

## XXVII. Metaphors of Translation

1. "I also find **the hall of mirrors** as an apt metaphor for translation itself. Every instance of bringing meaning from one linguistic context to another finds the translator both reflecting and being reflected in the original and, naturally, in the translation." Aron Aji
2. "Spoken word is an important category in our culture and most people **require no metaphor** in order to appreciate it . . . It's odd— isn't it?—how we sometimes have trouble appreciating the skill required to bring words from one language to life in another—and need a metaphor in order to help us do that—when we're so readily enthusiastic about the skill of bringing written words to life by reading them aloud." Esther Allen
3. "Translating a literary work can be seen as **similar to what a horticulturist does** by taking a rare plant out of its natural environment and bringing it to life and making grow and blossom in a foreign one . . . (I'm an avid gardener, as you might have guessed)." John Balcom
4. "Translation between languages as far removed as Japanese and English is often less a question of straining and pouring nuances from one mold into another than of **reshaping the entire receptacle**, especially where the publisher seeks a more readily palatable gel." Alfred Birnbaum
5. "**Translation is a handshake.** It always takes place between a translator and the original author . . . With

the handshake you are reaching out to them and you are also asking for their trust.” Ross Benjamin

6. “I might use the metaphor of **transporting a group of people across a river**, safely and soundly, in a shape they were to begin with, including their beauty, sans changes or embellishments. This metaphor brings the river, with its speed, color, undercurrents, etc. into play. What I mean by this are the cultural, social, political, etc. undercurrents that a native speaker of the source language would know while the non-native might not. It would perhaps be what is lost in translation.” Danuta Borcardt
7. “I practice Quintilian’s imitation, adjusted to my circumstances and limited abilities. **Translation is collaboration between an originating writer and a rewriting translator; imitation**, signals a first step toward peaceable co-existence.” Ronald Christ
8. “One often thinks of the craft of translation in terms of an actor interpreting a role, or perhaps a musician performing a piece; and yet the translator usually strives to bring as little as possible of his or her personality or self into the rendering. In that sense **I see translation more as mimicry**—doing as good an impression as possible of the original work in a different language.” Peter Constantine

9. “The process of translation feels like **playing chess** with a more talented opponent, who makes a seemingly mysterious move with the rook. Maybe a piece is left unguarded as a result, maybe the position seems more awkward, and I stare and stare at the board, trying to guess the point. Why this enjambment? Why didn't the character respond to the flashing light? Why put the word ‘dentures’ in the middle of the sentence, rather than the end?”  
Sean Cotter

10. “I have an incomplete image in my mind of a translator **conducting an orchestra of words**, trying to present the music from the original poem with a unique and insightful interpretation.” Ming Di

Text by Jessie Chaffee

<http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/36-metaphors-for-translation-jessie-chaffee>

Reading Guidelines:

Readers must know how to benefit from reading figures, tables, statistics and quotations. Quotations, which are usually well-chosen and belong to authoritative people, make ideas more concrete and are uneasily forgotten.

**Q.I** Give the exact meaning of the following words first in English and second in Arabic: apt, odd, readily,

enthusiastic, horticulturist, blossom, avid, straining, nuances, mold, receptacle, sans, embellishments, undercurrents, adjusted, collaboration, co-existence, strives, mimicry, opponent, rook, dentures, insightful.

**Q.II** Derive as many words as you can from the following words: reflecting, appreciating, rare, removed, safely, adjusted, mimicry, position, image.

**Q.III** Give the opposites of the words below and use them in good English sentences of your own: apt, odd, rare, palatable, trust, soundly, peaceable, mimicry, awkward, insightful.

**Q.IV** Answer the following questions briefly:

1. What is the gist of Esther Allen's argument?
2. How is the work of the translator similar to that of a horticulturist?
3. How is translation similar to a handshake?
4. Do you agree that translation is like transporting a group of people across a river? How?
5. How does a true peaceable co-existence exist between an author and a translator?
6. Do you agree with Constantine that translation is mimicry?

7. How do you find Cotter's metaphor of translation as a game of chess?

8. Is it right to compare the translator to a conductor of an orchestra?

Q.V Read, discuss and translate into plain Arabic any metaphor you like of the above ones.

Research Activity:

Think of more metaphors about translation. Give ones suggested by Arab authors.

**Quote of the Day:**

It is impossible to translate poetry. Can you translate music?"

Voltaire