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## Translation and literature

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The National Government, seen by MacDonald and his supporters as a more or less pragmatic response to enable effective political measures to be taken to cope with the economic and financial crisis, could thus also be seen as a political response to the growth of mass participation in parliamentary politics. The key question then becomes the real nature of this 'National' Government and it is somewhat disappointing that the author does not take the opportunity of analysing the British experience within a wider European perspective of the growth of Fascism and anti-Fascist Popular Front movements. For the British National Government rapidly became identified as a potential, then real, anti-socialist coalition, achieving, in the general election of 27 October 1931 a massive victory, 554 of the 615 MPs, although Labour retained 30.9% of the popular vote (p. 459); in reality, it was a coalition dominated by the Conservatives, 470 of their 518 candidates successfully winning seats, with 55% of the poll. In the words of Philips Price (quoted by Williamson on p. 458), 'To some, the election seemed "an English form of a Fascist coup d'état".' In fact there was no need to search for foreign models, given that the notion of National Government was fundamentally identified with the peculiarly British notion of the *national interest*, where the nation is largely identified with the state, not with the people.

Williamson is good on the profound transformation which the formation of the National Government wrought on the Labour Party itself and its notions of the *nation* and the *national*. Whereas in the Twenties, the attitude of the Labour leadership to questions of class was to dismiss 'class psychology' as something which affected the capitalist society and parties and to portray socialism as authentically classless and national, appealing to men and women of good will in all classes (p. 37), this was to change after the establishment of the National Government, which polarised the class division. In Williamson's view, the most far-reaching effect of the August crisis was therefore to change the strategy of political accommodation and constitutionalism of the Labour Party, transforming it into 'an overtly class party, sectional, irresponsible, confiscatory, 'revolutionary' ' (p. 388).

We would be more hard-pressed to find the evidence of the other profound transformations which the author had promised at the beginning of his book, in his categorisation of the National crisis of 1931 as a seminal turning-point in the history of British politics and the British Empire. In particular, although the state of the Empire was depicted as integral to this crisis, there is very little in fact on its more medium- and long-term effects. Indeed, the book is not really about drawing out the broad conclusions of an analytical overview; what it does provide for the reader is ample material of the most detailed kind on the way in which the 1931 crisis was actually perceived by its contemporaries.

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**Translation and Literature**, Volumes 1 and 2 (Edinburgh University Press, 1992-93), 180+180 pp., £20.00, \$40.00 per volume.

*Translation and Literature* describes itself as "an annual serial, publishing articles, notes and reviews on literary translation of all kinds and periods, and focusing on the English literary translating tradition". Begun in 1992, it is one of a number of journals that have recently been founded in response to the revived academic interest in translation. A few

dates tell the story. The German theoretical journal *TextconText* was begun in 1986; the revived international newsletter *Transst* in 1987; the Canadian journal *TTR* in 1988; John Benjamins' *Target*, generalist and scholarly, in 1989; the Spanish *Livius* in 1992; the Danish *Perspectives* also in 1992, and further journals are currently being planned. Given the scope and diversity of this activity, any new project must complement the work being published elsewhere.

The decision to focus on literary aspects of "the English translating tradition" does indeed indicate a desire to cultivate a neglected field. Yet this orientation contains its own internal diversity. In the space of 180 pages (the 1992 instalment) the journal divides into six sections, with the pages distributed as follows: three major articles (66), notes by practising translators (19), poetry in English translation (13), "notes and documents" (shorter critical or theoretical comments) (11), longer review essays (29) and shorter reviews (33). These divisions suggest a healthy desire to keep academic perspectives in touch with the practice of translators, at the same time as the relatively high proportion of reviews (36%) conveys a sense of participation in activity on both the academic and practical fronts. As such, the intentions are highly commendable.

Much depends, however, on the quality of the few major articles. One might regret that titles like "The Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis and the Translation Muddle" can introduce texts that simply create more of a muddle. The general style of the articles conforms to the pragmatic, civilised and often unclear norms of research in English Literature, to the extent that several pieces by the American Douglas Robinson, generalist in approach and resolutely non-English in style, enter as a gust of noticeably fresh air.

This underlies a more theoretical problem. In focusing on "the English translating tradition", the journal presupposes the existence of such a tradition, enabling one to explain translational facts in the terms of a particular target culture and, by extension, its established research practices. The journal is not alone in this. Germans tend to focus on translation into German, Israeli scholars study work into Hebrew, and Belgians (Flemish, but publishing in French) produce good empirical research on translations into French. A certain cultural nationalism pervades what looks like a cross-cultural discipline. And yet translators themselves are peculiarly intercultural people, often straddling national boundaries. Their norms and strategies could well be formed in intercultural situations. The existence of an "English tradition" thus cannot simply be taken for granted. It must be shown to exist. And this can only be done within a cross-cultural context. The focus of this journal, along with many parallel research projects, seems to preclude the extensive testing of such hypotheses.

The point is disciplinary as well as theoretical. For as long as literary "translating traditions" are presupposed, Translation Studies can be no more than a branch of Comparative Literature, and in this case of English Literature. But the more dynamic cross-cultural models that are giving new life to Translation Studies—models by no means absent from the review articles of this journal—have an enormous capacity to challenge and transform precisely these disciplinary categories. Why should a Translation Studies journal define its object in terms of monolingual rather than cross-cultural historical categories? For all the interest generated by the undoubted dynamism of the field, the format of *Translation and Literature* seems wilfully conservative.

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