

Transient Landscapes of Style

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1. Introduction

This article explores the conception of style as an aural and visual entity. It is thus concerned with the materiality of literature as perceived by a human body, and with ways of representing this perception. The concept of a stylistic landscape emerges from the patterns and shapes presented by a text when its style is materialised by the reader into a visual form. The aim is to propose a visual method to carry out stylistic analysis. The present article further investigates the use of translation as an agent of change that transforms this landscape as it builds an alternative body of text based on a work of literature in a different language. The aim of this comparative methodology is to facilitate an appreciation of the linguistic non-transferability of the materiality of style. The human body and its role in the phenomenology of reading is the starting point for the construction of the notion of transient landscapes of style here presented, and so this article begins by contextualising its proposal within embodiment theory.

Through his contributions to the philosophy and theory of embodiment, American philosopher Mark Johnson challenged traditional Western ideas about human sense-making mechanisms. In *The Meaning of the Body. Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (2007), Johnson asserts that 'meaning traffics in patterns, images, qualities, feelings, and eventually concepts and propositions' (Johnson 2007: 9). Embodiment theory thus reinstitutes the human body as the core source and destination of our meaning-making and sense-making faculties. It goes against the Cartesian division between mind and body, regarding them as parts of a system that works much more holistically than we sometimes want to acknowledge. And most crucially, it gives a central place to non-conceptual forms of understanding.

The theory of embodiment carries with it immense consequences for the perception of what constitutes the 'meaning' of a literary work. It suggests, for instance, that reading literature is not a textual endeavour in pursuit of a subject matter *per se*, it is about what our body as a whole makes of the entirety of perceiving that text, subject matter and beyond. In other words, reading is not only about explicitly semantic meaning, it is also about the layout of words and punctuation on the page, the sounds that we hear either when reading aloud or when subvocalizing in silence, the sensations the text evokes throughout the reading process, and other material implications that become alive in the experience of a reader encountering a text. These aspects within the material nature of literature should be considered as part of

its 'meaning', as they are textual and paratextual elements that, after all, convey sense to the reading experience.

The importance of the reader has transformed literary theory ever since the emergence of Reader Reception Theory in the 1970s. Even after its decline, Reception Theory paved the way for scholars like Peter Stockwell to specialise in cognitive poetics during the last decade, and to explore the relationship between reader and text in, as Derek Attridge puts it in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004), 'the event of literature'. But '[g]iven our tendency to measure civilization and culture by their very distance from the body, we hardly ever concede that there is a corporeal dimension to reading' (Littau 2006: 37). The present article focuses precisely on this corporeal dimension. It not only acknowledges the layers of sense conveyed by the most material aspect of literary language —its acoustic dimension—, but it also explores a visual way to express or represent this dimension as a landscape of style. By dwelling into the rhythmic dimension of reading, the notion of embodiment is inserted within the realm of style and of stylistic analysis.

2. Rhythm and Landscape

The opening statement of this article addressed the conception of style as an aural and visual entity. The notion of rhythm encompasses these two phenomenological and cognitive aspects of reading, and it is thus the main focus of the stylistic investigations here explored within the frame of a metaphorical understanding of landscape. The most fundamental notions of rhythm that human beings experience are the result of perceiving (mostly subconsciously) various constant vital mechanisms in the body, such as the palpitation of the heart muscles and the processes involved in breathing (Johnson 2007: 237; Furniss and Bath 1996: 25; Fraisse 1963). These two biological functions —cardiovascular and respiratory— are not only mechanical 'objective' workings of the body: they respond organically to stimuli both from the environment the individual is submerged in and also from the emotional dimension of the individual. In other words, the changes of tempo or the 'duration of the intervals in a rhythmic sequence' (Wennerstrom 2001: 276) in the heartbeat or in breath reflect certain physical or mental states experienced. This correlation reproduces itself in artistic forms, where devices like, for instance, acceleration, are used for particular aesthetic purposes such as producing feelings of anticipation (for more on musical motion see Johnson 1987: 244-245). It is useful to remember that the effects that gradual or abrupt changes of tempo have are neither culturally-dependent nor the result of an intellectual operation, but they are rather organic responses of the body which have essential emotive correspondences of feeling: 'The feeling is presented —enacted— in the felt experience of the listener. To hear the music is just to be moved and to feel in the precise way that is defined by the patterns of the musical motion. Those feelings are meaningful in the same way that any pattern of emotional flow is

meaningful to us at a pre-reflective level of awareness' (Johnson 2007: 239). In literature this means that the subconscious level of rhythmic communication underlying the structure of language has probably a much greater impact on readers than is usually considered.

In very broad terms, *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms* defines rhythm as 'a cadence, a contour, a figure of periodicity, any sequence perceptible as a distinct pattern capable of repetition and variation' (Preminger 1986: 238). Starting from the Greek etymological roots of the word as 'measured motion, time, proportion' (Myers and Wukasch 2003: 310), Jack Myers and Don Charles Wukasch define rhythm as 'the sense of movement attributable to the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of prose or poetry or to the duration of syllables in quantitative meter' (*ibid.*). The authors then focus on the rhythm of free verse and cadence in conversational phrasing, thus providing quite an unconventional definition of the term. However, their initial approach to defining rhythm is closely related to scansion perceived as the analysis of syllabic and accentual stress, and to the effect of these patterns which result in a 'sense of movement.'

Other more specialised definitions of rhythm tend to share some fundamental principles which appear to be much more abstract than the Princeton approach: 'rhythm occurs whenever there is a regular repetition of similar events which are divided from each other by recognizably different events' (Furniss and Bath 1996: 29); "'Rhythm" refers to the way in which sounds of varying length and accentuation are grouped together in patterns' (Taylor 2007: 6); 'repetition with variation' (Brown 1978: 7); 'the response of our rhythmic competence to internal and external events' (Cureton 1992: 120). These definitions tend to make reference to rhythm as a repetition in temporality, but also to a pattern of expectation and fulfilment. Cureton's assertion accounts for the fact that since it is inherent in the structure of a work of art, rhythm can also be attributed to non-aural elements of language, to visual forms of communication which do not rely on sound at all. The relevance of this in literary practices is enormous, given that language is written down on paper and words on the page are not only printed in a certain font and style, but also create visual spacing patterns on the page which themselves produce an effect on the reader comparable to that of silences in music. Already we are beginning to see the range of rhythmic conceptions which can be identified in a piece of literature, and that would go through a significant and sometimes radical conversion during the process of literary translation. Readers might be slightly or significantly unaware of the effects of sound and rhythm underlying the reading of literature, which is why using a method to notate acoustic and rhythmic elements in the original, and then comparing it to the notations of a particular translation might be the starting point to understand why translated works of literature have such a different rhythmic feel, and how this difference has important implications on the way a particular work is perceived by its readers.

The opening paragraph of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (first published in 1931) serves to illustrate what is meant by this rhythmic textual dimension:

The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually (Woolf 1993: 3).

The iconic nature of the flow of language at the end of this three-sentence paragraph echoes the image, or as it was referred to before 'the subject matter', the author describes: the movement of ripples on the water as a consecutive series of strokes. Woolf's use of the comma here is clearly set out for this iconic purpose, as in English it would not be strictly necessary to add a comma after the word 'moving', or even after the word 'another'; she could have written, for instance: 'the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving one after another beneath the surface, following and pursuing each other forever.' In this version there is no repetition of 'each other' and the extra comma has been removed. But Woolf's use of commas and repetition in this passage create a pulse for language to gently move across the sentence, and to simultaneously create the image: 'and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually.' Notice how the nature of the first two sentences in the paragraph contrasts dramatically with this third sentence, as 'The sun had not yet risen.' feels quite blunt in comparison to the detailed, paused description that follows straight after.

How can the reader transform this awareness of rhythmic textual dimension into a landscape of style? First of all, it is of primal importance to take into account the temporal nature of this experience: literature is not a static landscape but a landscape set into motion by the act of reading. In the fragment by Woolf quoted above, the subject matter directs the reader to the image of the sea, and the movement of the water; but the words themselves move in time as reading takes place, as if contemplated from within a moving vehicle, perhaps from a train or from a car. When the reader starts reading, the words begin to swing past, and they form patterns, and pauses, and with every change the reader finds him/herself affected, transformed by the rhythm of his/her own reading. It is also possible for the reader to raise him/herself from the path, or from the page, and see the journey from above, going back to previous moments and perceiving them in comparison to moments even further away, like on a map, thus seeing the trail of more general structures in the text. In other words, this reading has a linear dimension, but it has also a bird's-eye view dimension. In his book entitled *About*

Time. Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time, Mark Currie describes this perspective as 'aesthetic distance': 'a kind of critical sophistication adopted by a reader which distances that reader from the involvement which might normally be brought about by the mechanisms of fiction' (2007: 58). This distancing will also allow readers to appreciate the changes in what will be referred to below as transient landscapes of style.

3. Introducing the Transient through the Practice of Translation

Now that it has been established what a landscape of style is within the context of the reading of literature, a new element can be introduced into the equation: the practice of literary translation as a recreation of this landscape. A different fragment from *The Waves* will be used to explore the transformations of patterns of perception through the translation process. A visual rendering of rhythmic patterns in the original text will be displayed, followed by images of the same fragment in two different translations into Spanish. Thomas Carper and Derek Attridge's reflections on poetic scansion will help the reader understand the relevance of seeking a visual rendering of the rhythm of style:

Increased understanding, we believe, leads to increased enjoyment, but in the case of poetry, understanding is not only an intellectual matter. To experience a poem fully is to hear and feel it at the same time as responding to the meanings of its words and sentences, and to do this one has to be able to appreciate its rhythms. An invaluable tool in doing so, and in communicating one's experience to others, is a way of marking the lines of verse to indicate how the rhythm is working [...] (2003: ix).

Carper and Attridge's insight is concerned with the exploration of poetry, but poetic prose can be defined as prose that calls for a poetic reading, and marking the text is precisely the way to show how prose can be approached from an acoustic perspective, foregrounding those qualities we normally ascribe to poetry. The markings used in this article are personal symbols created by a particular reader, in this case the author of this article. It is worth noting that a single system of stylistic markings is not being proposed. The proposal is rather an invitation for readers to create their own symbols and marking systems to record the acoustic and rhythmic perception of the text. Figure 1 displays stylistic markings on a second fragment from *The Waves*:

“How strange,” said Jinny, “that people should sleep, that people should put out the
 lights and go upstairs. They have taken off their dresses, they have put on white
 nightgowns. There are no lights in any of these houses. There is a line of chimney-pots
 against the sky: and a street lamp or two burning, as lamps burn when nobody needs
 them. The only people in the streets are poor people hurrying. There is no one coming
 or going in this street: the day is over. A few policemen stand at the corners. Yet night
 is beginning. I feel myself shining in the dark. Silk is on my knee. My silk legs rub
 smoothly together. The stones of a necklace lie cold on my throat. My feet feel the
 pinch of shoes. I sit bolt upright so that my hair may not touch the back of the seat. I
rallentando
 am arrayed, I am prepared. This is the momentary pause; the dark moment. *p* The fiddlers
 have lifted their bows. (63-64)

Figure 1

The phrases within a blue rectangle display a parallel structure, and the green highlights within them show words that are repeated identically. Encircled in red are small stressed phrases with a somewhat independent nature and which stand out of the text. Repeated sounds are highlighted in red, in this case it is the ‘t’s which slow the rhythm considerably at ‘Yet night’, and that change the texture of the text in an iconic manner in “I sit bolt upright.” The green and violet lines placed just above the lines of text represent an alternation between long and short phrases which characterise this fragment as a particularly rhythmic fragment. The musical symbol on the last semicolon —fermata— signals a held pause, and the scansion marks correspond to two sentences sharing a very similar metrical structure where rhythm is quite prominent, and which echo each other within the paragraph: ‘The stones of a necklace lie cold on my throat.’; ‘The fiddlers have lifted their bows.’ The end of the fragment presents a slower tempo, signalled by the *rallentando*, and a quieter volume, indicated by *p*. Of course these are all markings that correspond to a particular performance of this text, but this performative aspect is an inherent process in the event of literature, and is therefore inherent to its meaning.

Figure 2 displays a notated version of Woolf’s fragment by translator Dámaso López:

—Qué extraño —dijo Jinny— que la gente duerma, que apaguen la luz, y suban por las
escaleras. Se quiten la ropa, se pongan los blancos pijamas. No hay luces en ninguna de estas
casas. Se recortan las chimeneas¹ contra el cielo, y hay una o dos farolas² encendidas en la calle,
porque las farolas se encienden³ cuando nadie las necesita. En la calle, las únicas personas que
hay son unos pobres que caminan aprisa. Nadie viene a esta calle, ni entra nadie, ha terminado
el día. [En las esquinas hay unos pocos policías.] [Y sin embargo está empezando la noche.]
[Me siento brillar en la oscuridad.] Hay seda en mi rodilla. [Las medias de seda se rozan
suavemente.] [Sobre el cuello siento las frías piedras de la gargantilla.] [Me aprietan los zapatos
en los pies.] Me siento con la espalda rígida para que el pelo no toque en el respaldo. Estoy
dispuesta, preparada. Ésta es la pausa momentánea, el momento oscuro. Los violinistas han
levantado los arcos. (López, 216)

Figure 2

Rather than displaying parallel structures that repeat a significant number of words generating duple rhythms, this translation seems to create triple rhythms by introducing changes in punctuation. The second sentence could be considered to keep the parallelism going if the reflexive 'se' was to be interpreted as the repeating pattern; but isolated in that manner, its repetition is not strong enough to create in the reader a feeling of echo or equilibrium. The use of 'se' without an explicit subject is quite strange in this translation and in fact generates instability and uneasiness. However, the resource in the fragment that does create a certain sense of parallelism is the use of metrical echoes, signalled in the text by scansion markings: 'En las esquinas' and 'Y sin embargo' share the same accentual structure, as do 'Me siento', 'Hay seda' and 'Las medias', 'de seda', and 'se rozan'. Within brackets are the many sentences that contain a similar number of words, and together creating a very contrastive effect — much more regular, even monotonous— when compared to the alternation of long and short sentences displayed in the original. Rather than creating a brisk sharp effect as did the 't's in the original, the alliterative 's's in the translation contribute to the creation of a smooth flowing flow in the central section of the paragraph. Also, the fermata has been lost due to the change in punctuation introduced at the penultimate sentence.

The acoustic differences between the original text by Woolf, and López' translation of it into Spanish, have been outlined. It is clear that some of the subtleties in the source text were not maintained, and that the translation creates a different 'feel' for the text, making use of other

patterns of sounds and a use of punctuation that generates a different rhythm. Marking these acoustic elements in the text helps to perceive its entirety as a landscape that emerges from the original text, but constitutes an entirely different body of literature in regard to its materiality.

A second translation of the same text will enable the reader to explore how different translations contrast with the original text in a completely different way. Figure 3 displays Lenka Franulic's translation:

presto
 —¡Qué extraño es pensar que las gentes retornan a sus casas en este momento, extinguen las luces
 y se acuestan a dormir! —dijo Jinny—. **Se han** quitado sus ropas y **se han** puesto sus camisas de
 dormir. **Sus** casas están **sin** luz. Veo perfilarse sus chimeneas contra el cielo y dos o tres faroles
 que arrojan su luz sobre la calle, tristes como lámparas que no iluminan a nadie. Los únicos
 transeúntes son algunas **pobres** gentes que **pasan apresuradas**. No hay tráfico en esta calle, **el día**
ha concluido. Algunos policías se estacionan en las esquinas. Sin embargo, la noche **no** ha hecho
sino comenzar. Yo me siento resplandecer en la oscuridad. Mis rodillas están envueltas en seda.
 Mis piernas **sedosas** **se** frotan **suavemente** la una contra la otra. Las piedras frías de un collar
 reposan sobre mi garganta. Me mantengo muy erguida por temor de desordenar mis cabellos
 contra el respaldo del coche. **Estoy** adornada, **estoy** pronta. Esto **no** es **sino** la pausa momentánea,
 el intervalo en la oscuridad. Los músicos alzan sus arcos. (Franulik, 2002: 86-87)

Figure 3

The initial contrast here is created by the extremely long initial phrase, which comes as a result of an inversion that displays the reference to the speaker at the very end of the phrase. The effect of this change is to speed up the opening of the fragment considerably. A purple line makes reference to another particularly long sentence in relation to both the original and López' translation. Franulic maintained the two parallel structures present in the original, both displayed inside blue rectangles and with green highlights for repeated words. She also introduced two negative constructions which are absent in the original and which do create an echo, as they are constructed in an equivalent syntactic structure: 'la noche no ha hecho sino comenzar' and 'Esto no es sino la pausa momentánea.' The 's's here have a similar effect as in the previous translation, functioning also in an iconic way, as the referent in that sentence alludes to the friction created by silk stockings rubbing against each leg. The final sentence is

quite rhythmical, perhaps because in the first translation the sentence is considerably longer and difficult to retain due to the complex tense used in the verb conjugation, where here it is a simple present tense construction. Like with the negative constructions, there is a metrical echo amongst the last sentence and '*Sus casas están sin luz,*' which is also scanned in the image above.

4. Transient Landscapes of Style

The concept of transience that is used in this article relates, first of all, to the temporal dimension of reading: the line of reading is in perpetual change as the reading moves forward, and so literature is inserted within temporal forms of art. Reading can thus be addressed metaphorically as a process whereby the reader paints the landscape of the text as it is being read. This thread of text, perceived through time, creates patterns of repetition and rhythmic shapes which, unless recorded, are often lost as the reading progresses and leaves behind each of its moments in time. But producing a visual rendering of style is an innovative way to record the creation of these patterns and to exploit the resources of stylistics in order to aid a literary analysis that takes into account the subjectivity of the reader's perception of rhythm. The concept of a landscape of style makes explicit one of the most abstract dimensions of literature: its rhythm.

To come back to the example of Woolf's fragment, examining a second translation has illustrated the potential of literary translation as a resource to explore the acoustic transformations of literary texts using a contrastive perception strategy. Figure 4 displays an image of Woolf's fragment and its two translations into Spanish:

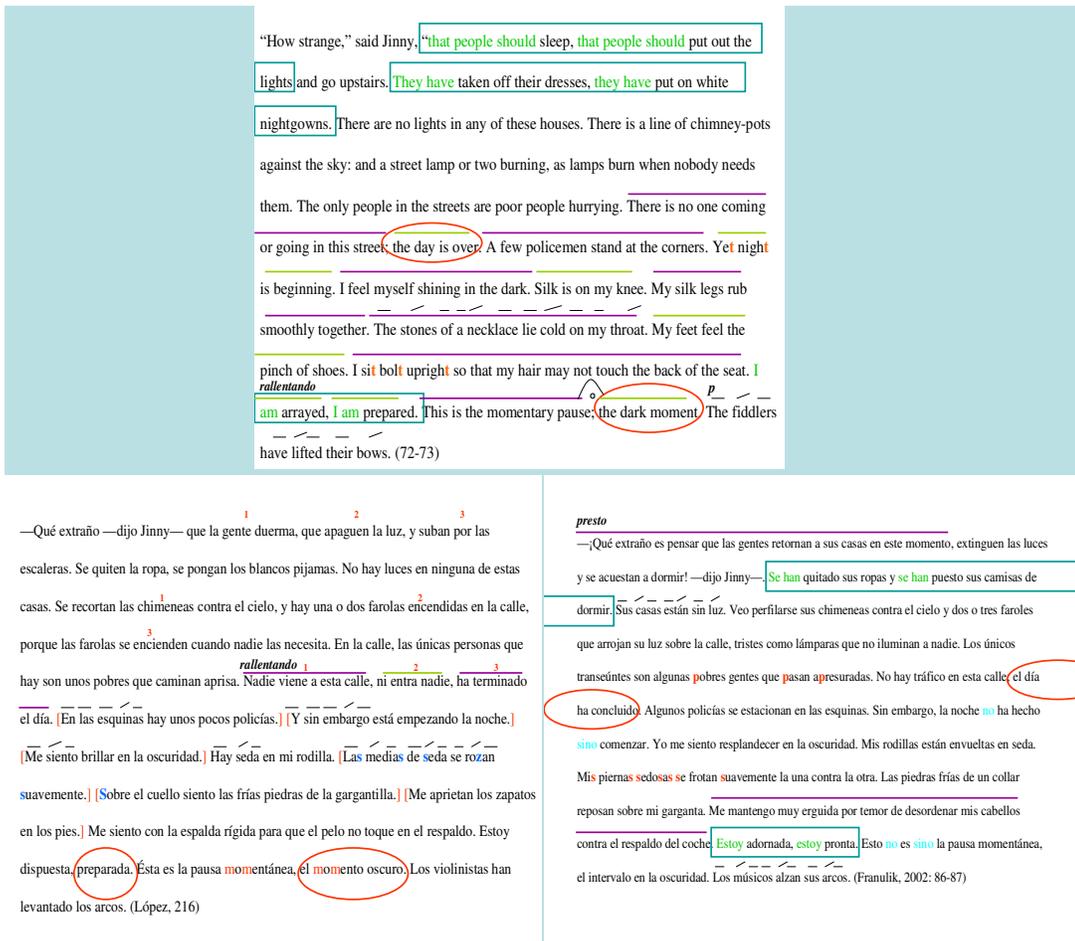


Figure 4

If the text in these fragments could be withdrawn from each of these images, the stylistic markings would be all that remains. The resulting image would be what this article describes as a landscape of style. The markings in the original text for this particular fragment show Woolf’s structures of parallelism and her alternation of long and short sentences. Each of the two translations produces a completely different rhythmic structure: the translation on the left has several triadic structures and clearly displays a preference for short sentences when compared to the long purple lines in the translation on the right, which amongst other things seem to have a speeding effect on the reading. Perceiving the images of original and translations comparatively foregrounds the second level of transience addressed here. The source text and the translated text are, at one level, the same literary work, but at another level they are only temporal forms for it: two (or more) completely distinct rhythmic bodies, each of them picturing a different landscape perceived by the reader. Alternatively, transience

could be said to address the literary work as a single landscape, but a landscape in perpetual change through the creation of each of its translations into other languages.

5. Conclusion

Perceiving style as a landscape incorporates embodiment theory to the experience of reading. It brings in a visual dimension to the rhythm of literature and helps readers appreciate the less tangible aspects of literary art in its temporal and acoustic dimension. Added to the recording of these rhythmic elements in the form of stylistic markings, translation adds another perspective to the appreciation of a text, as it foregrounds what is non-transferable in literature. As Scott explains, the advantage of producing a translation is that it 'reveal[s] the inimitabilities of the ST' (Scott 2006: 119). The conception of transient landscapes of style thus serves to highlight some of the aesthetic qualities of literature, and it contributes to enhance reading as an embodied pleasurable experience. Conceived as a methodology for the construction of a visual rendering of literary style as perceived by the reader, this conception has important implications both for research purposes and also for pedagogical purposes in various disciplines such as Stylistics, Literature, Translation, and Foreign Language Teaching.

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