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| Institution: King's College London |
| Unit of Assessment: 28 |
| Title of case study: Mexican Poetry on Tour |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study demonstrates how translation has fostered engagement between contemporary Latin American poetry and British audiences using the agency of arts organizations, public events and the media. In April 2010 Boll brought two Mexican poets, Coral Bracho and David Huerta, to participate in a national tour with the Poetry Translation Centre (PTC), funded by Arts Council England. Boll applied critical perspectives from cultural, philosophical and stylistic investigation to the selection, translation and presentation of the poets. Comments from readers and listeners demonstrate that the work has sparked a creative response among audiences who range from secondary school pupils to practising poets.</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Boll has held posts at King's as a research fellow (2009-10) and lecturer (2010-present). The Mexican Poets' Tour drew on insights from two projects during this period: research for his monograph, Octavio Paz and T.S. Eliot: Modern Poetry and the Translation of Influence (Legenda, 2012) (3.1); and archival research on the translation of Spanish American poetry by Penguin Books. This research informed three aspects of the tour: the selection of poets; the process of translation; and the presentation of the poets' work to live and digital audiences.</p> <p>The work on Boll's monograph during this period focused on a comparative analysis of Eliot's Anglo-American and Mexican reception. This investigation into the divergences between Mexican and Anglo-American modernism established both the challenges and new perspectives that Mexican poetry can offer to English readers. Anglo-American criticism has habitually stressed Eliot's hostility to romanticism, downplaying the philosophical reflection on language that is a key characteristic of the European avant-garde. Eliot's Mexican reception, however, reveals a poetic tradition that embraces the explicitly philosophical concerns of the romantics, symbolists and surrealists.</p> <p>Coral Bracho and David Huerta were selected to participate in the Mexican Poets' Tour as outstanding recent examples of this tradition. They both appeared in the definitive anthology of Latin American neo-baroque poetry, <i>Medusario</i> (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996). Their work combines the densely metaphorical practice of the baroque with reflection on language, perception and selfhood inspired by the new French critical theory. Although this theoretical context is familiar in British universities, it has not filtered through to mainstream British poetic practice, which remains mistrustful of a Continental, explicitly philosophical tradition. The Poet's Tour would therefore introduce British audiences to recent Mexican poetic innovation while challenging the domestic culture.</p> <p>Boll had invited Coral Bracho to participate in an earlier Poetry Translation Centre Tour. The initial translations that he produced in collaboration with the English poet Katherine Pierpoint revealed the pressure that domestic norms exert on the translation process. In an article that was published shortly before he began at King's, 'Abstract and Concrete: Translating Coral Bracho' (3.4), he enumerates the resistances of English poetic practice to the Spanish American neo-baroque.</p> <p>In subsequent articles produced at King's on the translation of César Vallejo and Pablo Neruda (3.2 and 3.3), Boll reflects more extensively on different translation methods and the philosophical basis of divergent attitudes to metaphor in the Latin and Anglo-American avant-garde. This research informed a change of approach when he produced further translations of Bracho and</p> |

Impact case study (REF3b)

David Huerta for the Mexican Poets' Tour of 2010. Boll was able to intervene in his collaboration with Pierpoint and Jamie McKendrick, identifying the presence of domestic norms in their early drafts: a fear of conceptual abstraction, a tendency to attenuate metaphor and the erasure of purposefully erudite registers in favour of more accessible colloquial language. He explained and negotiated these points of contention throughout the translation process, directing the poets beyond their first choices to a more culturally informed recognition of the Spanish texts.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Octavio Paz and T. S. Eliot: *Modern Poetry and the Translation of Influence* (Oxford: Legenda, 2012), 226pp, ISBN 9781906540432. Submitted in REF2.

3.2 'César Vallejo in English: Stanley Burnshaw, Paul Muldoon, and Lawrence Venuti's Ethics of Translation', *Translation and Literature*, 22, 1 (March 2013), 74-102. Submitted in REF2.

3.3 "Surrealistically meaningless": Pablo Neruda and Penguin Books', in *Reading Penguin: A Critical Study*, ed. by William Wootten and George Donaldson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 125-139. Submitted in REF2.

3.4 'Abstract and Concrete: Translating Coral Bracho', *Modern Language Review*, 103, 2 (April 2008), 438-55. Submitted in REF2.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

As Assistant Director of the Poetry Translation Centre, Boll had seen that arts organizations often choose to translate poets because of personal friendships or a deference to foreign governments' promotion of an official national literature. His commitment to translation criteria based instead on a research-led understanding of the poets' significance and potential to engage British audiences provided the foundation for a successful application to Arts Council England (ACE) for a Grant for the Arts worth £41,000 (2009). He applied both his research and previous experience at the Poetry Translation Centre to the presentation of Bracho and Huerta to the UK public .

Boll had earlier represented the Centre on Respond in Practice, a flagship scheme organized by ACE dedicated to audience development. For the Mexican Poets' Tour, the Centre used that experience to create a programme of events that would appeal to a variety of audiences: the general poetry-reading public (Manchester, Grasmere, Glasgow, Edinburgh and the PEN Free the Word Festival in London); specialist opinion-formers (the London Book Fair, the universities of Oxford and Leeds); and Spanish speakers living in England (the Cervantes Institute and a 'meet the poets' community event in London). The poets read to 500 people (5.1). Boll presented the poets at the London Book Fair, Manchester, Leeds and Edinburgh, and participated in Q&A sessions, leading discussion on the translation process.

Readings also targeted regional audiences whose exposure to foreign literature events has traditionally been restricted. Local collaborating organizations were enthusiastic about the impact of the tour on their own programmes: 'The Poetry Translation Centre does wonderful work in enabling us to bring international poets to Grasmere who we otherwise wouldn't be able to hear' (Literature Officer, Wordsworth Trust) (5.1); 'Wonderful opportunity to hear these voices and have the regional "offer" of poetry and readings so vibrantly expanded' (Audience member, Chetham's Library Manchester) (5.1); 'We were delighted by the audience engagement in this event – most people seemed to linger afterwards for the chance to chat to the poets. Such events emphasise the Scottish Poetry Library's international outlook and serious intent to widen the kinds of poetry experience available to our audience' (Director, Scottish Poetry Library) (5.3).

Audience responses indicate that the primary aim of the tour, to foster public engagement with a

foreign culture, was achieved: 'The translated poems are truly a bridge between cultures' (Audience member, Cervantes Institute London) (5.1); 'Enjoyable, inspiring and necessary for British audiences to hear Mexican/Isthmus Zapotec poetry. A wonderful event' (Audience member, Exeter College Oxford) (5.1).

The events were supplemented by a permanent digital record which is freely available on the PTC's website. Visitors to the site can download print-on-demand versions of the chapbooks, read the poems in three different versions (Spanish, literal and poetic English translation), view videos of the events and listen to podcasts of the poets reading and discussing their work (5.2). Between 1st March and 31st May 2010 the website pages featuring the tour poets received approximately 7,500 unique pageviews (5.1). The Chief Executive of Writers' Centre Norwich was asked to assess David Huerta's podcast and chapbook for ACE: 'One gets immediate access to the poet's voice and presence – often the most powerful aspects of readings when one cannot access the original language. I thought this was an excellent piece of work that made the best use of the technologies available to bring new work into the mainstream' (5.1).

The Tour aimed to provide not only an experience of a foreign culture but also an understanding of the ways it relates to domestic traditions. Boll employed his research knowledge to provide explanatory material that accompanied the translations. He wrote a digital essay for the PTC website, which placed the stylistic and thematic preoccupations of Bracho and Huerta in the context of recent Mexican history (5.2). He also produced introductions to the bilingual chapbooks of their work which the PTC published to coincide with the tour. In addition, radio interviews with David Huerta on BBC Radio 3's Night Waves, the World Service's The Strand, Radio Netherlands Worldwide and Deutsche Welle Radio provided not only publicity but an important contextualization of the poetry (5.1).

Comments on the PTC website reveal that the material appeals to a variety of users. Secondary-school students have left appreciative comments: 'it was a really nice poem im doin a poem project and im choosin this to be one of my three favorite poems' (Bracho, 'Water of Jellyfish') (5.2): 'I Liked It How U Explained It And How U Used Some Spanish This Will Help With My Topic!!!!' (Huerta, 'Aural') (5.2). It has also stimulated a creative response, including further translation activity: 'One of the poets in the audience who writes in Shetlandic has tried her hand at translating one of Coral Bracho's poems' (Director, Scottish Poetry Library) (5.3); 'This is such a beautiful poem. I recently took a photograph that I am now convinced was made to accompany this poem. I've featured them together on my blog' (Bracho, 'Thread in a Spider's Web') (5.2).

Some of the more extensive comments articulate both enthusiasm and a reflective engagement with the translations. One reader writes appreciatively about the perceptual disorientation of Bracho's 'Water of Jellyfish': 'Each word makes each of my senses dance-and at the same time! So I'm not sure if I'm tasting, seeing, hearing or feeling. My senses are at their confused best but what a delightful state to be in' (5.2). Another reflects further on Bracho's capacity to present a world which is conceptualized as much as experienced: 'This is a poet of immense visual and tactile imagination. We never hear, smell or taste the water, but what a feast for our eyes and skin sense of water in all its shifting shapes, moods and colors, its settings and its inhabitants' (5.2). Such responses bear out Boll's concern with the philosophical aspect of the poets' work, identified in his research as the key innovation and challenge for English-speaking audiences.

Besides this direct impact on readers, Boll's promotion of Bracho and Huerta has also led to a wider recognition of their work in established outlets for English poetry publication. Translations of Huerta have appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation* 3, 12 (2009) and *Poetry Review* 100, 2 (2010); and Bracho has been published by Enitharmon Press (2008) and *Poetry Review* 95, 3 (2005) and 100, 1 (2010) (5.4).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Poetry Translation Centre Mexican Poets' Tour Evaluation Report for Arts Council England: live events and audience figures; impact of tour on programmes of collaborating arts organizations; impact on live audiences; digital audience figures; impact of podcasts; poets' broadcast media appearances.

5.2 Poetry Translation Centre website, <http://www.poetrytranslation.org>: tour publications and recordings; impact of translations on digital audiences.

5.3 Corroborating statement: Director, Scottish Poetry Library: impact of tour on programme of collaborating arts organization; impact of translation on live audience.

5.4 British poetry publishers, Modern Poetry in Translation (<http://www.mptmagazine.com/>), Poetry Review (<http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/publications/review/>), Enitharmon Press (<http://www.enitharmon.co.uk/>): recognition of tour poets by established outlets for poetry publication.