

## Translation as Relation and Glissant's Work

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**Sandra Bermann,**  
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**Abstract:** In her article "Translation as Relation and Glissant's Work" Sandra Bermann proposes that in today's complex world of migration, war, and globalization, translation among languages and cultures is everywhere evident. Indeed, as citizens of the twenty-first century, we inevitably think in and through translation. Yet we have only begun to explore its contemporary modes of operation, its challenges, and its promise for study. Bermann suggests ways to think about translation — its difficulties, as well as its promise. Looking first to some traditional views of translation, Bermann then turns to particular ways in which it might be recast in terms of relation, dialogue, and analogy. She considers the potential of this more pragmatic way of "thinking translation" for contemporary ideas about language and literary dissemination. Important to this perspective is the work of the Caribbean poet, novelist, and theorist Edouard Glissant. Bermann examines a few of Glissant's salient insights and their pertinence to the questions she raises in her study. Bermann argues that Glissant's ideas can expand our understanding of the role translation might play in the world today and in the future.

**Sandra BERMANN**

### **Translation as Relation and Glissant's Work**

Ours is a linguistically and culturally interwoven, but often conflicted world. It is a site of ongoing translation, where ordinary boundaries are often blurred and re-mapped through migration and cultural encounters. Displaced and migrating peoples bring with them languages and cultures that require translation. Globalization itself, with its financial networks and information technologies depends upon translation, although it may attempt to avoid it. And, as we know, war brings not only conflicting armies, but also conflicting languages and cultures. Whether reading newspaper reports, interacting with people, using technology, or watching a film, we often must think in and through translation. Yet we have only begun to consider its significance. I propose here some ways of thinking about translation, its challenges, as well as its promise. Important to these questions is the work of a large number of translation studies theorists as well as that of poststructuralist, postcolonial, and pragmatist thinkers identified with literary and cultural studies. But I focus here particularly on the writing of the Caribbean poet, novelist, playwright, and theorist Edouard Glissant, who has developed what he calls a "poetics of relation." I examine a few of his salient insights as they pertain to and amplify what I am calling here "translation as relation."

Although one dictionary definition of the term "translation" is simply a "rendering from one language into another," this does not tell us much. Nor does the phrase, "saying the same thing in different words," which is another common description. There is, of course, a long and distinguished history of translation theories. At times, they echo a very old, indeed mythic, search for exact equivalence. This comes to us clearly in the often cited story of the Tower of Babel. Once, the story goes, there was one universal and transparent language, a godly language, spoken by all. The prideful efforts to reach the heavens (to make a name) resulted in the loss of this universal language. Dispersion was our fate and with it came our many languages. Transparency was gone. The story is told as a tragic one.

In our everyday world of the twenty-first century, we are living in a particularly evident plurality of languages — and in the midst of particularly frequent efforts at translation. And although the pure language of translation, the key to perfect communicability, has never been found, many continue to think about it. Buoying this desire is, of course, the sense that some *tertium comparationis* might actually be located, that some key or measure might be used by which our different languages might calibrate their meanings as they establish an exact equivalence. Behind this often unconscious assumption lies a Platonism, a desire for a universal measure outside the everyday — some rational language structure transcending the languages of our quotidian world, that might help us decode them. Countering such beliefs and their unfulfilled hope for equivalence, much contemporary translation theory makes strong claims for translation's very material necessity and, indeed, its current, altogether immanent modes and potential. Not only do we need translation in our immediate everyday transactions. We also need it for the survival and transmission of literary art and culture. Might there not be ways to think translation beyond the demand for equivalence, and to do so in a manner that would valorize multiplicity and difference in languages and cultures as it also valorizes communication among them? What of a down-to-earth story of translation, a more sublunary and hopeful one for understanding its craft as well as its role in the world?

As a good number of twentieth-century theorists agree, we might indeed think of translation differently, as no longer in search of a *tertium comparationis* with its Platonic purity, and desire for perfect equivalence. We might speak of it more pragmatically and more productively. Translation might, for instance, be said to work within a non-essentialist, sublunary zone and to involve at least three very earthly actions: 1) a constant weighing of words in their different linguistic and cultural contexts, 2) a negotiation of meanings, and 3) a finding of comparable terms and contexts in a language other than the source (see Ost, *Les Detours* 38; also Bermann, "Working in the 'And' Zone"). This way of thinking translation might seek equivalence, but only the sort of equivalence that does not aspire to identity, to a sameness. It would deal in similarities that communicate, but without suppressing difference.

This change in perspective about the act of translation, the move from thinking translation as the search for equivalence to a search for mere similarity and analogy might be described as a more

pragmatic or pragmatist turn. It is also a move from what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe as an arboreal or tree-like vision to a more rhizomatic one (see also Ost, *Le Droit* 24-26). Rather than emphasizing a return to the same, to the past, to the trunk of the translation tree, translation would entail a move outward, like the reaching tubers and roots of a rhizome, a reach to new words, to continually new possibilities of language, culture, and thought. This more earthly and outward movement also works through processes of analogy and what Charles Saunders Peirce has called abduction rather than through the more scientific, hierarchical and self-confirming procedures of induction or deduction. It would expect translation to produce a new text that echoes an earlier one but never claims to duplicate it exactly. From this perspective, the novelty and creativity of the translated text come into much sharper relief. Viewed this way — as based on analogy and abduction — translation plays an important role in creating the new in languages, even the unforeseen and the surprising. Peirce in fact describes abductive reasoning as a sort of reasoning that is not only more everyday, but also more creative than the usual inductive or deductive reasoning associated with the sciences (Walton 6-13; Davis 22-25). It comes to us in a flash, like a metaphor. It is an act of insight, a creative leap of the mind, a new hypothesis or image that relies on analogy. It does not reduce similarity to identity, or create full equivalence. It encourages us to think in similar but always different terms. In this "and zone" of analogy and abduction that is the earthly site of translation, human judgment and an ongoing internal dialogue between texts serve as guides — a judgment that owes its wisdom to a broad historical and cultural knowledge, and a dialogue that listens as well as responds. In the process, translation, while starting off from texts created before, inevitably creates something new — through a language that gestures toward the source text as it also transforms its own linguistic and cultural context. It thereby generates an ongoing dialogue between texts past and present, distant and close to home. This language of translation will bear within it a relation to another — or indeed to many others (more on this, see Bermann, "Working").

A description of translation as relation, based on linguistic analogy and abduction, rather than exact equivalence or fidelity, is more than simply operational. It also bears important ethical and aesthetic possibilities. As has been eloquently pointed out by Antoine Berman in *The Experience of the Foreign*, an ethic of hospitality inhabits the work of translation. A stranger will always be found there — speaking from another text, from another place and time (see also Berman, "La Traduction de la lettre" 87-91). Reading in translation — with a knowledge of its relational ways — can encourage awareness of the intervenient power of the translator and the polyphony of language itself. It can render us more vigilant readers, more acutely aware of textual transformations as well as cultural Otherness. Attuned to the transformative power of translation, much recent work in translation studies — emanating from postcolonial, poststructuralist thought, as well as from what is more generally termed the "cultural turn" in translation studies — has shifted emphasis to context and function in translation (see, e.g., the work of Lawrence Venuti, Theo Hermans, Paul Bandia, Michael Cronin, Jeremy Munday, and Maria Tymoczko). Other major theorists of translation have identified the always value-laden responses that translation produces in and to specific situations. Highlighting the specific intervenient power of the translator, they underscore the ethical and political issues involved (see Mona Baker, Theo Hermans, Suzanne Jill Levine, Jeremy Munday, Sherry Simon, Luise von Flotow, among others). And increasingly, translation theorists and comparatists are rethinking premises from global perspectives, seeking new ways to understand cultural and linguistic differences occurring in the course of translation (see, e.g., Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Emily Apter, Edward Said, and Robert Young).

The work of Michael Cronin, for instance, highlights the specific viewpoints of source and translation in order to study the particulars of cultural otherness that translation can reveal. In his view, translation can in fact nurture diversity — and "global citizenship in the twenty-first century" (Cronin, *Translation and Identity* 30). His emphasis on a new "micro-cosmopolitanism" suggests that we think the global in more open, but also in more precise, local ways. He suggests, for instance, that we might study literature and culture "from below," from the viewpoint of language itself, with its many, often unforeseen cultural and historical connections (see Cronin, *Translation and Identity* 14-17). He also urges us to enter the critical discussion from any linguistic or cultural vantage point (not only from those of hegemonic English, French, Spanish, or Mandarin Chinese). Increasing attention to local languages, cultures, and texts and to their relation to the global is, I believe, essential if we are to pro-

duce literary and cultural interpretation with a heightened awareness of cultural Otherness. Doing so requires keeping differences in mind as the translator creatively weighs words in specific cultural contexts, negotiates meanings, and finds related but never identical terms in different languages and cultural systems.

Such ways of describing translation begin to provide a semantic framework for a range of current literary and linguistic issues — with ethical, cognitive and esthetic possibilities always in play. Three particular issues might be considered: 1) How might we more fully describe the ethics associated with translation as relation?, 2) If we think translation in the ways I have so far outlined, particularly in a broad global context, what do we mean by "language"? Is there in fact ever "a language," or is language itself a sort of "and zone" in which multiple languages encounter and overlap? How do we "think translation" in postcolonial situations where hybrid practices rule? What about inter-semiotic and intra-lingual as well as inter-lingual translations—all increasingly important in the global media?, and 3) Finally, what role might translation play in the study of world literature? There is clearly a growing interest in a more global range of readings — particularly visible in world literature programs in the United States and around the globe. These raise both challenges and promise for translation. According to David Damrosch, world literature seeks to chart a space for the encounter of cultures (283). How might world literature's many translations enlarge that space and promote a conversation of languages and cultures that can engage readers with the narratives, poetics, and complex cultures and histories of our globe? And how might world literature lead in this way to a more respectful and responsive relation to other cultures? Attempts to answer these questions must range beyond the translation studies perspectives I have so far mentioned.

To broaden the context for answering them, I turn now to the work of Edouard Glissant. Writing from the French Caribbean island of Martinique, and from a deep engagement with postcolonial and poststructuralist thought, Glissant has been recognized by a number of major literary prizes — and a growing number of translations. His many works in a variety of genres produce overlapping yet expanding themes. I highlight several that are compelling in themselves and that contribute directly or indirectly to an argument for a more creative, relational and dialogic view of translation. These themes are archipelago, Creolization, relation, and translation. All expand the global context of what I have called translation as relation, and help to answer some of the questions it poses.

From the beginning, Glissant has written from both a "local" and a "global" perspective. A poet and writer of Martinique, he has mapped his homeland in poetry and prose, describing also the greater arc of the Caribbean islands. These islands open onto the flux of the sea and its terrifying history — as well as its unpredictable changes and unknown encounters of the future. But the islands and the sea have metaphorical reach well beyond their local context. In his theoretical writing, Glissant associates modes of thinking and of history with sorts of geographical setting. Continental thinking, more systematic, linear, and interested in filiation and genesis, would tend to be organized and characterized by "slow and imperceptible repercussions between languages" (Glissant, "Introduction to a Poetics of the Diverse" 119). Although this characterizes the European continent and particularly the Mediterranean basin, it fails to account for many other cultures of the world interacting today in energetic and sometimes violent ways. Opposed to this continental thinking Glissant juxtaposes an "archipelagan" viewpoint. Such thought is non-systematic, changeful, open to the unexpected. Like the islands themselves, set within the restless movement of the sea, this viewpoint welcomes encounter, innovation, unpredictable change. It also focuses on a history that is both discontinuous and in many cases, tragic (*Poetics of Relation* 33-34, *Caribbean Discourse* 130-43).

From his Caribbean standpoint, Glissant thus looks backward in time and outward toward the sea to relate the complicated, non-linear histories of the island of Martinique. What he describes is not the official French history of discovery, but the complex interwoven histories of the island's settling, the eradication of its indigenous population, the development of the slave trade, and the multiple immigrations that ensued. Such a history does not have lines of filiation reaching back to a single source. It is from the start a mixture. According to Glissant, such a tragic history must be faced and accepted, in the same way as the potential for mixture and encounter it now provides. In poetic texts such as *Les Indes (The Indies)*, *Le Sang rivé (Riveted Blood)*, *Le Sel noir (Black Salt)*, and *Boises (Yokes)*, Glissant evokes the tragic history as well as the present beauty and hopes of the islands through a language that powerfully draws upon the imagery of the natural world. For Glissant, "the poetic word is flesh,"

as he writes in *Riveted Blood* (*Black Salt* 32, *The Collected Poems* 14). From his island home, poetry comes as a cry more than a celebration, in contact with the sea of the Middle Passage, and with the memory of all who have suffered. Trees, birds, the shore- lines stud the sea with an accumulating imagery that reveals the working and re-workings of history. This poetry uses innovative prosodic forms, rather than the traditional Alexandrine — including the prose poem, and experiments with aphoristic short verse, to create a poetry open to new intersections, new ways of reading, new interpretive relations. The poetic word is, above all, a creolized word, a complex juncture of oral and written language. Such novelty, such resistance to the systematic and conventional, is appropriate to the history and promise of the islands, the archipelago. Through imagery, syntax and rhythmic form, his poetry evokes a thought process he describes theoretically in his *Introduction to a Poetics of the Diverse*: "Another form of thought is developing, more intuitive, more fragile, threatened ... This thought I call "archipelagic thought," a nonsystematic, inductive thought that explores the unforeseen of the world-totality and attunes the written to the oral and the oral to the written. What I see is that today the continents are being "archipelagized," at least as perceived from the outside. The Americas are archipelagizing themselves, are constituting themselves into regions beyond national borders. And I believe that this term of "region" needs to be given some dignity. Europe is archipelagizing. Linguistic regions, cultural regions, beyond the barriers of nationhood, are islands — but open islands, this being their main condition for survival" (119-20). Here, center and periphery give way to extension, transformation, and encounter. What emerges is not a unity, but a diverse totality.

Creolization is for Glissant a central concept. It is language as *métissage*, (both a cultural and a linguistic mixing.) Creole language is both a specific local and historical phenomenon — and also organically linked for Glissant to the cross-cultural phenomenon described as typical of our times and of archipelagan thinking. On the local level, the Creole language is the language used in Martinique and elsewhere. As such, it is a language without a unified, single root; it is not derived from an original African language, but a creation born of many — the languages of indigenous peoples, African slaves and European colonists. A language tied to the land, it is imbued with specific local histories and community cultures. According to Glissant, cultures and languages must be preserved. They must be left their dignity and "opacity," to use one of his favorite terms. He means by this their depth and distinctness — although not exclusivity, isolation, or hegemony. Such languages, of which there are many in the world, must resist universalization into a single language or group of hegemonic languages. Glissant thus firmly rejects the universalizing hopes of the Tower of Babel as well as the tragic view of linguistic plurality described at the beginning of this article. In Glissant's view, "vast and dizzying possibilities are opening up, transcending fierce struggles against economic domination. This is not the pre-apocalyptic dizziness which precedes the fall of the Tower of Babel, but rather the tremor of creativity confronted with these boundless possibilities" (Glissant, "Beyond Babel" 562). And I submit that authors should write today with the world's multiple languages in mind — as possibilities to be protected and nurtured (on this, see, e.g., Dagnino; Sturm-Trigonakis).

Language and Creolization are the subject of some of Glissant's most compelling essays and theoretical works. His *Discours Antillais* (*Caribbean Discourse*) discusses not only the role of Creole language in the Caribbean, but its complex and problematic political situation. For it is not simply the inadequacy of either French or Creole to express Martiniquan culture that poses problems to writer and ordinary citizen alike; it is also the unequal weight and importance of the two languages. "The official language, French, is not the people's language. This is why we, the elite, speak it so correctly. The language of the people, Creole, is not the language of the nation" (*Caribbean Discourse* 166). Such a situation clearly creates major political and literary obstacles. According to Glissant, the writer can respond to this by transcending both languages to create a new idiom (what he calls *langage* as opposed to *langue*). Amalgamating both oral and written discourse, Glissant produces a distinctive written idiom that transforms the official French through the Creole language (see Britton, 141-43). Specifically, he employs Creole words and syntactical structures that invade and "foreignize" his French text. At the same time, he finds inspiration in the Caribbean arts of painting and sculpture — the painting of Wilfredo Lam and Matta as well as the sculpture of Cardenas — as he pursues his own poetics. In Glissant's resulting *langage* — a translation in its own right — the Caribbean landscape often provides images of mutation and Creolization.

Throughout many of Glissant's later texts, Creolization suggests a far more general, indeed "global" principle, referring to the increasing contact between cultures of the world. In our current era the cultures of the world are intersecting more often and becoming more conscious of one another. They are changing and exchanging across shocks, wars, but also the advances of consciousness. The idea of Creolization in this more general context is rhizomatic — extending outward to new encounters: "If we speak of creolized cultures (like that of the Caribbean for example), it is not to define a self-contained category which by its very nature would be opposed to other categories (pure cultures), but to assert that today the infinite vistas of interrelating are open to the human mind" (Glissant qtd. in Dash 148). While based in local histories, Creolization expressed as a global principle subverts attempts to glorify any single or "unique" origin that a language, nation or group wishes to claim. It highlights *métissage*, encounter and synthesis. Creating the new and unforeseen, Creolization is a cultural expression of unending metamorphosis, a *métissage* without limits. Creolization is also the linguistic term for the "poetics of relation" to which Glissant devoted his 1990 theoretical book *Poétique de la relation* (published in English translation in 1997).

Glissant takes the term "relation" in its usual sense, meaning rapport, connection, the tie associating things — be they phenomena, sizes, peoples etc. It suggests the act of telling or narrating as well. But he also explores it philosophically and politically. In his essays, "relation" remains anti-essentialist and strongly anti-imperialist. He uses the term to illustrate a way of thinking that does not attempt appropriation of one element or language or culture by another, but that underscores only the tie, the connection, while leaving to each entity its individual thickness, its 'opacity.' Only this way, as equals in respect and independence, do they maintain the opportunity for free dialogue and exchange. Relation for Glissant is the positive result of what he calls more generally "chaos." Referring to chaos theory in mathematics, he emphasizes the unpredictable and the accidental. Here, new sorts of identity — "relation-identities" or "rhizome-identities" — are formed. Such identities do not depend on the downward-reaching root, characteristic of what he names "root-identity," but extend outward, through multiple branching networks of roots. Such identity is not fixed but shifting and questioning, changing through the relations with the many particular Others that constitute it (*Poetics of Relation* 141-57; see also Deleuze and Guattari).

For Glissant, the modern epoch constitutes a time of growing dialogue between cultures of different sensibilities and an increasing awareness of the importance of identity as multiple and rhizomatic. A keen sense of the world's multilingualism is essential to this conception: "I write in the presence of all the world's languages ... But to write in the presence of all the world's languages does not mean to know all the world's languages. It means that in the present context of multiple literatures and of the relation of poetics with the chaos-world, I can no longer write in a monolingual manner" ("Introduction," *A Poetics of the Diverse* 119). This is to say, among other things, that we must leave behind a sense of language or knowledge that attempts to dominate or comprehend (in the sense of "grasping" that which is Other) and adopt one that is shared. Ideally, this rapport with Others permits everyone to speak the world in his/her own created language — and to act in the world as well. It also demands an ongoing awareness and respect for the great number of languages and literatures in our world, many of which are currently being absorbed. Relation is, then, above all, an encounter of the languages and cultures of the world as well as a creation of a new sort of identity that arises from an awareness of this. It is an encounter that is open, unforeseeable and creative. It entails exchanges — but has no system at hand to explain all in advance, only a keen understanding that there are a multitude of systems, and that they interact in always new and intriguing ways.

According to Glissant, no communities — certainly not imperialist ones — derive legitimacy from a mythological, ontological or genetic order, but rather from a "relational" one — that is, from their connection and openness to others. He notes that wandering and encounter have always been recurrent themes, essential even to the great "foundational" epics: from the Old Testament, to the *Iliad*, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the Indian *Bhagavad-Gita*, the Icelandic sagas and the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Aeneid* to the *Popul Vuh* or the *Chilam Balam* of the Native Americans, to the Finnish *Kalevala*. ("Introduction," *Poetics of the Diverse* 120). In the course of such mythic journeys, different modes of relation, examples of becoming, are as important as definitions of being. Emphasizing the journeys — rather than the foundational moments — would provide challenging themes for study, while subverting the root-identities they usually suggest.

Glissant does not lavish many words on translation. But he is clear about its role. He understands translation as relation par excellence. Why? For one, because in the exchange fostered by translation, two texts retain their thickness and opacity. Each is respected and works within its own cultural and linguistic community. The act of translation provides the connectivity and does so through its creative "detour" into another language, the wanderer's journey into a new language and culture. Translation's role is both real and symbolic, implicating all of the terms so far discussed. It works in a non-essentialist, relational way: "The language of the translator operates like Creolization and like Relation in the world. That is, this language produces the unforeseeable. Translation is a veritable operation of Creolization, from now on a new practice of that invaluable cultural *métissage* ... Translation inscribes itself in the multiplicity of our world, Translation is consequently only the most important type of the new archipelagic thinking. Art of the flight ["fugue"] from one language to another, without the first being effaced, without the second refusing to appear. But also art of the fugue because each translation accompanies the network of all possible translations of all languages into all" (*Introduction à un poétique du divers* 45; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). For Glissant, all languages reach beyond themselves to intersect with other languages and the cultures from which they emerge. So there is much room for translation. But translation will always remain only relative, never scientifically equivalent. It does not want to be. The translator, like the writer, creates relations by forging a new language (*langage*) based on a respect for Otherness, and in dialogue with it. It is a language whose novelty and future course cannot be foreseen. This is also the sort of translation that "translation as relation" would describe.

Although Glissant's work often suggests poetic vision rather than argument, it nonetheless illuminates what translation as relation might include. And although clearly utopian, as well as deeply political, its visions of archipelagan remapping, of Creolization, of a new rhizome identity and of creative translation have both practical and literary appeal. For one, they underscore the role of imagination in envisioning the future. They also suggest fruitful directions for answering the particular questions introduced earlier: 1) What might we then mean by an ethics of translation? Translation as relation would operate within an anti-essentialist philosophical framework. Its ethics would accept the "opacity" of the source text, while not overwhelming it or pretending to fully comprehend and transparently restate it in an equivalent semantic and syntactic structure. Aspects of the source text would always remain unspoken in the new words of translation. Translation as relation would, moreover, clearly extend to all the languages of the world. It would intend never to eradicate the source language but rather to draw attention to it and to its cultural community; 2) What might we mean by "language" in a broad global context? Is there in fact ever "a language," or is language itself a sort of "and zone" where multiple languages encounter and overlap? As we have seen, Glissant makes language issues central to his work and presents them in a variety of ways. His discussions of Creolization underscore the complexity of every language, while focusing our attention on the particular linguistic *métissage* of post-colonial situations. Glissant's explanation of language as in fact multi-linguistic and in constant transformation suggests new ways to consider the very language of translation. Indeed, it would seem that just as the poet creates a *langage*, a special idiom, for her use, so does the translator. In the creolized zone that Glissant explores, the two run parallel, each creative, each transforming language through dialogues with other texts, languages and arts; and 3) Glissant's writing also advances our understanding of world literature and translation's role within it. The emphasis on multilingualism promotes respectful consideration of the countless works of literature written in the many languages of the world. Moreover, while world literature risks being impoverished when reduced to a simple "tree-like" archaeology of texts and their cultural roots, Glissant offers a new direction of epic analysis. It builds on the wanderings rather than the "foundational" character of world literature's epic texts. This brings us back to that other journey through language, time, and space entailed in the production, translation and re-translation of texts, classic and otherwise. Finally, Glissant's very discussions of archipelagan thinking, with its potential re-mapping according to flows of languages, translations, literatures, and peoples rather than institutionalized geo-political borders, itself offers an important humanistic counterpoint to ideas of commercial, financial or military globalization and to legal and political structures fixed within the nation-state. They suggest new ways to think about literary transmission across the globe, perhaps even new ways to map world literature.

Glissant himself can be viewed from the standpoint of literary transmission and world literature. A growing number of translations have placed his work in new cultural contexts, where they initiate important dialogues, affecting identities, languages and poetic idioms. There have already been a good number of translations of Glissant into different languages: at least 14 book-length translations into English; 1 book into Italian; 1 book into Japanese; 11 into German; 1 into Portuguese; 8 into Spanish. His English translations by Michael Dash, Betsy Wing, and Jeff Humphries, for instance (which are those I know best) have offered important recreations of his work, coupled with insights into the particularities of Glissant's syntax, lexicon and form. These translations have enabled his theoretical and creative work to widely influence postcolonial thinking about language and identity.

Glissant has already left his mark not only on theorists and academics, but on poets as well. For instance, Adrienne Rich, speaks of the importance of Glissant's work to her own. Indeed, her sense of translation has been deepened by this encounter. She has long welcomed poetry of other cultures when forging her own distinctive work, and translations have often played a part in this. She writes of her desire for "a convergence of tributaries" jostling one against another (*A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* 130), and for a language that has learned from "the heartbeat, memories, images of strangers" (*What is Found There* 86). But in recent years she has begun to measure the full political charge implicit in this term "translation." In her 2007 *Poetry and Commitment*, Rich speaks of poetry as "an exchange of energies which, in changing consciousness, can effect change in existing conditions" (38). Here she also makes clear both the importance of translation and the fact that she does not think of it as anything disembodied, Platonic, or esoteric. It is neither a simple intertextuality, she reminds us, nor some vague understanding of World Literature (so often assumed to be a European-rooted "tree," eliciting hierarchical readings of the national and the foreign). Rather, in Rich's view, translation is a part of our many individual lives and their particular histories, deeply connected to their often terrifying twists and changes, and capable of either betraying or fostering that exchange of energy that is poetry. She writes, "I've relied — both today and in my lifelong sense of what poetry can be — on translation: the carrying over, the trade routes of language and literature. And the questions of who is translated, who are the translators, how and by whom the work is done and distributed are also, in a world of imbalanced power and language, political questions. Let's bear in mind the Triangle Trade as a quintessential agony of translation" (*Poetry and Commitment* 38). She follows these words at the end of that essay with a reference to Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, pointing to the abyss of the Middle Passage, and to the sharing that can occur through a poet's lived awareness of other poets, other languages, and other, often tragic histories (see Bermann, "Re-vision" 111-12).

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