes.[1] Amphion thus figures the powers that eloquence—stirring, rhythmic language—wields to build great structures, from physical walls and buildings to civilizations. But the walls Amphion builds do not encircle Babel or Rome. They surround Thebes—the city of Oedipus Rex, the city born of Mars's dragon's teeth. So Amphionic creation is embedded in a larger context of violence.[2] More specifically, it is embedded in *political* violence: these walls protect members of the polis from real and imagined threats from the outside. They also close people in with each other, thereby creating conditions that animate seething energies and rouse neighbor to turn against neighbor. This is the phenomenon Dante describes in cantos 6, 10, and 32 of *Inferno*, which detail gruesome excesses that accompany civil breakdown in Florence. Canto 32 invokes Amphion's music, specifically, as the aesthetic medium through which this kind of hell is created. Amphion goes on to serve as a touchstone in Renaissance and early modern poetics, which pair him with Orpheus as a tandem figure for lyric poetry. Among numerous examples from the period, we can cite George Puttenham's *Art of English Poesie* (1589): "Amphion and Orpheus, two Poets of the first ages, one of them, to wit Amphion, builded up cities, and reared walls with the stones that came in heaps to the sound of his harp. . . ."

What I call Amphionic translation generates one world as it eclipses or destroys another. As an instrument, Amphion's lyre represents the way in which human agents can, for a limited time, tap into the great powers of nature to accomplish superhuman ends, such as the summoning of a community and the raising of a city. Amphionic poetry is informed, however, by the rhythm of created things: coalescence and dispersal. Allen Grossman captures this

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idea when he writes, "The poem as manifestation is mounted upon the ruins of excluded possibility. . . . [A]s manifestation it competes, within the horizon of human attention, for its spatio-temporal moment" (224). Although Grossman is not discussing translation, his phrasing applies well, as every translation stands on excluded possibilities. Grossman further observes that "verse forms . . . are fundamentally discussable as mediations of relationships, as rules and orders of polities" (283).

Alice Oswald's 2011 "excavation" of the *Iliad*, *Memorial*, furnishes an instructive example (1). The *Iliad* itself recounts the destruction of one Mediterranean world—the world of productive communities, anchored by families—and the emergence of another as the Trojan war drags on. This latter world is marked by disruption, grief, loss, and absence. Oswald's task is to renew the story for the present time.

Memorial's preface describes her process. Since Matthew Arnold, she contends, the dominant priority for translators of the *Iliad* into English has been the mimesis of the nobility of a man—Homer—at the expense of *enargeia*, the "bright, unbearable reality" the poem communicates (1). As a result, the poem has lost focus. To recover its *enargeia*, it is necessary to dispense with great swathes of the text, "as you might lift the roof off a church in order to remember what you are worshipping" (2). One thing Oswald does not address directly but may be implying here is the changeable nature of *enargeia*, usually defined as vividness or as a quality in poetry that appeals to the senses. Oswald describes the term as "what is used when the gods come to earth in undisguised form" (1). Because human beings can't withstand unmediated encounters with gods, the poet's (and the translator's) work is to discover the form in which a given person or community can perceive and tolerate what the gods have to deliver, their "bright, unbearable" facts. The world in which Arnoldian man conveyed *enargeia* experienced its heyday in European and European-derived social, political, and pedagogical institutions shaped by nineteenth- and twentieth-century empire and colonialism, and by concepts such as the modern nation. In the twenty-first century, the awareness of human and social costs of empire and nationhood—the kinds of societies they produce, and the human lives they overlook or fail to value adequately—has facilitated the perception of a different *Iliad*. *This* poem communicates the bright, unbearable reality of human communities and the equally unbearable human compulsion to destroy them.

The lyric process Oswald employs as she recovers this truth in an for the English-language version is thus Amphionic in this dual sense, destruction and lyric reanimation. Oswald reports she has retained just two elements of value from the *Iliad*: polyphonic funeral lament and similes. These are lyric mechanisms, which Oswald employs to bring the loss of the world into view; for example, in the following lines:

> Like a wind-murmur
> Begins a rumor of waves
> One long note getting louder
> The water breathes a deep sigh
> Like a land-ripple
> When the west wind runs through a field
> Wishing and searching
> Nothing to be found
> The corn-stalks shake their green heads.
> (14)

My second example of Amphionic translation arises from a different instance of world-emergence and world-eclipse—different, but related, by way of the thread of a Western modernity that assigns priority to the noble masculine subject. Two translations of Olivier de La Marche's 1483 French poem *Le chevalier délibéré* were published in 1553 and 1555: El cavallero determinado *traduzido de la lengua francesa en castellana por Don Hernando de Acuña, y dirigido al Emperador Don Carlos Quinto Maximo Rey de España Nuestro Señor* (1553; The Resolved Gentleman, *Translated from the French Language into Castilian by Sir Hernando de Acuña and Dedicated to the Emperor Sir Charles V, His Majesty the King of Spain*) and *Discurso de la vida humana y aventuras del caballero determinado traduzido de frances por Don Jerónimo de Urrea* (1555; *A Discourse on Human Life and the*

Adventures of the Resolved Gentleman, Translated from French by Don Jerónimo de Urrea).[3] These two translations were undertaken in a notably short period of time, by writers who knew each other. Both Acuña and Urrea were privileged members of the court of the Spanish monarch and Holy Roman emperor Charles V. Urrea, moreover, clearly knew about Acuña's translation, which was a topic of conversation among the Spanish nobility (Clavería). Similarities between the two poems strongly suggest that Urrea consulted Acuña's version as he shaped his own text.

Yet the two poems are fundamentally different, and their difference arises from two distinct sets of ideas about Spain and Spanishness, two visions of the Spanish world. During the 1550s, Charles V (1500–58) was preparing to abdicate in favor of his son Philip II (1527–98). This was the first dynastic transfer of power for the Spanish Hapsburgs, and the family and their councilors prepared it carefully. Acuña's translation appears to have been part of that preparation, given that *Le chevalier délibéré* was a family heirloom. Urrea's poem, in contrast, presents a vision of Spain that was promoted by forward-looking humanists. In their view, the crowning of a new monarch opened the way for Spain to follow lettered elites such as Urrea and his circle toward a world in which the Spanish caballero is also a learned courtier and assumes pride of place at the structuring center.

La Marche (1426–1502) was a loyal knight and retainer of Charles V's ancestors, Charles the Bold (his great-grandfather) and Mary of Burgundy (his grandmother). *Le chevalier délibéré* presents these two famed aristocratic Burgundians as mirrors of Christian perfection and virtue. The poem recounts the journey and adventures of a knight, La Marche, who, on the threshold of old age, sets out for a tournament held in the forest of Atropos (Death). His encounters with allegorical figures such as Appetite, Desire, Time, Good Counsel, Fresh Memory, and Understanding provide a template both for the good Christian life and for a good death.

Susie Speakman Sutch and Anne Lake Prescott analyze the rhetorical and poetic strategies La Marche deploys to fuse Christian allegory with a memoir of the lives and exemplary deaths of his lords (284–86). By means of his poetics, La Marche constructs a chivalric world and positions the Burgundian dukes as living signs of God's eternal majesty. The future Charles V was trained to embrace the tradition of Hapsburg rulers as ciphers of Christian world dominion. Indeed, legend has it that he created a prose translation of *Le chevalier délibéré* as he prepared to assume the Spanish throne. That translation may have served as the basis for Acuña's poem. Thus, Acuña's task with *Le chevalier délibéré* was to re-create this valued piece of Hapsburg patrimony in Castilian *verse*. By devising poetic lines and stanzas that accomplished for the Castilian world what La Marche accomplished with his French, Acuña would expand the Burgundian allegory to encompass Spain.

The front matter of Acuña's translation further identifies the project with the Burgundian world. A letter penned by Charles V himself, composed in French, describes the book's contents, forecast to include both an account of a journey Philip II had taken through his future domains and Acuña's *Caballero determinado*. This pairing would have been consistent with a plan to incorporate *Le chevalier délibéré* into propaganda surrounding the transfer of rule. In fact, the poem and the travel account were published separately; however, the vocabularies of vassalage, fealty, and majesty that suffuse both the Emperor's letter and a dedicatory epistle Acuña prepares for his liege enhance the chivalric character of the volume and contribute to the mood of joyous solemnity the Spanish Hapsburgs promoted during the transition. That Charles V wrote in French similarly reinforces the Burgundian connection, because by this point in his career he was fully capable of writing in Spanish. French reinforced a sense of continuity between present-day Spain and fifteenth-century Burgundian empire.

The self-enclosed world of *Le chevalier délibéré* shapes Acuña's poetic praxis, and his decisions about how to accomplish the poem's transit are Amphionic ones, since they have to do with the powers of the lyre. That is, *Le chevalier délibéré* is not lyric in the sense that term tends to be used today. But Acuña perceives the power of La Marche's poetry as residing in its music—specifically, in its rhymes. In a preface to his version of the work, Acuña explains:

> Hizose esta traducción en coplas Castellanas, antes que en otro genero de verso, lo uno por ser este mas usado y conocido en nuestra España, para quien principalmente se tradujo este libro. Y otro porque la rima Francesa, en que el fue compuesto, es tan corta, que no pudiera traduzirse en otra mayor sin confundir en parte la tradución, comprehendiendo dos y tres coplas en una, o poniendo de nuevo tanto subiecto que fuera en perjuicio de la obra, y assi lo traduzido va una copla por otra; y lo que en ellas se añade, es en partes donde no daña.
>
> This translation was made in Castilian *coplas* [a traditional Castilian form of rhyming verse], instead of in another kind of verse, first because they are the most frequently used and the best known here in Spain, for whom this book was translated, principally. And next because the French rhymes in which it was composed follow each other so closely that I could not translate it into another, longer line without partly confusing the translation, gathering two or three verses into one, or putting things in new ways often enough that the work would be placed in jeopardy, and thus the translation comes rhyme by rhyme; and what is added to them is in places where it will not cause harm.[4]

The French *huitain* stanza furnishes La Marche with the means to enact a double *poiesis*: the generation of a poem, which in turn inscribes the coherent chivalric world. Specifically, La Marche's rhymes build a dense edifice whose harmony reflects the order and concert of God's creation. To accomplish this poem-world's transit, Acuña also deploys the melopoeia generated by patterns of rhyme worked across short lines. Visually and acoustically, his poem mirrors and echoes La Marche's cosmos, and the knight-chevalier thus passes from the French world to the Castilian one, with his significance intact.[5] Moreover, because it is La Marche's rhyme-scheme and rhythm that construct and secure the chivalric Burgundian cosmos in his poem, Acuña can take license with the poem's content. Acuña sets his *coplas* into *quintillas*, paired five-line stanzas of octosyllabic verse arranged in a regular pattern of rhyme—in this case, ABABACCDDC. *Quintillas* approximate La Marche's eights. But Acuña makes an important modification in La Marche's opening. A comparison illustrates him at work:

La Marche, *Le chevalier délibéré*

Ainsi que à l'arrière saison	A
Tant de mes jours que de l'année	B
Je partis hors de ma maison	A
Par soudaine achoison,	A
Seul a par moi fors de Pensée	B
Qui m'acompaigna la journée	B
Et me vint en remembrance	C
Le premier temps de mon enfance.[6]	C

(54)

Acuña, *El caballero determinado*

En la postrera sazón	A
del año y aun de mi vida	B
una súbita ocasión	A
fue causa de me partida	B
de mi casa y mi nación.	A
Yendo solo mi jornada	C
a mi memoria olvidada	C
despertó mi pensamiento	D
renovando el tiempo y cuento	D
de la mi niñez pasada.[7]	C

Acuña carries the musicality of La Marche's French into the Castilian tongue. His style is serious, but engaging, with accents and rhymes deployed to add movement, music, and onomatopoeia to the lines. For example, Acuña emulates and even enhances La Marche's assonances in lines 7–10: "a mi memoria olvidada / despertó mi pensamiento / renovando el tiempo y cuento / de la mi niñez pasada." The Spanish synaloepha (*sinalefa*) plays an important role here: As in anglophone poetry, the device combines syllables ending in a vowel with the following syllable, if that syllable begins with a vowel. So line 9, for example, would read, "re – no – van – del – tiem – poy – cuen – to." This skillful formal work allows Acuña to intervene in the nature of the knight's quest, building in an idea of geographic and political place through his insertion of the word *nación* in line 5.[8] La Marche's *Le chevalier délibéré* presents a primarily spiritual and psychological journey. Acuña grounds the vision in nationhood, thus preparing the way for a *translatio imperii* that he (and the emperor) frame as a revelation, as opposed to a violation, of the allegory's world.

In contrast, Urrea openly breaks with this world. He anchors his poem on earth and shapes it to fundamentally human concerns: on the one hand, the caballero's standing among men; on the other, the bothersome human fact of old age and death, eventualities for which all men and women must prepare. For Urrea, what is most striking and valuable about *Le chevalier délibéré* is not the poem on its own terms as a work of aesthesis but rather the skills exhibited by its poet:

> [P]orque la material de envejecer y morir es pesada y enojosa, ponse la por agradables figuras, en estilo tan de cavallero como el fue, porque la dulçura del verso, y primor de la invención, engañe al dañado gusto de aquellos que andan desabridos con la vejez, y no quieren leer historia de muerte, como si la una destas dos cosas no viniesen de venir. . . . por tratar el libro material grave lo he traduzido en verso grave, assi como tal historia requiere.

> [B]ecause the matter of aging and death is burdensome and troubling, he puts it in agreeable figures, in the style befitting a knight such as himself, so that the sweetness of the verse and the charm of his imagination beguile the injured taste of those who are displeased by the fact of age and do not want to read about death, as if either of these things were not to arrive. . . . [B]ecause this book treats of serious matters, I have translated it into serious verse, as the story requires.

Urrea's androcentric world eclipses Acuña's chivalric one. Urrea translates a poem whose power derives from the human mind, its capacity to create the efficacious metaphors that communicate core truths. The divine is not entirely absent from this work; God creates the human mind. But its power is much diminished. Rhetoric is a mortal science, an art cultivated by sixteenth-century Renaissance humanists such as Juan Boscán and Garcilaso de la Vega, who earlier in the century brought Italian linguistic and poetic reform to the Spanish court. These two courtiers also introduce the hendecasyllable, a verse form they adapt from writers such as Pietro Bembo and Andrea Navagero, into Spanish poetics. Urrea employs the hendecasyllable in his translation of *Le chevalier délibéré*, which proceeds at a stately pace in stanzas of terza rima. The verse form evokes Dante, and, as a long line, it is thought suitable "for serious matters . . . as the story requires":

> En la postrer sazón del mes y año, A
> y de la juveníl flor de mi vida B
> me sacó de mi casa un caso estraño. A
> Por súbita ocasión acontecida B
> dejé la patria, y el contento estado, C
> siguiendo una ventura desabrida B
> solo yendo caminos desusado. C

> In the final season of the month and of the year, / and of the flower of my youth, / a strange incident took me from my house. / Because of something that happened all of a sudden / I left my fatherland, and my contented state, / embarking on a disagreeable quest / traveling along lonely paths.

When it was introduced into Castilian letters, the hendecasyllable raised objections on two grounds. Writers who employed it appeared to break with a history, a tradition, and an identity memorialized for centuries in either the heavily metrical, twelve-syllable lines of Castilian *arte mayor* or in *romances* (ballads) and other *coplas* of *arte menor*, the short-lined art Acuña employs. Second, traditionalists argued that the hendecasyllable reads like prose. Sixteenth-century Spanish hendecasyllables prioritize rhythm and wit over meter, and the longer lines weaken the power of rhyme. The elevation of wit over the spellbinding properties of rhyme was precisely the effect Urrea and his supporters sought with the new translation, however. Juan Martín Cordero, a highly regarded humanist, announces in a prefatory sonnet to the poem that as Urrea's caballero, the knight-chevalier finally comes into his own:

> Determinate tu, Determinado
> Caballero por nombre, y valeroso,
> A salir que te vean animoso
> . . . .
> Urrea te hizo hablar tan gravemente
> Como conviene que hable un caballero
> Determinado a todas aventuras.
> Urrea te levanta entre la gente,
> Y te quiere poner como primero
> Que menosprecies las desaventuras.

> Resolve yourself, oh Resolute Knight, so called by name, and also for your valor, / to come forth, so they can see your great spirit. . . . Urrea made you speak in the grave style / that suits a knight / resolute before all adventures. / Urrea exalts you among the people / and seeks to establish you as the first among them / you who disdain accident.

Acuña's short lines drum the Spanish Hapsburg world into its expanded existence; Urrea's long lines link the Spanish caballero to Italian poetry and to Spanish Renaissance humanism.

The different lyric poetics Acuña and Urrea employ in their translations of *Le chevalier délibéré* mean the world, as it were, in the erudite circles of Spain's power elite in the 1550s. From the perspective of the two writers and their communities, these two worlds cannot coexist (although Charles V and Phillip II cannily played them against each other).[9] Acuña campaigned for Urrea to be banished from court, most famously in a satirical poem, "A un buen caballero y mal poeta, la lira de Garcilaso contrahecha" ("To a Good Gentleman and Bad Poet: Garcilaso's Lyre, Undone"). Acuña makes the case that Urrea should be exiled on the grounds that he is a bad Orpheus. The accusation bundles Urrea's decisions as a translator, his choices as a poet, and rumors about his private activities into one devastating witticism; and Urrea indeed disappears from court records in the wake of a secret investigation into allegations of sodomy. Ironically, while Acuña's poem was the more successful of the two, enjoying numerous printings and traveling to England to serve as the basis for a number of translations there (Sutch and Prescott), it was Urrea's world, the world of the noble masculine subject, that ultimately prevailed.

In the introduction to *Early Modern Cultures of Translation*, Karen Newman and Jane Tylus observe that in the early modern period "preoccupations with fidelity, accuracy, authorship, and proprietary rights were alien to this moment formative for the production of the vernaculars in which we speak and write today" (2). In a pathbreaking essay, A. E. B. Coldiron observes that the world of early modern literature is "intensively multilingual and multicultural, created by and constituted of 'cultural amphibians' . . . the individuals, texts, material objects, and cultural practices that adapt to survive in more than one linguistic or cultural environment" (43). Coldiron, Newman, and Tylus all contend that the study of early modern translation expands and shifts our understanding of poetry and poetics, even as early modern discourses and practices of translation reshape how this art is understood today. Amphionic translation is among the thought-resources early modern studies contributes to this discussion.

NOTES

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1. On Amphion, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, books 3 and 6. See also Horace, *Ars Poetica*, lines 394–96.

2. Amphion and his brother, Zethus, slay their uncle; later in the story, years after Amphion builds the Theban walls, his children are struck down one by one, by Apollo and Diana.

3. On the role *Le chevalier délibéré* plays in Caroline Spanish culture, see Clavería.

4. All translations from Spanish are my own, unless otherwise noted.

5. At least, this is what Acuña maintains. In a compelling reading, Sutch and Prescott analyze the "deformations" the poem undergoes on its journey. My reading here dovetails with theirs. Following thinking that calls the idea of an original poem into question (e.g., in Coldiron, Emmerich, and to a certain extent Venuti), I am more interested in what Levine calls the "affordances

of form," what is enabled and precluded by decisions about pattern and rhythm.

6. "In the autumn of both / My life and of the year, / On the spur of the moment / I went outside my house / By myself, alone except for Thought, / Who stayed with me that day / And made me recall / My earliest youth" (55)

7. "In the final season / of the year and of my life / a sudden event / caused me to depart / my home and my country. / As I made this journey alone / my Thought awoke / to ponder forgotten memory / of my history and the time / of my childhood."

8. *Nación*, like *nation*, has a number of meanings during this period; however, in this context, Acuña uses the term in the sense of the *patria* or homeland.

9. A less lyrical way of talking about the phenomenon Grossman writes about is the aesthesis and "worlding" developed in the writings of Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Rancière. Eric Hayot synthesizes their ideas in a productive way at the start of *Literary Worlds:* the idea of the world, a "self-enclosing, self-organizing, self-grounding" totality, one that constitutes "the ground of activity, eventfulness, subject- and object-hood, and of procession" in a work of art and in "this world, the natural, actual, living world of human history and geologic time" (24–25).

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