

Culture in Translation: The Case of British *Pathé News*

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This article is a metareflection on translation and the process of mediating ways of living that are foreign to one another. Paul Ricoeur writes that the work of translation cannot be separated from “the battlefield of a secret resistance motivated by fear, indeed by hatred of the foreign, perceived as a threat against our own linguistic identity” (2006, p. 23). At the risk of serving and betraying two masters, the intellectual, theoretical and practical work of the translator in this tense theatre of interlingual war is best characterized as an ethical problem: to navigate our anxieties of otherness by making difference accessible while also protecting the ‘other’ from appropriation. For Ricoeur, this translational bind is the essence of what he calls “linguistic hospitality” (p. 23). In the context of international motion picture news production in the early twentieth century, newsreel producers such as British *Pathé News* faced a similar challenge: to make far-off people, places, events and cultural practices accessible to cinema-going audiences at home. As *cultural* translations engaged in the description and explanation of frames of reference different to those of the spectator, newsreels took their audiences on an intercultural journey of discovery, bridging both the physical and the metaphorical gulf that separated them from the images projected on their cinema screens and the experience of life elsewhere. With regard to interlingual translation, Ricoeur writes that when the translator

acknowledges and assumes the irreducibility of the pair, the peculiar and the foreign, he finds his reward in the recognition of the impassable status of the dialogicality of the act of translating as the reasonable horizon of the desire to

translate. In spite of the agonistics that make a drama of the translator's task, he can find his happiness in what I would like to call *linguistic hospitality*. (p. 10)

Linguistic hospitality, he goes on to say, is “correspondence without adequacy” – a constant striving to explain that which we do not understand (p. 10). With its nod to Beckett – fail, fail again, fail *better* – linguistic hospitality is about relinquishing the dream of a ‘perfect’ translation and recognizing its fragility. By translating ‘differently’, without hope of filling the gap between adequacy and failure, linguistic hospitality is where “the pleasure of dwelling in the other’s language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one’s own welcoming house” (p. 10). When we apply this interlingual paradigm to the cultural realm, we outline a model for representing difference without having to bend it to our will. By locating this discussion within the concrete practice of British *Pathé News*, this article advances a powerful example of not only the complex intercultural negotiations that exist at the heart of newsreel production *qua* translation but also the ways in which these negotiations echo across our relationship to otherness more generally. At a time when the coexistence of sometimes diametrically opposed modes of living threatens to destabilize the foundations of peace, there is much to be learned from an approach that embraces the need for understanding across borders of difference while also recognizing the fallibility of precisely such efforts.

Newsreels and the Northern Ireland context

The title card of a 1921 *Pathé News Gazette* reads: “BELFAST/ ULSTER’S GREAT DAY/
Sir James Craig addresses/ 50,000 Orangemen after/ imposing demonstration/ in the

City” (British Pathé, 1921). The silent film shows a vast crowd moving through Belfast City Centre. There are marchers on parade, men on horseback, horse-drawn carriages. The marchers wear bowler hats and sashes; some carry banners, others play pipes or beat giant *Lambeg* drums attached by harness to their chests. The streets are lined with people as they pass. The film cuts to a podium from which James Craig, the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, speaks. The “great day” is 12 July, the annual public holiday on which the Orange Order and its supporters celebrate the victory of Protestant King William of Orange over Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The “imposing demonstration” is just one of many so-called ‘Orange walks’ that take place during the summer marching season across Northern Ireland, parts of Scotland, England and other Commonwealth countries. According to the website of the Grand Orange Lodge these “commemorative” parades mark various events in “the history of the people”:

The parades are a glorious display of pageantry. The colour of the collarette or sash, the uniforms of the bands and the beautiful paintings on the banners combine to make an Orange Parade a visual kaleidoscope. The Flags and Banners are full of religious, cultural, and political symbolism depicting, biblical scenes, famous people or events in history and in themselves portray the rich cultural heritage of our people in picture form. (Grand Orange Lodge, 2015a)

For many, the ‘Twelfth’ is a fun day out and a chance to celebrate a shared sense of cultural history with family and friends. Yet what the film does not describe is the deep identitarian division that surrounds it. The following year *Pathé* once again covered the Belfast Twelfth parade. This time the 1922 title card reads: “A PEACEFUL “TWELFTH”/

50,000 Orangemen/ celebrate the 232nd/ Anniversary of the/ Battle of the Boyne". Again, the film shows a vast crowd of marchers processing up Donegal Place towards Belfast City Hall and an intertitle is provided: "Armoured cars/ protected the procession" (British Pathé, 1922). The camera cuts to a close-up of an armoured vehicle monitoring the scene. The film ends with a glimpse of James Craig, flanked by British flags, addressing the crowd from a podium. Why the apparent shift in security measures between 1921 and 1922? The hyperbolic headline of the 1921 film implies a celebration for all, yet by then disagreement about British rule had spread across the island, which until 1920 had been a single constituent country of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Three months before the release of the 1921 film, Ireland was formally partitioned into two subdivisions, following years of violent conflict between British forces and republicans fighting for independence. 'Northern Ireland', comprised the six counties of the northeast and a self-governing Irish state controlled the remaining 26. Under this dispensation the 'Irish Free State' was to remain an autonomous dominion of the British Empire with the British monarch as head of state. Many saw this as a betrayal of the republic proclaimed after the Rising of 1916 and the ideological struggle that ensued has continued in some form ever since.

Over ninety years later, the experience of the Twelfth for the people of Northern Ireland remains dichotomous. The Grand Orange Lodge promotes the parades as a "commemoration" of "the history of the people" and it is true that for many the Twelfth plays an important role in the Protestant imaginary. But as an institution which describes itself as a "Protestant fraternity" created to "defend" Protestantism, it is also true that "the history of the people" to which the Orange Order's Twelfth celebrations speak is a history told from the perspective of only one section of Northern Irish society (Grand Orange Lodge, 2015b). For those who do not share the Order's view, the Twelfth

is a reminder that many facets of public life in Northern Ireland remain locked in single-identity cul de sacs that the peace process has not yet been able to solve. To residents in some of the Catholic-majority areas through which the Orangemen parade it is a time of protests against the Protestant bias the parades are perceived to symbolize. In other areas, Protestant supporters have often reacted forcefully against official orders to deny them access to certain parading routes. Violence has frequently erupted at these interface points and the cost of policing the 2014 Twelfth parades was estimated to exceed £2m, with 36 tactical support groups – what we in Northern Ireland know as ‘riot squads’ – and more than 3,500 officers deployed. To some, with the marching bands and the ‘11th night’ bonfires, the Twelfth stands for culture, solidarity and tradition. For others, it is the illegal erection with impunity of sectarian flags on public lampposts and other street furniture; it is the hanging of effigies of non-Protestant politicians on the same 11th night bonfires; and it is the painting of anti-Catholic slogans in the colours of the Union Jack on children’s foreheads.ⁱ Between these extremes of celebration and exclusion, of course, some 2000 marches take place every year without incident. But in these documentary film shorts we find no hint of the complex and multifaceted story that is the Twelfth of July in Northern Ireland. Celebration or discrimination? Tribalism or community? Pageant or affront? The reality is that the Twelfth is all of these things and it is none of them, for it is a complex practice that no single vision can totalize.

How do we account for the differential experience of this story among the communities of Northern Ireland and its singular representation on film? It is tempting to attribute this perceptual lacuna to the constructedness of the medium itself. After all, the newsreel was the first popular worldwide system of visual news reporting and competition between rival companies was fierce. Predating global satellite news

broadcasts by more than sixty years, the newsreel was the first to transmit moving images of events from every corner of the world and the first to combine 'hard' reportage with 'soft' infotainment (Althaus, 2010, pp. 193-194). In this competitive industry only the strongest companies would survive; reciprocity agreements meant that footage could be shared between subsidiaries of newsreel chains, squeezing out smaller companies. Newsreels typically ran for between ten and twenty minutes and comprised a variety of short documentary items and were released to British cinemas on a twice-weekly basis and screened as part of a programmed feature. In America, due to the vast distances, they were usually released weekly. They commanded huge interest worldwide, with an audience share and diversity unprecedented even today; despite the introduction of sound in the late 1920s, the format remained virtually unchanged for nearly seventy years in Britain and sixty years in the United States. But this interest created immense pressure – to produce material that would capture the hearts and minds of audiences while also lending itself to maximum sustainability. The time lag between filming and screening meant that newsreels could not compete with the speed of newspapers in getting the story out. Given that newsreels were replayed in individual cinemas for several days before moving on to second-run venues, material had to maintain a healthy shelf life. Producers therefore had to specialize in content that could hold the public's attention for as long as possible. According to Althaus:

This meant that the newsreel, as a component of every feature film program, had to do three things at once: avoid controversial subjects, hold the attention of audiences with little interest in current events, and be understood with minimal cognitive effort. (2010, p. 201)

Stories were recounted with a simple narrative structure and an obvious storyline. Internationally distributed news items were scripted in local languages and adapted to suit the tastes of each domestic market by editors acutely attuned to public taste (Hiley & McKernan, 2001, p. 191). With war stories, for example, melodrama was the dominant motif, with a “distinctively overwrought presentation” that pitted the forces of good against the forces of evil, with a musical score that underlined this framing. Such films were limited in the visual evidence they could present, shots were often restricted in terms of their viewpoint and shooting could be random and discontinuous (Huggins, 2007, p. 685). Motion picture news has hence been characterized as a highly conservative medium that tended to follow the government line and which condensed, rather than expanded discourses, created stereotypes, problematic projections and gendered power relationships (p. 686). They have been described as superficial and sensationalized accounts of world events that subordinate current affairs to light entertainment, mired in the faking of actualities and condemned as vehicles for government censorship and media-savvy politicians (Fielding, 1972).

These critiques go some way towards explaining the limiting discourses that inflect *Pathé's* representations of the Northern Irish Twelfth. But by focusing on distal factors of market competition, audience expectation and constraints of time and geography, and how these influenced the shape and nature of newsreel representations, this approach reveals nothing about the proximal factors that motivated newsreel producers themselves. In 1915 *Pathé* issued a set of in-house ‘Hints to newsfilm cameramen’, which stated that:

[a] parade is only worth taking if there is something decidedly new in it; and you can never say that there is until you have succeeded in stating what that is in

writing. Owing to the speed of the movement across the field of vision, and to the nearness of the subject to the camera, a float is almost impossible to photograph successfully when in motion. [...] A parade must be very interesting indeed to justify the usual street scenes. (Hiley, 1993, p. 40)

Behind the global race to bring the latest news and events to the British and American spectator, was a desire to offer something *new*: to identify foreign ways of living and make them accessible to audiences at home. In a 1926 essay entitled ‘The Business of International News by Motion Pictures’, Editor-in-Chief of *Pathé News* Emanuel Cohen proffered a similar view:

Like the great news syndicates, [...] the Pathé News is now world wide, its tentacles reaching into every nook and corner of the earth—civilized and uncivilized—its thousands of lenses focussed on every political development, witnessing the pageantry and the tragedy of every people; peering into the customs of every land; holding a mirror to every phase of human activity everywhere. (1926, p. 74)

When applied to *Pathé’s* coverage of the Twelfth, the image of probing tentacles, wending their way throughout Northern Ireland, “holding a mirror” to the practice of parading to which audiences in Great Britain had no direct access, is evocative of a motivational impulse most familiar with the practice of *translation*. As with Cohen’s desire to reach “into every nook and corner of the earth”, translation is driven by a singular objective: to make the unknown accessible. To a translator, the ‘unknown’ is a foreign text written in a language the translator’s audience does not understand. The

translator must package this unknown quantity in a linguistic framework familiar to her audience. By the time it reaches its intended reader, the foreign text is a story retold, quite literally, in the words of the translator. From the perspective of the local audience, the original foreign work is no longer visible. To understand how a single *Pathé* film can simultaneously elucidate *and* occlude the story of the Twelfth is to understand the complex ethical basis from which translation proceeds.

Scapegoating the other

Ricoeur maintained that translation is animated by the belief that it is only by looking outwards to the world of the other that we address something that is missing in our own (2006, p. 32). But this intellectual curiosity brings with it inherent risks, for it follows that if we must import from abroad to meet demands at home, our inability to make it on our own is exposed for all to see. Faced with the vulnerability of this position, we simultaneously desire *and* repudiate the other:

Men of one culture have always known that there were foreigners who had different customs and different languages. And the foreigner has always been disturbing: so there were other ways of life than our own were there? Translation always was a partial response to this 'test of the foreign'. (p. 32)

In this "test", two partners are connected: the foreign, which covers the work that is translated, its author and the language in which it is written, and the reader, as the one who receives the translated work. Between the two, Ricoeur writes, "the translator who passes on the whole message, who has it go from one idiom to another. It is in this

uncomfortable position of mediator that the test in question lies” (p. 4). Viewed from this hermeneutic perspective, where understanding and explanation go hand in hand, the ‘test’ of the foreign starts with the translator’s encounter with ‘otherness’. Richard Kearney, a former student and exponent of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic philosophy writes that “[s]trangers, gods and monsters are three colloquial names for the experience of alterity” that accompanies our encounter with difference (2003, p. 13). “Ever since early Western thought equated the Good with notions of self-identity and sameness”, he finds, “the experience of evil has often been linked with notions of exteriority’ (p. 65). As Yi-fu Tuan explains:

Human beings, individually or in groups, tend to perceive the world with ‘self’ as the centre. Egocentrism and ethnocentrism appear to be universal human traits, though their strengths vary widely among individuals and social groups. Since consciousness lies in the individual, an egocentric structuring of the world is inescapable. (1974, p. 30)

Although aware of its existence in a world of others, the “egocentric” human consciousness structures its relationship to the world from the self outwards. For Kearney, it is this relegation of the other to the self that paves the way for regimes of demonization, exoticization and estrangement.

Consider the ‘self’ at work in the narration of a *Pathé* news item issued on 17 August 1969. The film opens with an Apprentice Boys march in Derry/Londonderry and a voiceover narrates the action:

Londonderry. This was the peaceful prelude to days of rioting and violence. The beginning of a new and bloody chapter in the grim history of the city. As the Apprentice Boys parade, a traditional Protestant march, wound its way through the streets, there was no hint of the violence that was to rip Londonderry apart. It was only when the march was almost over that tempers began to get frayed. Stones were thrown from the Catholic Bogside area. Within minutes barricades were going up and militant MP Bernadette Devlin was addressing the crowd. The police prepared to defend themselves from the stones that were already beginning to hail down on them. Protestants gathered to reply to the Catholic stones. More barricades went up. Tempers flared. The crowd linked arms and within minutes Londonderry was in the grip of the most savage and senseless rioting it has yet seen, with Bogside the battleground. As dusk fell the battle raged on. Rioters threw stones, iron bars and then petrol bombs. As the flames illuminated the scene of conflict, casualties mounted. It was reminiscent of the Blitz. As buildings blazed the rioters sheltered behind their barricades to make more petrol bombs. Police used teargas and three hundred British troops stood by on the outskirts of the city. Ulster's agonizing experience may hold grave consequences for the future. (British Pathé, 1969)

There is a sense in this portrayal that the violence was polarized, with Protestant marchers on one side and the "Catholic Bogside" on another. The foreboding militaristic music and the reference to the Blitz suggest a city under siege by belligerent foreign forces. Yet the Bogside rioters were not outside aggressors; they were residents with as much stake in the city as any. Despite its majority Catholic population, gerrymandering after partition deprived Catholic residents of the same opportunities to share in the

democratic governance of the city as the Protestant minority. Public housing was not allocated fairly and a shortage resulted. This and other grievances fed into tensions that led not just to rioting but the birth of a strong civil rights movement. The annual Apprentice Boys parade on 12 August, meanwhile, commemorated the Protestant victory in the Siege of Derry in 1689 and was regarded as highly provocative by many Catholic residents. There was missile throwing, not only from Bogside residents but also some of the parade's supporters as well, which escalated in the ways described in the film. What is not reported is the effect of the CS gas released by the police in a densely populated area, or that by the time of the film riots had spread elsewhere in Northern Ireland, leaving seven people dead, hundreds more wounded, scores of largely Catholic-owned houses burned out and many more Catholics put out of their homes. As a result, the first of Northern Ireland's infamous 'peace lines' were constructed to ease tensions by separating neighbouring loyalist and republican areas. These urban monoliths were meant to be temporary, but proved so effective they remain necessary even today. This period is seen by many as the point at which the 'Troubles' began in earnest.

Of course, not all marchers wished to antagonize local residents and not all civil rights demonstrators at the time were 'rioters', and so on. Yet the *Pathé* film suggests a very clear *them-us* binary. If, as George Steiner says, "one's own space is mapped by what lies outside; [and] it derives coherence, tactile configuration, from the pressure of the external", then the 'security' of the self seems dependent on precisely how this 'outside' is configured (1998, p. 381). Kearney illustrates this dependence with the example of eighteenth-century France. Before the Revolution, foreigners, known as *étrangers*, were received with enthusiasm. By 1793, however, they had become *agents de l'étranger*, proclaimed as non-citizens and sentenced to the guillotine. In the national psyche of post-Revolution France the figure of the foreigner symbolized the denial of

individual subjectivity in favour of reified representations on the basis of prevailing prejudices (2003, p. 33). In such cases, writes Jan Blommaert:

we pay less attention to true characteristics than to what the 'other' might represent in our socio-psychological and moral frame of reference. We construct the other in terms of our own categories, expectations, habits and norms. Not everything in our reality fits those categories and expectations, and not all of our behaviour corresponds to these habits and norms. But the deviation, the 'abnormality', is attributed to the 'other' as an essential property. (1998, p. 19)

This is a response to alterity in which the bearer of cultural difference is viewed not as an individual worthy of respect but as a figure onto which our anxieties of otherness are projected. For Kearney, this is the foundation of the unconscious process of "scapegoating", in which:

we contrive to transmute the sacrificial alien into a monster, or into a fetish-god. But either way, we refuse to recognize the stranger before us as a singular other who responds, in turn, to the singular otherness in each of us. (2003, p. 5)

Kearney takes his inspiration from the sacrificial rites of the Old Testament in which the expulsion of the "scapegoat" described in Leviticus signalled the expiation of sin by demarcating the 'pure' from the 'impure'. This practice, Kearney says, is repeated again and again on human figures throughout history. Thus, "Canaanites, Gentiles, Jews, heretics, witches, infidels and – after the discovery of new continents by colonial

empires – unregenerate ‘savages’ become the focus of a moral culture’s purging of its ‘monsters’” (pp. 27-28).

The problem is that we perceive others either as so “transcendent” that we can never imagine a relationship to them directly, or so “immanent” that we view them not as beings in their own right but as figments of our own interpretation with no subjectivity of their own (p. 11). Such a predicament – where the foreign is ‘too foreign’ and the familiar ‘too familiar’ – locks us into a process in which we repudiate otherness through the essentialism of our response. For Elaine Scarry, this is the difficulty of “imagining other people”, for our capacity to dematerialize the cultural specificity of another is the result of our inability to acknowledge the ‘injury’ we cause. This injury occurs:

because we have trouble believing in the reality of other persons. At the same time, the injury itself makes visible the fact that we cannot see the reality of other persons. It displays our perceptual disability. For if other persons stood clearly visible to us, the infliction of that injury would be impossible. (1996, p. 102)

Where does this leave translation? In her introduction to *Translation in a Postcolonial Context: Early Irish Literature in English Translation*, Maria Tymoczko (1999) proffers a view strikingly similar to that of Kearney and Scarry:

Increasingly it has been recognized that as it facilitates the growth of cultural contact and a movement to one world, translation is paradoxically the means by which difference is perceived, preserved, projected, and proscribed. Translation

stands as one of the most significant means by which one culture represents another. If nations are 'imagined communities', inevitably representations of nations will shift as they are constructed through translation by different groups with their own senses of identity, groups both internal and external to a nation. [...] translations form images of whole cultures and peoples, as well as of individual authors or texts, images that in turn come to function as reality (pp. 17-18).

As the means by which difference is perceived and constructed, translation produces "representations" of otherness and, as Tymoczko warns, participates in a process in which the self-same representations "come to function as reality".

What does it mean to apply this translational logic to *Pathé's* 'Battle of the Bogside' coverage? In *Poetics of Cinema*, David Bordwell (2008) warns of the dangers of "reflectionist" thinking in the search for causal accounts for cinematic representations. 'Reflectionists', he writes, typically ignore material that does not suit the narrative for which they seek proof. Pick any one film, he says, and more or less any resonance with contemporary social life can be found. But take any other film, or the industry's entire output and things are less clear-cut. Reflectionists further fail to account explicitly for the ways in which widely held attitudes within society could find their way into film, given the multitudinous agents who contribute to the production process and the heterogeneous agendas they pursue:

In sum, reflectionist criticism throws out loose and intuitive connections between film and society without offering concrete explanations that can be argued explicitly. It relies on spurious and far-fetched correlations between films

and social or political events. It neglects damaging counterexamples. It assumes that popular culture is the audience talking to itself, without interference or distortion from the makers and the social institutions they inhabit. And the causal forces invoked—a spirit of the time, a national mode, and collective anxieties—may exist only as reified abstractions that the commentator turns into historical agents. It comes down, very often, to realizing that large-scale events need not have large-scale and distant causes, and small and medium-size events can have small and proximate causes. (pp. 31-32)

By placing its emphasis on the *agent* rather than on the *object* of representation, the translational model serves primarily as a reminder that as spectators in the twenty-first century, causal accounts are not only out of reach but limited in scope, for they illuminate only the constructedness of motion picture news production and not the wider problematics of cultural encounter behind it.

Representing the other

Johannes Fabian describes the gap between what we perceive and how we represent it as the difference “between reality and its ‘doubles’” (1990, p. 753). In the slippage between reality and representation it must not be forgotten that the former has an ‘existence’ before it is later ‘doubled’. “Awkward and faddish as it may sound”, he writes, “othering expresses the insight that the Other is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but made” (p. 755). Translation’s ‘other’ is thus never merely ‘encountered’ but constructed, through regimes of enquiry driven by the translator. It is here that we delve deeper into the hermeneutic paradigm behind Ricoeur’s

conceptualization of linguistic hospitality. To its reader, a text for translation effects an escape – from its original author, time, place and addressee. By this measure, all text is addressed to just about anyone who knows how to read (Ricoeur, 1976, pp. 92-93). Since the author’s intention is beyond our reach, we must ‘appropriate’ its meaning to ourselves, rendering contemporaneous its past potential by “actualizing the meaning of the text for the present reader” (pp. 91-92). If understanding a text is the first task of the translator, this task is not to reconstruct the original ‘event’ of meaning between author and addressee but to generate an all-new meaning event. As Michel de Certeau explains, this process is about making a text “habitable”, like a rented apartment:

It transforms another person’s property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient. Renters make comparable changes in an apartment they furnish with their acts and memories; as do speakers, in the language into which they insert both the messages of their native tongue and, through their accent, through their own ‘terms of phrase’, etc., and their own history; as do pedestrians, in the streets they fill with the forests of their desires and goals. (1998, p. xi)

In a representational sense, it is the translator’s distance from the original event of text and addressee and the concomitant hermeneutics of interpretation required to revivify it for contemporary audiences that make injury possible. As Stuart Hall explains:

Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of enunciation. What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say ‘in our own name’, of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is

spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place. (1990, pp. 233-234)

The translator's "position of enunciation" yields crucial insights into the range of influences both internal and external to the process of representation. To what extent does a translation play to its audience? Does a translator's interpretation of the audience's needs and expectations affect the tenor of representation? In the context of documentary motion picture news, for example, it is worth considering the position of enunciation from which the Editor-in-Chief of *Pathé News* wrote in 1926: "News is only news only when new to the world, when it can still thrill, excite, arouse with all the warmth of fresh sensation, when it is red hot from the forge of events" (pp. 75-75). If, as Hall maintains, the one who speaks and the one who is spoken of exist in mutual exclusivity, the 'thrilling' quality of *Pathé's* Northern Ireland coverage is, above all, an imputation.

As an intercultural encounter between the world of the foreign and the world of the local, negotiated through the figure of the translator, translation and representation operate as two sides of the same coin. When viewed as an interpretive exercise, translation 'mediates' the foreign texts it treats, creating an essential difference between the text that is interpreted and the translation that is produced. The transformative hermeneutic that accompanies the translator's interpretation means that translations reveal more about the realities of appropriation on the part of the translator than the 'reality' of texts themselves. It is for this reason that in his seminal essay on the task of the translator, Walter Benjamin rejected the notion of translation as the 'communication' of a foreign work. If, as Fabian maintains, representation is the praxis of our encounter with otherness, then the business of representing others is

really a way of representing *ourselves*. Given that translation is a function of anxieties of our own making, what seems necessary is to find a way to attenuate this practice by focusing precisely on the translator's position within the process. It is in this search for greater critical awareness within representation that linguistic hospitality comes into its own.

Hosting the other

It is useful at this point to recall the basis for self-conscious representation. Kearney argues that we contrive otherness either as too "transcendent" or too "immanent". The former causes us to view the other as an immutable alterity, so untouchable that we can never imagine embracing a direct relationship to them. The latter views others as fodder for untrammelled relativism – not as beings but as constructions, indistinguishable from the totalizing appropriations produced by an endless circle of hermeneutic distancing (2003, p. 11). But what if we could imagine the other neither as absolute nor as a figment of our imagination, but simply *as 'other'*? To achieve this, Kearney proposes a "hermeneutics of discernment" through which we would learn to tell the difference between transcendent and immanent representations by becoming more mindful of how we experience otherness (p. 99). Without this critical means through which to "differentiate between diverse kinds of otherness in a culture where everything has become more and more undecidable" we risk lapsing into representational paralysis, repudiating our representations either as cultural reifications that universalize the distinctiveness of the foreign or as solipsistic affirmations of our own selves (pp. 5-11). In the context of *Pathé*, what we must not do, in other words, is reject out of hand its representations of the people and events in the

history of Northern Ireland's Troubles, for representations then, as now, are driven by a human need to understand. In today's globalized multicultural world, moreover, where the circulation of digital capital increases exponentially our daily encounters with otherness, represent we *must*. Without the "test of the foreign", Ricoeur asks, "would we not be in danger of shutting ourselves away in the sourness of a monologue, alone with our books?" (2006, p. 29). This "test" forces us to abandon the safety of the world we know in order to journey to the undiscovered country of the other, for our placement in a post-Babelian world of cultural encounter is an inescapable problematic. We must attempt to engage with the other if we are to avoid creating a series of separate mini-States of the mind. But as Ricoeur explains, the translator meets constant resistance:

The pretensions to self-sufficiency, the refusal to allow the foreign mediate, have secretly nourished numerous linguistic ethnocentrism, and more seriously, numerous pretensions to the same cultural hegemony that we have been able to observe in relation to Latin, from late antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages and even beyond the Renaissance, in relation to French in the classical era, and in relation to English today. (pp. 4-5)

On the part of the foreign work, it is the possibility of untranslatability that resists the translator. "Everything transpires", Ricoeur writes, "as though in the initial fright, in what is sometimes the anguish of beginning, the foreign text towers like a lifeless block of resistance to translation" (p. 5). It is for this reason that he describes translation as a "drama" driven by fear: of the incommensurable elements that resist understanding. The dream of the 'perfect' translation thus amounts "to the wish that translation would gain, gain without losing. It is this very same gain without loss that we must mourn until

we reach an acceptance of the impassable difference of the peculiar and the foreign” (p. 9). The dream we must relinquish is that of uncomplicated understanding across linguistic and cultural lines for there is no “universal library from which the untranslatabilities would have been erased” (p. 9). To the ‘masters’ that linguistic hospitality serves – the foreign and the local, the other and the self – translation brings with it the risk of failure.

If clarity of vision is the yardstick by which translation is measured, then it is indeed impossible. But we must not confuse ‘impossible’ with ‘futile’, for what we gain from Ricoeur is that all of this resistance from the world of the foreign also serves to make us more alive to the nature of our own. It is this self-conscious reflexivity that enables us, however tentatively, to distinguish between what Kearney terms “enabling and disabling forms of alterity” (2003, p. 67). In this “hermeneutics of practical wisdom”, Kearney relies primarily on Jacques Derrida’s discussion of the ethics of hospitality (p. 72). In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida (2000) describes the modes of judgement a host employs with a house-guest. Some guests the host knows personally; others are strangers. Some arrive with good intentions; others bad news. If we conceive of the home as an inviolable territory over which the host has sovereign authority, the host must decide to whom to grant access and who to turn away. This sovereign right subjects the visitor to an identification process by which the host “takes the measure” of the other at the door (p. 18). Derrida’s neologism “hostipitality” thus describes the ease with which we slip between hospitality and hostility in our dealings with others:

Anyone who encroaches on my ‘at home’, on my ipseity, on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy. This other becomes a hostile subject, and I

risk becoming their hostage. Paradoxical and corrupting law: it depends on this constant collusion between traditional hospitality, hospitality in the ordinary sense, and power. This collusion is also power in its *finitude*, which is to say the necessity, for the host, for the one who receives, of choosing, electing, filtering, selecting their invitees, visitors, or guests, those to whom they decide to grant asylum, the right of visiting or hospitality. (pp. 53-55)

“Choosing, electing, filtering”, the host maintains power by retaining the threat of violence. Thus “from the very threshold of the right to hospitality”, the performance of justice requires that a certain injury also be performed (p. 55). Whether in the home or at the borders of a sovereign state, hospitality starts with discrimination. To apply these observations to translation, we might say that to read and write the world of the foreign text in a language of our own is an attempt to defend our own position in the world.

Derrida’s solution is to reject the threat of inhospitality in favour of a Levinasian ‘responsibility’ to the other regardless of their intentions. Thus we should “say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification” (p. 77). Our callers may be good or evil, “but if you exclude the possibility that the newcomer is coming to destroy our house, if you want to control this and exclude this terrible possibility in advance, there is no hospitality” (1998, p. 70). But this ethics of the *tabula rasa* is problematic. Is it feasible to welcome every stranger who comes to our door? Is it fair to treat all strangers in the same fashion? Is it even possible to do so? For Kearney, “absolute hospitality”:

undervalues our need to differentiate not just legally but *ethically* between good and evil aliens. It downgrades – without denying – our legitimate duty to try to

distinguish between benign and malign strangers, between saints and psychopaths (though admittedly most of us fall somewhere between the two). And it does this, in the final instance, by relegating the requirement of ethical judgement to a matter of selective and calculating legislation invariably compromised by injustice and violence. (2003, p. 70)

Unlike Derrida, who asks us to open our door without horizon of expectation, Kearney's view is that justice is served precisely when we recognize the individuality of the other person and have them recognize us in the same way (p. 80). By turning to Julia Kristeva he develops the notion of "right action", in which our relationships to otherness are based on primarily on balance. Kristeva's argument is that our perception of the other results from an unconscious process by which we externalize what is 'strange' in a bid to exempt ourselves from the estrangement we feel within. When we construct our alterities as absolute, we fool ourselves into thinking that our others are wholly apart; the strangers outside thereby feel the brunt of our estrangement inside. For Kearney, "the 'alien' is revealed accordingly as that most occluded part of ourselves, considered so unspeakable that we externalize it onto others" (p. 74). This defence mechanism protects us from the inner division our secret anxieties of otherness threaten to cause. As Kristeva writes, "the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder" (1991, p. 1). Like the picture of Dorian Gray, the other stands as a reminder of the "stranger to ourselves" we keep locked away in the recesses of our unconsciousness. Yet it is precisely when we confront this portrait of our othered selves that we open up to the possibility of redress: "By recognising *our* uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me, hence we are all

foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners” (p. 192). If we are all foreigners to one another then the untouchable alterity that Kearney outlines is replaced with the knowledge that ‘others’ are what we make them.

A similar process is at work in the world of text. Through the hermeneutic detour – that interpretative journey of understanding across a distance of time and space – the self-conscious reader becomes mindful of her presence within the process of appropriation. Because what we appropriate is ultimately a *proposed* world, to ‘understand’ is thus “*to understand oneself in front of the text*” (Ricoeur, 2008, p. 84). This curved itinerary explodes the self-centred egotism of the *cogito* – I think, I am, my world exists only in as much as I think – in favour of a subject who is constantly interpreting herself while she also interprets the world around her, a being who gains the condition of ‘being’ precisely in the condition of being-with-others (2004, pp. 11-17). This relational condition enables Kearney to nuance the “immanence” of representations of otherness through the realization that the self *requires* its others in order to establish a sense of identity relative to them. To “de-alienate the other” in this way is to:

recognize (a) oneself as another and (b) the other as (in part) another self. For if ethics rightly requires me to respect the singularity of the other person, it equally requires me to recognise the other as another self bearing universal rights and responsibilities, that is, as someone capable of recognising me in turn as a self capable of recognition and esteem. (2003, p. 80)

This combined approach maintains that there is no otherness so incommensurable that it cannot be interpreted at least in some way and that we can do so conscious of the reasons why and how we act.

Conclusions

Through Kearney we add flesh to the bones of linguistic hospitality, for we can now characterize it as proceeding from an encounter with otherness. By acknowledging the impossibility of absolute equivalence in the encounter between the foreign text and the translator's representation, we create some leeway for a working correspondence to be shaped. By 'hosting' the difference of the other – not in the duty-bound sense of absolute hospitality advocated by Derrida but in the self-conscious process elaborated by Kearney – the translator allows the local to be influenced by the foreign. The task of translation is not just to make the other a little less 'alien', but also to become conscious of the translator's positionality along the way. If the translator's approach to the foreign is mediated through regimes of interpretation then translations are 'projections' of the translator's own subjectivity. Linguistic hospitality is hence a matter of adapting what we think translation *can* and *should* achieve. When we renounce the ideal of a perfect representation of the foreign we come closer to a more realistic way of living with translation that takes into account both its necessity and impossibility. As Ricoeur observes: "This renunciation alone makes it possible to live, as agreed deficiency, the impossibility, articulated a short while ago, of serving two masters: the author and the reader" (2006, p. 8). In the case of *Pathé* newsreels depicting key moments in the history of Northern Ireland's Troubles, the representations screened in cinemas are 'projections' both in the cinematographic and translational sense. As cinematic

spectacles, they offer images of people and places inaccessible to spectators themselves. As cultural translations, they project how their producers have understood the material they have recorded, describing and explaining through their own hermeneutics of interpretation ways of living that are 'foreign' – as much to themselves as to their spectators. Read as such, they transform what they observe and reveal as much about the people behind them as they do the news itself. To apply Kearney's hermeneutics of practical wisdom to our reading of the *Pathé* newsreels is to recognize where they fail *and* where they fulfil a need. They offer an indispensable record of past events and reveal much about dominant preoccupations. And, as with translation, we must reorientate our expectation of what such newsreels can and should achieve. To enter into representation of another, we do so conscious that our representation can never be fully 'representative'. As an activity that fixes the lived experience of another into the a-temporal space of inscription, representation reifies otherness. Like translation, it finds itself between a duty to its audience and a duty to the others it represents, serving two masters at the risk of betraying both.

What we gain from Ricoeur is the conviction that the lessons of translation have wider applications. By falling short of complete equivalence the hermeneutic detour 'betrays' the texts translators translate. But it also teaches the translator about herself in the process: "As reader, I find myself only by losing myself. Reading introduces me into the imaginative variations of the ego. The metamorphosis of the world in play is also the metamorphosis of the ego" (Ricoeur, 2008, p. 84). As a "critique of the illusions of the subject", hermeneutic appropriation encompasses a critique of ideology, through the plurality of detours across the terrain of difference that succeed in distancing the self from itself (p. 85). To characterize ourselves as 'readers' of human action means

entering into a self-reflexive process in which we are saved precisely through our failure to understand:

It is this which serves as a model for other forms of hospitality that I think resemble it: confessions, religions, are they not like languages that are foreign to one another, with their lexicon, their grammar, their rhetoric, their stylistics which we must *learn* in order to make our way into them? (2006, pp. 23-24)

Translation functions not just as a metaphor for our anxieties of otherness but as a lens through which we might start to examine more critically the ways in which we deal with modes of living that are foreign to one another. Translation, we remember, is always doomed to failure, for our representations of others can never achieve equivalence to reality. What linguistic hospitality teaches is that equivalence is not the point – it is through translation, flawed as it is, that we learn more about ourselves and our own prejudices, fears and anxieties than we do about anyone else. To read newsreels as such is to reject the reflectionist's desire for causal explanations and to replace it with an approach that questions what the act of interpretation reveals about the interpreter herself. This model illuminates as much about documentary motion picture news production as it does the scholar's own construction of the objects of her study, for the process of cultural translation starts with a demand to *understand*. At a time when commentators rush to describe and explain the harrowing effects of conflicts between ways of living that are foreign to one another, and to enumerate suitable solutions, a little more self-conscious reflexion on the fallibility of our mutual (mis)understandings might just be what saves us from ourselves.

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