

Translation and Transformation in the Age of Revolution (1750–1850)

Veranstalter: U4 network 'Reverberations of Revolution: Political Upheaval Seen from Afar' in Cooperation with the Early Career Research Group 'Multiple Modernities'

Datum, Ort: 23.06.2016–25.06.2016, Göttingen

Bericht von: Katrin Berndt, FB 10 English-Speaking Cultures, University of Bremen

The symposium 'Translation and Transformation in the Age of Revolution (1750–1850)' was the third conference of the U4 Network 'Reverberations of Revolution: Political Upheaval Seen from Afar'. The network is a strategic partnership between the University of Göttingen (DE), Ghent University (BE), the University of Groningen (NL), and Uppsala University (SE). Uniting four European universities with similar profiles and of a similar size, the network aims to further cooperation initiatives in the fields of education, research and institutional management, all of which are realized in the form of international projects and in international contexts.

One of these initiatives is the joint project 'Reverberations of Revolution', which seeks to investigate the ways in which writers, artists, and intellectuals responded to revolutions that were taking place in other parts of the world. Based on a collaboration between historians, literary scholars, and art historians, the project aims to explore how 'second-hand experiences' of political uprisings become represented in literary genres such as novels, essays, poetry, caricatures, and life-writing, and how these representations have subsequently impacted upon political debate in their authors' national discourses, which were initiated and led far from the states that were directly affected by the political transformations in question. The first symposium 'Reverberations of Revolution' took place on 22 September 2014 in Uppsala and focused on artistic and literary responses to the French and American Revolutions in the late eighteenth century. It was followed by 'Technologies of Print and Dynamics of Power in the Age of Revolution', a conference held at the University of Groningen on 17 and 18 September 2015, which examined the media, readers,

and discursive areas of the emerging bourgeois public sphere between 1750 and 1850.

The focus on translation pursued by the third symposium of the U4 initiative took into account both the intellectual and the material dimension of the responses to radical political transformations in the so-called age of revolution from 1750 to 1850. The Call for Papers had already emphasized that the category of 'revolution' was itself a product of translation, which transported the concept to different national contexts and across transnational spheres. Taking up this aspect during their Welcome Address, the organizers BARBARA SCHAFF and FLORIAN KAPPELER (University of Göttingen) pointed out that in recent years, the research on revolutions has become less Eurocentric, for they are increasingly considered in view of their connections with other places, including translator networks and transatlantic revolutionary narratives. The organizers explained that the symposium understands 'translations' as both linguistic and cultural phenomena, aiming to explore them with explicit reference to the medial conditions that made them possible. Against this background, the presentations addressed the announcement and reception of political events – and the revolutionary narratives that accompanied them – as relying on translators' ability to connect political pamphlets, resolutions, legal publications, witness accounts and other material with new cultural contexts in a meaningful way. Moreover, translations provided a way to avoid censorship, or served to deliberately transform and distort the ideas expressed in the domestic revolutionary context.

The inaugural keynote lecture was given by JEREMY D. POPKIN (University of Kentucky), who examined the impact of Creole translations of revolutionary documents on the French Empire in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Raising the question of whether *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité* were truly universal principles, or whether their meaning was significantly changed when translations transported them into different socio-political contexts, Popkin discussed how the French Revolution had inspired the translation into Creole and subsequent reissue of two documents, Louis XIV's 1685 Code

Noir and a royal ordinance of December 1784 that was supposed to restrict the powers of slave-owners over their 'property', in France's Caribbean slave colony of Saint-Domingue. These translations represented the first legal documents in the Creole language, establishing the slaves' lingua franca as a medium of communication equal to the colonizers' French. Organized by Léger-Félicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel, French government officials in Saint-Domingue and supporters of the French Revolution, the translations introduced Caribbean slaves to the legal concepts of a society based on racial descent, and to the obligations imposed by the Code Noir on slave-owners, who were expected to provide for their slaves and to grant equal rights to free people of colour. While not aiming to abolish slavery, the commissioners sought to make the plantation economy a more humane system, an ambition that, as Popkin pointed out, represented the difficulty of translating French principles of equality to the colonies, and stressed the gap between metropole and periphery that became more pronounced rather than bridged by the translations in question.

The second day of the symposium was structured into three panels, each featuring two presentations and one invited commentary that introduced the discussions. Taking note of the gender dimension of translations, Panel I addressed 'Revolutionary Women Translators' in papers that focused on two extraordinary female intellectuals, writers, and translators of the age of revolutions: Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft. ALISON E. MARTIN (University of Reading) discussed the representational strategies of British writer and translator Helen Maria Williams's enthusiastic support of the French Revolution. According to Martin, Williams's revolutionary fervour significantly shaped her translation activities, as exemplified in her *Political and Confidential Correspondence of Lewis the Sixteenth; with Observations on Each Letter* (1803), a collection of letters written by the executed king supposedly between 1775 and 1791 that turned out to have been forged. Discussing how the translator established herself as intellectual authority, well-versed commentator and cul-

tural innovator in the annotations to her publication, Martin argued that Williams's self-representation challenged late eighteenth-century discursive demands of the subordination of women and their writing. ALESSA JOHNS (University of California, Davis) explored the significance of Mary Wollstonecraft both as a translator of German educational treatises and as an author of revolutionary pedagogical publications that were translated into German. Providing an enlightening account of the crucial role played by translations in the dissemination of revolutionary feminist ideas, Johns demonstrated how Georg Friedrich Christian Weissenborn, Wollstonecraft's German translator and a teacher at the philanthropist *Erziehungsanstalt* in Schnepfenthal (Thuringia), promoted a feminist pedagogy that was revolutionary not because it encouraged violent rebellion, but because it combined natural education, human development, gender socialization, and future political legislation in a larger utopian project that challenged masculinist revolutionary notions of the time. The paratexts added to Weissenborn's translation by Christian Gotthilf Salzmann, who had established the school in Schnepfenthal, show an interesting contrast between the two Germans' validation of Wollstonecraft's revolutionary suggestions, for Salzmann distanced himself from the British feminist's more radical opinions on women's professional prospects and liberties. According to Johns, his comments reflect the more conservative climate in the German lands where the dissemination of Enlightenment thinking often depended on the patronage of progressive aristocratic rulers. While Salzmann's mollifying comments, however, effectively drew more attention to Wollstonecraft's radical opinions, the latter's translation of Salzmann's *Moralisches Elementarbuch* revealed her to be just as influenced by her national background. Under cover of 'naturalizing' the content into the English context, Wollstonecraft changed the gender dynamics of Salzmann's treatise. In any event, the connection between Wollstonecraft and the Schnepfenthal educational innovators demonstrates the importance of a transnational network of progressive translators who successfully promoted an enlight-

ened pedagogy.

The afternoon of the second conference day began with a panel on 'Transatlantic Translations', in which RAPHAEL HÖRMANN (University of Central Lancashire) returned to the appropriation of revolutionary ideas in the French colonies in order to explore the genealogy of the trope of the Black Jacobins which, he claims, was not coined by Trinidad-born Marxist C.L.R. James but dates back to the contemporaneous discourse on the Haitian Revolution. SARAH ADAMS (Ghent University) drew attention to the role of plays as catalysts in the spread of anti-slavery thinking in her discussion of German writer August von Kotzebue's abolitionist melodrama *Die Negersklaven* (1796). Adams looked at the 'translation' of the image of transatlantic slavery to European stages in a play which, according to Kotzebue himself, was not a creative invention but merely a dramatic frame for actual events and historical facts. It was also, as Adams convincingly demonstrated, very much informed by the arguments against slavery made by Abbe Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770). In her commentary on the papers, ANJA BANDAUF (Leibniz-University Hannover) linked the discussion to Lynn Festa's concept of the 'sentimental figures', used by Enlightenment philosophers to solicit sympathy from the audience, in order to point out that the mode of literary translation of revolutionary ideas – from melodrama to satire and horror – had a significant impact on their reception by the audience.

The third panel of the day refocused attention to migrations of revolutionary ideas within Europe with discussions of political appropriations and legal discourses of revolutionary events in eighteenth-century Russia and Wales. MALTE GRIESSE (University of Konstanz) addressed the factual and fictional aspects of narratives of the Pugachev Rebellion (1773–75) in southern Russia, which was instigated by a man who pretended to be Peter III, Catherine II's husband who had been murdered in 1762. According to Griesse, the image of the uprising was shaped almost exclusively abroad, a result of the media policy of Catherine II's government, which first

issued an 'act of oblivion' in 1775 to silence reports on the rebellion – not an uncommon strategy of rulers at the time – and later attempted to control its afterimage by commissioning an account of the events in 1784. In her subsequent paper on Celtic translations of revolutionary political concepts in Wales, MARION LÖFFLER (University of Wales) linked translation and conceptual history in her examination of how a political vocabulary that was developed through translations from one culture influenced political conceptualizations in another. Löffler demonstrated that the concept of 'political revolution' became introduced to the Welsh language as a translation of the 'Glorious Revolution' in 1716 and 1717. In this context, the Welsh terms expressing 'to revolutionize' had religious overtones and positive connotations, and referred to 'a rightful process of restoration, undertaken by the people in cooperation with the monarch'. Late eighteenth-century translators then emphasized more dangerous elements of revolutions with Welsh terms that, however, complemented rather than replaced the earlier translations, so contributing to what was listed in 1798 as a record of twelve Welsh words, all of which denoting 'revolution'. The wealth of different terms, Löffler argued, exhibits both the richness of the local tradition and the role of Welsh translators who helped securing native terminology even for concepts derived from English sources.

In the podium discussion on the third and final day of the symposium, participants reflected on the terminology that would be suitable for discussing the role of translations in transporting revolutionary ideas and on the particular significance of manuscripts, which not only allowed the expression of more radical ideas but also invited research on the role of women authors, and of censorship. Alison E. Martin suggested thinking about translations as clusters representing networks of communication, while Jeremy D. Popkin pointed out that the term 'network' implied a conscious and wanted connection, and was therefore unfit to describe relations between people who actually sought to distance themselves from one another. Barbara Schaff took up their points to argue that 'network' could be used as a diachronic term that included

an understanding of collaboration as wanted connection as well as conflict and critical response. Describing interdisciplinary collaboration as a form of translation between disciplines, Popkin acknowledged the success of the conference, which had demonstrated the importance of relations between historians, literary scholars, and translations studies. The conference concluded with the announcement of the fourth symposium of the joint project that will deal with 'The Power of Things: Revolutionary Objects, Icons and Images across Borders', and will be held at Ghent University (Belgium) on 16 September 2016.

Conference Overview:

Welcome Address

Florian Kappeler and Barbara Schaff (Göttingen)

Keynote Lecture

Jeremy D. Popkin (Kentucky): Revolution in Creole: Liberty, Equality, and Slavery in the French Empire, 1789

Panel I: Revolutionary Women Translators

Alison E. Martin (Reading): Helen Maria Williams as Mediator and Translator in Post-1789 France

Alessa Johns (UC, Davis): 'A Revolution in Female Manners': Mary Wollstonecraft in Schnepfenthal

Panel II: Transatlantic Translations

Raphael Hörmann (UCL, Preston): Black Jacobin(s): From Horror Trope to Trope of Black Atlantic Liberation

Sarah Adams (Ghent): Translating Slavery to the Stage

Panel III: The Migration of Revolutionary Ideas

Malte Griesse (Konstanz): The Pugachev-Rebellion of 1773-75 in Translation

Marion Löffler (Aberystwyth): Translating Political Concepts for a Celtic Nation: 'Revolution' in Wales 1775-1815

Podium Discussion: Travelling Revolutions / Translation Networks

Michael Boyden (Uppsala), Alison E. Martin (Reading), Jeremy D. Popkin (Kentucky)

Tagungsbericht *Translation and Transformation in the Age of Revolution (1750-1850)*. 23.06.2016-25.06.2016, Göttingen, in: H-Soz-Kult 19.09.2016.