

27. See, for instance, Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991).
28. Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 227–311.
29. Dorothy Ko, *Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15.
30. Gail Finney, "Iphigenie in *Germanistik*, or the Feminization/Humanization of the Profession," in *Rethinking Germanistik: Canon and Culture*, ed. Robert Bledsoe et al. (New York: Lang, 1991), 31–43.

## Writing in Tongues

### Thoughts on the Work of Translation

STEVEN UNGAR

Translation is the most intimate act of reading.

—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

All of this so-called Maghrebian literature of French expression is an account of translation. I am not saying that it is nothing but translation; it is a matter of an account that *speaks in tongues*.

—Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*

### The Most Intimate Act of Reading

Consider this a position paper. Translation has remained central to comparative philology as well as to European and North American models of world literature since the early nineteenth century. Yet the centrality of translation within literary studies is at odds with the fact that it often remains under-analyzed and under-theorized. Rather than simply bemoan this condition, I want in what follows to consider how issues surrounding practices of an emergent field of translation studies over the past twenty-five years has contributed to the evolving discipline, discourse, and institutions of comparative literature. To put an edge on this consideration, I want to state from the start that what draws me to translation is less a matter of what it is, and how to do it, than what it *could* and *should* be doing. No poetics of translation, then, without its concomitant politics and ethics.

"No better place to start," writes Haun Saussy concerning literature in translation, where "nothing of the work may survive of the process but the subject matter." The assertion occurs about a third of the way into his introduction to the current ACLA

report, during a brief overview of world literature. It precedes a reference to thematic reading as a constant pedagogical temptation and examples of Kafka and "the Kafkaesque" borrowed from David Damrosch in order to illustrate that what works for world literature may not work for close comparative study. Here is Saussy's sentence in full: "But for literature in translation, where nothing of the work may survive the process but the subject matter, there is no better place to start."

What strikes me first in this assertion is how vocabulary and grammar set the second of two dependent clauses apart from the independent clause that completes the sentence. That second clause jumps out at me, grabbing my attention on the order of what Barthes theorizes in *Camera Lucida* as the *punctum*.<sup>1</sup> I am likewise drawn to the terms "work," "process," "survival," and "subject matter," whose convergence discloses a judgment—implied, indirect, and rapid—concerning the process of translation. As used here, the terms "work" and "survive" allude to what translation adds to or detracts from a verbal entity whose designation as "work" connotes an assumption of aesthetic value that presumably warrants survival.

To state the point somewhat differently, I propose that what the clause refers to in terms of process and work is grounded on assumptions of value ascribed in a positive way to the literary work of art at the cost of the specific activity of translation. For I continue to see the literary work first of all as a textual entity (post-1960s Barthes again) whose minimal units of meaning can be analyzed at a level of detail for which aesthetic values such as literariness are secondary. The term "process" likewise also fails to account adequately for the work of the translation. It is *this* work—*travail* rather than *œuvre*, *Arbeit* (or even *Werk*) rather than *Kunstwerk*—for which I want to be an advocate and for which Saussy's remarks provide an apt point of departure. Finally, I admit to a degree of doubt concerning Saussy's contention that the process of translation fails to affect the subject matter that it purportedly conveys. To the contrary, elements of inscription that I take as essential to the work of translation inevitably bear on the nature of a communication as a process that is never direct or transparent.

For the record, I mean to "speak"—actually write—here less as a theorist of translation than as chair of the University of Iowa's Department of Cinema and Comparative Literature, in which former colleagues Stavros Deligiorgis, Gayatri Spivak, Fred Will, and Daniel Weissbort were among the first to teach literary translation in the United States nearly forty years ago. In fact, all of us who study and teach language and literature are comparatists—and even professional foreigners of sorts, in deed if not always by title.<sup>2</sup> George Steiner, for one, has long been an eloquent advocate for a model of comparative literature centered in the eventuality and defeats of translation under the sway of what he calls the multiplicity of languages after Babel:

Every facet of translation—its history, its lexical and grammatical means, the differences of approach that extend from the word-by-word interlinear to the freest imitation or metamorphic adaptation—is absolutely pivotal to the comparatist. . . . It is, furthermore, a close hearing of the failures or incompletions of even the finest of translations which, more than any other means of access, helps to throw light on the *genius loci* as it were, in any language. Labor as we may, *bread* will never wholly translate *pain*. What, in English, French or Italian is *Heimat*?<sup>3</sup>

Steiner's remarks point to the conundrums surrounding translation as an activity engaged with language as the material expression of cultural difference. The terms "failure" and "incompletion" imply the persistence of a model of translation whose virtues would entail precisely overcoming failure and incompletion. Accordingly, a successful and complete translation would presumably be one that succeeded in excluding any and all alternatives. Yet the criteria of such completion would, I believe, be of less interest to Steiner than what a "close hearing" of translation's failures and incompletions might disclose concerning the nature of cultural difference, whose interpretation Steiner identifies elsewhere as the never-ending task of the translator.<sup>4</sup>

### Lost in Translation?

The work of translation is often dismissed within literary production as a second-order representation, with the translator accordingly invisible as an extension—faithful or unfaithful—of the original work attributed to the author.<sup>5</sup> Only when a translation reads clumsily in the target language do the figurative eye, ear, and hand of the translator lose their invisibility. Recasting the work of translation instead as rereading and rewriting engaged with the production of meaning counters received understanding in the form of a prejudice that stigmatizes translation as always already derivative.<sup>6</sup> The efforts of translators whose work I use and admire—Richard Howard, Barbara Wright, and Ralph Manheim are among the names that first come to mind—fully warrant parity with that accorded to authors because they succeed in conveying the linguistic specificity of the source text . . . in another language. What is distinctive about such translations is the extent to which they succeed in conveying a sense of a French text in English beyond conventions of prose meaning in the latter language. The fact that these translations in English read ("feel") close to the French results less from their transparency in the target language than in a quality of abusive fidelity located first in the agency of the translator and only secondarily in the attentive reader.<sup>7</sup>

While it may be tempting for the sake of argument to assert the primacy of lan-

guage over the respective agencies attributed to the figures of author, translator, and reader, a focus on these figures posits the irreducible nature of translation as an act of communication among individuals and/or groups. Such communication obtains even in instances where etymological and historical links between transposition, transfer, and translation conveyed by the Spanish noun *traslado* prompt a convergence of unpaired domains seldom on a par with each other.<sup>8</sup> Recognition alone does not suffice to rectify this lack of parity. But it illustrates the extent to which the work of translation falls all too easily into aspects of contrast rather than comparison. As in the case of the translator's invisibility, interaction between the two domains is often unequal.

The work of translation is most evident in detail and thus in a sensitivity to language and style grounded in poesis and poetics; that is, in the making and critical understanding of how that making occurs. At the same time, translation enters fully into areas of force, influence, and power that set poetics by necessity alongside politics of varying kinds and degrees. To the extent that current usage of the term "globalization" can be understood as including an increase in the circulation of capital—symbolic and cultural as well as material—the import of translation cannot be determined simply by the accuracy, grace, or faithfulness of the product. Instead, it centers, as Gayatri Spivak argues, on choices made by the translator: "In the translation from *French* to *English* lies the disappeared history of distinctions in another space—made by the French and withdrawn by the English—full of the movement of languages and peoples still in historical sedimentation at the bottom, waiting for the real virtuality of our imagination."<sup>9</sup> Spivak's position is, in fact, among the strongest that I have seen in support of what she refers to several pages earlier in the same book as "the irreducible work of translation, not from language to language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is a 'life.'"<sup>10</sup>

Exactly what do we mean when we refer to the politics of translation? Jacques Derrida describes translation as a political-institutional problem of the university linked to the values of traditional teaching.<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Venuti characterizes it as a cultural political practice that opens onto ethical dimensions involving greater respect for linguistic and cultural difference.<sup>12</sup> For Sherry Simon, translation is a feminist practice and "a mode of *engagement* with literature necessarily involved in a politics of transmission, in perpetuating or contesting the values which sustain our literary culture."<sup>13</sup> Spivak, Derrida, Venuti, and Simon all seem to agree on the potential of translation to contest received practices and values related to language as communication. Where Derrida emphasizes teaching and the institution of the university, Venuti analyzes power relations at work in the commerce of literary translation whose academic variant he describes as "a deep unwillingness among foreign-language specialists to

think about the differences introduced by moving between languages and cultures."<sup>14</sup> Venuti argues forcefully for moving beyond linguistic-based approaches that block the ethical and political agenda of a minoritizing practice of translation. Spivak and Simon follow Venuti while they focus on cultural aspects of identity related to the long history of subjugation (Spivak) and gender as a distinctive construction emerging enunciated at multiple sites (Simon).

What Simon describes as the cultural turn linking translation studies to a feminist practice promotes a change in critical perspective and the foundational questions: "Instead of asking the traditional question which has preoccupied translation theorists—'How should we translate, what is a correct translation?'—the emphasis is placed on a descriptive approach: 'what do translations do, how do they circulate in the world and elicit response?'"<sup>15</sup> Referring to the writings of Spivak, Salman Rushdie, and Homi Bhabha, Simon argues for an altered understanding of translation as an activity "which destabilizes cultural identities, and becomes the basis for new modes of cultural creation" (135). The model that she proposes is that of Third World literature, whose translation into English discloses imbalances inherent in a willful monolingualism and its corollary of a "flat international translatese" wholly inadequate to the transmission of literary and cultural specificity (142). (Spivak makes a similar point when she writes of what happens when "all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of with-it translatese, so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan."<sup>16</sup>)

The questions that Simon raises for translation as a feminist practice and the case studies on which she draws illustrate not just what translations do, but also (and more to the point) what they fail to do. Simon also follows Spivak by extending the politics of translation toward a revised pedagogy affecting the recognition of difference within the postcolonial nation as well as the institutional site of this pedagogy in college and/or university curricula. The logic that links writing, translation, and pedagogy is one of *transmission*. Accordingly, the prospect of making translation integral to the new comparative literature is most evident in cases that illustrate the limits of current models and practices: that is, when they disclose what translation does as well as what it does *not* do. Simon invokes Christine Brooke-Rose's 1968 novel *Between* and Eva Hoffman's 1989 essay *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* as recording an economy of difference and loss growing out of new forms of postwar internationalism. Without understating the pertinence of Simon's examples, I want to explore how a similar economy of difference and logic of transmission bear on translation faced by Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian writers following the formal end of colonization under France in 1962. I take my cue here especially from Abdelke-

bir Khatibi, Assia Djebar, Abdelwahab Meddeb, and others whose writings disclose a cultural layering that casts their authors as occupying an "in-between" space between Arabic, French, and other languages. To bring this layering back to the level of language, I want to explore how the specificity of enunciation and inscription bears on translation in the context of globalization and difference.

It is helpful to start by distinguishing between the phenomenon of the bilingual (which Khatibi often equates with the pluri-lingual) and conventional usage that posits the former term as fluency in more than one language. Differences between the two usages emerge exactly when the assumptions grounding translation as a finite process no longer obtain in a reading practice that recognizes a core of language that resists translation. Accordingly, the phenomenon of the bi- or pluri-lingual discloses an "infraliminal level of writing and thinking that renders the dualistic opposition that has dominated Maghrebi literary production obsolete."<sup>17</sup> It recasts translation less as a process leading to transparency in the target language than as a confrontation in which multiple languages and cultures square off against each other and "meet without merging . . . without a reconciling osmosis or synthesis."<sup>18</sup> Curiously, a secondary meaning of the French verb *traduire*, designating the legal phenomenon of bringing someone before a court ("traduire en cours de justice") conveys the adversarial nature of this interaction. It heightens the strategic force that Khatibi grants to the *bi-langue* and *pluri-langue* as a means of disclosing the play of power that always bears on a diglossic condition whose inequality conventional translation all too often glosses over. Retaining the italicized term *bi-langue* in English likewise contends with the corporeal sense of "bi-tongue" or "forked tongue" apart, at a distinct remove, from standard usage of the English word *bilingual*.<sup>19</sup>

For more than thirty years, Khatibi has written decidedly between languages in order to destabilize hierarchies of the colonial period that fixed Arabic language and cultures as inferior to their French equivalents. In *La Mémoire tatouée*, he writes that "at school, with a secular education imposed on my religion, I became a triglot: I read French without being able to speak it, I played with some fragments of written Arabic, and I spoke the dialect as my everyday language. Where in the midst of this confusion is coherence and continuity?"<sup>20</sup>

A decade later Khatibi transforms this condition between languages and cultures into a critical wedge when he writes:

As long as the theory of translation, the *bi-langue*, and the *pluri-langue* does not advance, certain North African texts will remain impregnable via formal and functional approaches. The mother tongue is at work in the foreign language. Between the one and the other occur a permanent translation and an interchange of infinite recession that is

extremely difficult to elucidate. . . . Where does the violence of the text take shape if not in this cross-over, this intersection that is truly irreconcilable?<sup>21</sup>

As described above, *pluri-langue* and *bi-langue* promote a literary production in which the marks and traces of multiple languages resist traditional translation grounded on binary distinctions between source and target languages. For Samia Mehrez, the *pluri-langue* asserts the untranslatable as a mark of resistance and subversion: "With this literature, we can no longer merely concern ourselves with conventional notions of linguistic equivalence, or ideas of loss and gain which have long been a consideration in translation theory. For these texts written by postcolonial bilingual subjects create a language 'in between' and therefore come to occupy a space 'in between.'"<sup>22</sup>

The evocation of *pluri-langue* and *bi-langue* entails interaction among calligraphies of French and Arabic whose incommensurability Khatibi transforms from deficiency to advantage—he refers to luck, energy, and his third ear—as a performance of writing equated with the force of enunciation. Of Abdelwahhab Meddeb's 1979 *Talismano*, he writes:

Here the book is torn, sometimes bursting into pieces. Something that belongs to the madness of speaking in tongues in a unified writing, inhabits the imagination of those who suffer the inversion of the ordinary relations from one language to another: relations that specify to each language its distinct property, its separate territory, and its resistance to all translation. The extraordinary thing would be to write so to speak in multiple hands a text that is nothing but a perpetual translation.<sup>23</sup>

Both passages cited above convey the essential differences of language and culture bearing on North African texts whose impregnability also embodies an otherness that *Love in Two Languages* extends to sex and affect. Once again, translation remains a key element of Khatibi's deployment of *bi-langue*:

What was translated by this love? Reply slowly, it's still going toward an encounter without actually reaching it, and recovering from it in reality. Neither expectation nor return: maintain the constraint of the undetermined. In thinking of you in other terms, I'll add that a dissymmetric rapture took place: I transcribed you in your native tongue as I abducted you from my own, which you didn't recognize.<sup>24</sup>

The indispensability of Khatibi's *bi-langue* for the interpretation of Maghrebi texts is heightened by the affective charge of sexual difference and an otherness that *Love in Two Languages* conveys in its full complexity. This otherness does not, however, lend itself to deployment on the part of the presumably male narrator, a deployment to which an anonymous female referred to throughout the text as "she" seemingly has

no access.<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida provides an additional take on the phenomenon of *bi-langue* when he asserts, just before noting that he and Khatibi share a certain "state" as far as language and culture are concerned, that the double postulation

—We only ever speak one language . . .

(yes, but)

—We never only speak only one language . . .

is not only the law of what is called translation but also the law itself as translation.<sup>26</sup> Derrida is referring to the linguistic hierarchy imposed on him in his youth by the educational system in colonial Algeria, and this in the context of a cultural complexity conveyed via the invented term "nostalgia" that serves as a measure of both distance and persistent proximity.<sup>27</sup>

### Challenging Translation

The sites of translation work that I have invoked above range from academic discipline and pedagogy to insurmountable difference and otherness cast in sexual and affective terms. Khatibi's staging of translation as an extended set of attempts at exchange and understanding recalls the format of Maurice Blanchot's *L'attente l'oubli* (1962), and this not least by the suspension of full and adequate understanding through an infinite series of failed attempts that result in misunderstanding. Khatibi's advocacy of *bi-langue* and *pluri-langue* derives from cultural and political conditions in North Africa that impose a linguistic space constructed out of two kinds of Arabic (dialectal and classical), Berber, French, and (in parts of Morocco) Spanish. This plurality also bears on the status of French as a language continually made, unmade, and remade by the internal and external languages that surround and inhabit it: "And in fact, all Maghrebian literature of so-called French expression is an account of translation. I don't mean that it is only translation, but more specifically that it is an account that *speaks in tongues*."<sup>28</sup>

The challenges that Khatibi's *bi-langue* and *pluri-langue* raise for translation recall those associated with a third space of hybrid culture in which translation likewise imitates and displaces the priority of what traditional translation posits as the source language.<sup>29</sup> As hybridity becomes less an exception than a fact of daily life, a translation pedagogy attuned to difference can contribute to recasting the model and practices of a new comparative literature in line with the realities of globalization in its multiple expressions. Part of that model and practice should extend the decolonization of knowledge by showing the extent to which knowledge remains entrenched in the irreducible difference of language. For Khatibi, this difference links

the geohistorical location of the Maghreb between Orient, Occident, and Africa as a crossing of the global in itself to a condition in which the regional languages of classical Arabic, its local dialects, French, and Spanish contain the inscription of the other languages that surround and inhabit it.<sup>30</sup> How best to convey this difference and its essential dissymmetry is a prime challenge for what translation studies can contribute to understanding the range of local, regional, and global contexts with which the new comparative literature increasingly contends.<sup>31</sup>

As formulated through the set of problems that Khatibi raises in conjunction with the phenomena of the *bi-langue* and *pluri-langue*, translation enhances rather than resolves linguistic difference by pointing to the collapse of clear and stable distinctions between source and target languages:

A foreign tongue is not added to the native tongue as a simple palimpsest, but transforms it. When I write in French, my entire effort consists of separating myself from my native language, of relegating it to my deepest self. I am thus divided from myself within myself, which is the condition for all writing inured to the destiny of languages. Dividing myself, reincarnating myself—in the other's language. Henceforth, little by little, my native tongue becomes foreign to me. Bilingualism is the space between two exteriorities. I enter into the telling of forgetting and of anamnesia. Henceforth, "I am an/other" in an idiom that I owe it to myself to invent—a limit experience inherent in this situation.<sup>32</sup>

For Khatibi, then, the turning point in contending with the phenomenon of the *bi-langue* in its Maghrebian specificity involves taking charge of—rather than merely resisting—the plurality among Arabic, French, and Berber even (and especially) when what it imposes is a radical experience of melancholia and loss. To assert difference, to speak and write this loss, is thus to contend with the war between languages in the formation of self as a more personal setting of the impact of this war in the formation of nations and states.

Among the strategies that might promote this understanding of difference, the condition that Khatibi asserts in terms of *bi-langue* and *pluri-langue* lends itself by extension to the context-dependent practice of a thick translation linked to a "genuinely informed respect for others."<sup>33</sup> The irreducible difference on which Khatibi grounds his practices of *bi-langue* and *pluri-langue* can be tempered with reference to the more moderate position that Benjamin adopts when he asserts that while languages are not strangers to one another, "all translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of language."<sup>34</sup> Close reading will continue to be grounded in efforts to understand linguistic specificity as well as to recognize how broader factors of difference bear on the linguistic choices made by the writer.<sup>35</sup> As comparatists learn to contend with the full range of this difference and foreign-



ness, translation becomes even more essential to literary study across languages and cultures such as the teaching of literature in translation that Saussy aptly designates as the best place to start.

## NOTES

1. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).
2. The expression "professional foreigners" appears in Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Figures de l'étranger dans la littérature française* (Paris: Denoël, 1987), 211. Translation must continue to ally itself with literary studies and their institutional corollaries in academic departments of language and literature. Translation activities at Iowa have long been allied with creative writing, especially with the International Writing Program, a residency program founded in 1967 by Paul Engle and Hualing Nieh that brings writers to spend a semester in Iowa City. Because the writers often live in countries where freedom of expression and human rights are restricted, the opportunity to interact across languages with students and faculty responds to the challenge raised by Gayatri Spivak and others to make a new "Comp. Lit." with a human import.
3. George Steiner, "What is Comparative Literature?" in *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978–1995* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 151–52.
4. Steiner elsewhere connects open-endedness of translation to reading and hermeneutics. See, for example, his "Understanding as Translation," in *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 48.
5. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 6. Walter Benjamin makes a similar point in "The Task of the Translator" (1921) when he writes that "just as translation is a form of its own, so the task of the translator may be regarded as distinct and clearly differentiated from the task of the poet" (*Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Vol. 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996], 253). Much of what I advocate in this chapter draws on Venuti's work over the past fifteen years. I thank Venuti and Christopher Merrill for their comments on an initial draft.
6. Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1.
7. See Philip B. Lewis, "The Measure of Translation Effects," in *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 31–62.
8. Octavio Armand, *Refractions*, trans. C. Maier (New York: SITES/Lumen Books, 231); cited in Carol Maier, "Translation, *Dépayement*, and their Figuration," in *Translation and Power*, ed. Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 184–85.
9. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 18.
10. *Ibid.*, 13.
11. Jacques Derrida, "Living On/Border Lines," in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979), 93–94.

12. Venuti, *Translator's Invisibility*, 19; *Scandals of Translation*, 6.
13. Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (New York: Routledge, 1996), viii.
14. Venuti, *Scandals of Translation*, 33.
15. Simon, *Gender in Translation*, 7. Subsequent citations are in the text.
16. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 182. Along similar lines, I have heard derisive reference to a practice known as "MacTranslation."
17. Réda Bensmaïa, "Translating or Whiting Out Language: On Khatibi's *Amour bilingue*," in *Experimental Nations: Or the Invention of the Maghreb*, trans. Alyson Waters (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 104.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Richard Howard's decision to retain the term *bi-langue* in his English translation of *Amour bilingue*—see *Love in Two Languages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990)—is fully in line with the model and practice of writing in the 1983 French text published under the title of *Amour bilingue*.
20. Abdelkebir Khatibi, *La Mémoire tatouée* (Paris: Denoël, 1971), 64; cited in Samia Mehrez, "Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text," in *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 1992), 120.
21. Abdelkebir Khatibi, "Bilinguisme et littérature," in *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoël, 1983), 179. I have italicized the two key terms for emphasis.
22. Mehrez, "Translation and the Postcolonial Experience," 121.
23. Khatibi, "Bilinguisme et littérature," 205.
24. Khatibi, *Love in Two Languages*, 101–2.
25. Winifred Woodhull asserts this indispensability but remains critical of the extent to which Khatibi's use of deconstruction and Freudian psychoanalysis reinforce patriarchal attitudes (*Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonization and Literatures* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993], xiii). See also Lucy Stone McNeese, "Decolonizing the Sign: Language and Identity in Abdelkebir Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée*," *Yale French Studies* 83 (1993): 12–29; and Bensmaïa, *Experimental Nations*, 99–124.
26. Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, trans. P. Mensah (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 10.
27. *Ibid.*, 52.
28. Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, 186.
29. See Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 210.
30. On Khatibi and border thinking, see Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Local Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 64–71.
31. This dissymmetry is neither neutral nor negligible. In the Maghreb, it has led to the death of three languages linked, respectively, to colonization (Arabic) and to independence (French and Berber). It has prompted an apparent impasse in which "literary Arabic is misunderstood by the majority, while dialectal Arabic and Berber are limited to oral usage while French, often

poorly spoken, remains the language of colonial alienation" (Djamila Saadi-Mokrene, "The Algerian Linguicide," in *Algeria in Others' Languages*, ed. Anne-Emmanuelle Berger [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002], 44–46).

32. Khatibi, "Diglossia," in Berger, 158.

33. Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Thick Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2000), 427. Appiah's title evokes the model of a culturally informed and context-dependent interpretation that Clifford Geertz sets forth in "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

34. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 255, 257.

35. William H. Gass, *Reading Rilke: Reflections on the Problems of Translation* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 55.

## Old Fields, New Corn, and Present Ways of Writing about the Past

CAROLINE D. ECKHARDT

Some six hundred years ago, a Londoner whose day job might have come under the designation of Civil Servant (he collected taxes, inspected bridges, delivered confidential messages for powerful government figures, and in general made himself useful), and whose night job might have been designated Poet or Public Intellectual, was having an epistemological moment. In other words, he was pondering the nature and the production of knowledge, and in particular, the relations between earlier knowledge, as preserved in writing, and present knowledge, as derived from experience. His resolution, while not new either then or now, captures in metaphor several concepts useful for any attempt to assess the status of a field of knowledge or an academic discipline:

For out of olde felde, as men seyth,  
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,  
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,  
Cometh al this new science that men lere.<sup>1</sup>

The poet, as some readers may have recognized, is Chaucer, and the poem is his "Parlement of Foules," an allegorical narrative in which most of the speakers are birds, many of their utterances are what we would call bird-brained, and the doubly punning title suggests a parliament (a speaking or discourse) both of birds and of fools, as well as pointing toward the British Parliament in particular.<sup>2</sup> With those multiple referents, the poem goes on to incorporate a critique of language, of representative government, of human love and desire, and of literature itself.

The epistemological position offered in the brief lines just quoted, which Chaucer will later complicate, seems simple enough here: just as new grain comes from old fields, so new knowledge comes from the cultivation of old books. The metaphor