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SELJA PADDON

John Ashbery and Paavo Haavikko: Architects of the Postmodern Space in Mind and Language

Form isn't an overcoat flung over the flesh of thought; it's the flesh of thought itself. (Julian Barnes)

The question: "What is minor or marginal literature" continues to be the focus of much critical debate, partly, I would suggest, because the notion of a "minor or marginal literature" finds itself in a cross-fire between those who are politically motivated and anxious to discover what the dominant centre has trampled underfoot, and the poststructuralist ideologues who cannot give a literary nod neither to the notion of centre nor to that of margin without seriously compromising their theoretical stance. What is commonly known, however, is the fact that the traditional and highly political emphasis on system-building has designated the margins to be at areas perceived linguistically, culturally (that is, in ethno-cultural terms) and geographically as "minor." Thus Finnish poetry, for example, is seen to embody aspects of what Said called "Orientalism" (Said 25), that is, often appearing faceless within the Western mind-set and occupying the role of the Other while remaining imageless, if not representative of the notion of "anti-image." We might say, however, that Said's thought-provoking criticism of Western attitudes towards the Orient and everything "oriental" sees the Western stance as homogeneously expressive of a kind of blindness, when, in fact, the Occidental discourse and its attitudes towards its own "marginal" voices can be similarly challenged. It is interesting, therefore, to consider the views of current theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, for example, who sees "minor" literatures deriving from deterritorialized languages, their most notable representatives being Kafka who wrote in German while a native of Prague, also Joyce and Beckett both of whom wrote in French and English while living in Paris (Deleuze and Guattari 19). Within Deleuze's decentred perspective, the major/minor or centre/margin dichotomies

undergo a radical change; Deleuze valorizes the utilization of English and *every language* in Joyce (Deleuze and Guattari 19), hence the focus is no longer on the atemporal, eternal essences attributable to specific languages / cultures / literatures, but on a historical plurality which necessitates the rethinking of concepts such as margins and borders. Importantly, there is a move away from centralization and its preoccupation with concerns such as origin, oneness, and what Linda Hutcheon views as the monumentality of national specificities (Hutcheon 58). In short, it has become clear that in our fragmented, contemporary world conceived to be in perpetual flux, "the centre" as Foucault sees it, becomes a fiction (Foucault 1977, 208), therefore, necessarily, so do the margins.

We know that there were modern poets before there was modern poetry just as there were postmodern poets before our encounter with postmodern poetry, poetry which we see as permitting, if not valorizing, multiplicity, diversity, eclecticism and cultural dissimilarity. In contrast to the notion of cultural heterogeneity, Barbara Herrnstein Smith draws attention to the way in which Western critical theory has validated the preferences of members belonging to particular communities — an idea which can be extended to include ethnocentricity as a contingency — a theorizing which simultaneously not only effectively discounts, but pathologizes all other contingencies outside the communally specific (Herrnstein Smith 41). The cultural criticism which has maintained this self-privileging logic has been, and often still is, viewed not only as normative, but natural. For example, the notion of poets' rootedness in their particular locale has often been seen as paramount, as well as presumed to be unique without further thought to the contrary.

The two poets whose work is the focus of my paper, John Ashbery and Paavo Haavikko, would in such a territorially specific and unified past have found themselves at polar opposites. Theirs would have been a world structured strictly on the representational idea of poetic discourse, that is on a sort of realist or mirror theory of poetry which preceded structuralism and whose fundamental evaluative categories would have been adequacy and accuracy in representation (Lyotard viii) presumed to be culture-specific. The cultural backgrounds and contexts of their poetry, in turn, would have been seen as single, great national stories. I propose to show how in this postmodern age of legitimization crises, to use Habermas's term, such polarities have lost their validity. Instead, we are faced with a sense of locale as well as individuals of multiple social identities, we are aware of a continuously shifting sense of community, a collage of beliefs and allegiances; in short, we carry images of social and mental life that are profoundly richer, more dynamic and more subtly differentiated than the proponents of an objectified reality could articulate (Herrnstein Smith 168). Hence, designating the poetic discourse(s) of Ashbery and Haavikko, for

example, along the linguistic and/or ethno-cultural lines as the Dominant and the Other, I suggest, can be seen as radically problematic.

In the following analysis of Ashbery's and Haavikko's poetry I hope to show why we can no longer legitimately employ as an organizing principle such conceptually opposite notions as the centre and margins, particularly in ethno-cultural terms. In keeping with the postmodernist shift to spatial emphasis, my focus is the plane of expression, the space language both occupies and creates in poetic discourse and Ashbery's and Haavikko's manipulation of that space. This is not a static or definable space, but as in film, the space expands with close-ups; Haavikko writes: "but I yearn also for myself, for the place where I am, there is / an empty space / there, / it is the soul in the midst of flowers ("Land of Birth" 9-12).

In keeping with the idea of space as a mutable, perpetually shifting phenomenon, the close-up on the self and the soul opens up onto a wide expanse of flowers, an expanse extending to the limits of the eye's reach, perhaps. As in film, slow motion in Ashbery's and Haavikko's language expands movement, or in Ashbery's words:

The island is becoming a sun. Wait by this
Mistletoe bush and you will get the feeling of really
Being out of the world and with it. ("Collective Dawns," 19-21)

Ashbery's and Haavikko's work have parallels in the realm of visual art as well, specifically in the abstractly expressionistic paintings where shapes jump the tracks of formalistic composition. They switch meaning and position, at times acting as background, at times as foreground within a tableau yielding contradictory clues. Here I am thinking of works by De Chirico (prior to 1920), de Kooning, Sandro Chia and others. In Ashbery's and Haavikko's poetry the reader also moves in a world of sharply drawn but fragmentary images which resist the application of consistency, hence the images are at once both general and unstable allowing for ambiguity to surface and take over, ambiguity which cannot be resolved. Moreover, it is a plane of expression where distinctions between "history" and "fiction," historical time and the present are not only deliberately undermined, but assume a peculiar timelessness, as it were. In keeping with parallels, as an example of the latter we might consider Chia's work in which one sees "quotations" from Giotto asking the viewer to share the medium's own perception of history as if the latter were an endless reserve of equal events (Taylor 105). In a similar vein, the medium of Haavikko's poetic language self-consciously and seamlessly juxtaposes Troy burning and a fire in a contemporary fireplace, levelling "historical" distinctions. In "The Sixth Poem" he writes:

I wonder, is it beautiful Helen you'd want
in whose eyes Odysseus bathed,
who complained that Troy
burned but does not warm, complained
that fire in this house chills the bones

and what is the subject of this poem, and is it a poem? (17-22)

In Haavikko's lines images and their meaning not only "jump the tracks" of an imaginary past and the contemporary present, but moving from the second last to the last line above, the reader witnesses the unravelling of the linguistic screen between the poetic language and the reality it purports to represent while the lines also shift to contemplate their own contemplation. The space the language creates and simultaneously occupies is a "dual" space which harbours many contexts and many conflicts, the lines embody the flux — in Wallace Stevens's terms — between the thing as idea and the idea as thing. Ashbery writes in the poem "Wooden Buildings":

That's how it all began. Looking back on it,
I wonder now if it could have been on some day
Findable in an old calendar? But no,
It wasn't out of history, but inside it.
That's the thing. On whatever day we came
To a small house built just above the water,
You had to stoop over to see inside the attic window.

... ..
And we may be led, then, upward through more
Powerful forms of poetry, past columns
With peeling posters on them, to the country of
indifference. (5-11, 14-17)

The subject, while positioned in the present, sees the future contemplating the past, or so we assume, thus erasing historical markers. The reference to an attic window, a detail of a built enclosure, only has a momentary hold before the reader faces the other space of the duality, the parallel construct of poetry the reader is being led through, past columns with peeling posters, the text within the text, only to experience the "walls" giving out onto something uncontainable, onto the country of indifference. The often abrupt presentation of everyday objects and constructs in both Haavikko's and Ashbery's poetry seemingly command the reader's attention only to shift the attention to the composition itself and we see this intentional scrambling of representational clues also

creating tension between what might constitute elements of the foreground or background in the compositional space of the poems.

Imagination in both Ashbery's and Haavikko's poetry imagines poetic activity as a means of existence. We may compare it with the Heideggerian sense of viewing elements of Being as elusive of categorical conceptualization, much the way time and space are elusive of conceptualization (Roberts 256). Hence constructs, for example, are not constructs in the traditional sense. The "house" imposed upon space neither contains nor keeps out, but rather provides space which is incontrovertibly neither inner nor outer. To quote Haavikko:

Make this poem one I can live in, in Winter, modestly priced,
with many closets,
and provide a room for the soul,
and I will live on this line for a very long time,
in this poem that does not shed,
an inhabitable voice, a house. ("The Seventh Poem," 19-24)

In addition to the dual nature of the space the language creates and of which it becomes reflective, Haavikko's lines can be seen to search for new presentations in order to impart an emphatic sense of the unrepresentable. The "aesthetic play" consists of structures which destructure themselves (be they linguistic, historical or of the self) while the lines test themselves against some empirical order as if to mock the commonly known. They create space where the mysterious and the mundane meet, either bringing about a kind of transvaluation of the commonly logical, or echoing in their wake the surreal of the past. Ashbery in his poem "Blue Sonata" redefines his poetics much the same way:

It would be tragic to fit
Into the space created by our not having arrived yet,
To utter the speech that belongs there,
For progress occurs through re-inventing
These words from a dim recollection of them,
In violating that space in such a way as
To leave it intact. Yet we do after all
Belong here, and have moved a considerable
Distance; our passing is a facade.
But our understanding of it is justified. (11-20)

The lines of both poets evoke images of visual associations with the elliptical reserve of past writings whether we imagine "Troy burning" or "the Island" — in reference to Iceland in this case — becoming a "sun" in the fragment from Ashbery's "Collective Dawns" quoted earlier. The conditions of such a poetic awareness is one of the fundamental elements of Being where time is not a suggestively sequential flow but rather a discontinuous movement that is both in

representational play in the poem. The words either slide into one another's space or present multiple options and possibilities for interpretation in a way which washes the meaning under while in the process the language forefronts itself as both the subject and the medium of the poetic lines.

In Ashbery's poem "The Gazing Grain" the "I" is the object of an *eye* (that sees) or a gaze that marks one of the momentarily stable points in the poem before the visual metaphors evaporate into the haunting presence of *the either no longer, or the not yet here*.

Rooted in parched earth I am
A stranger myself in the dramatic lighting,
The result of war. That which is given to see
At any moment is the residue, shadowed

In gold or emerging into the clear bluish haze
Of uncertainty. We come back to ourselves
Through the rubbish of cloud and tree-spattered pavement.
These days stand like vapor under the trees. ("The Gazing Grain" 9-16)

The "I" is solidly situated only as long as the framing of the gaze from a distance is firm, as long as the illusion of "rootedness" holds. However, the lines unravel the illusion, displace the immobility with the elusive quality of lighting, the fickleness of what is or is not given for the gaze to see or observe as shadowed. The single point disintegrates into the haze of uncertainty. The "I" changes places with the commonality the "we" represents while existence is not the permanent site of "ourselves," but rather Being that merely *appears* to be present while residing between inside and outside. Thus the double or fragmented assertion conforms to the "dual" space the language both creates and occupies in the poetic discourse as a whole. It is as if we are observing a magic lantern rotating while it can only produce what amounts to an illusion of presence, giving the "I" the mere symbolic role of a "self." Its anonymity functions as a passageway, a space that allows meaning to occur. The contradictory beings: "I am girl and boy, one and two, / and are you night and day?" ("The Fifth Poem," 14-15), and contradictory messages: "I want to go back to where I was born, / either/or or and/or ... I want to be silent there" (21-22, 25) in Haavikko's lines take on aspects of phantasmagoria, the now you see me or us, now you do not, the momentary substance that we see dissolving into the non-substantial and undefinable, the bodied "I" and the disembodied "I" being as discontinuous as historical time.

As conventional categories in both Haavikko's and Ashbery's poetry disintegrate, mutability and duality of what we might call the seasaw of the poetic vision creates a space where concepts such as fantasy and "reality" become indistinguishable, where time is not present and past but spatialized to

and out of history or "inside it," as Ashbery says. Try as we may, history cannot be objectified any more than space ultimately can. Here both Ashbery and Haavikko flirt with the non-discursive forms of expression as if their lines endeavoured to be either music or myth. Haavikko writes:

I am in this poem merely an image, pure meaning,
it does not ask why fruit doesn't flower, and I wonder
who would care for these goods of mine and for this meaning
that I throw onto the scales.
it floats in the air like a round ship, dawdling, turning in the
/ wind, I came through the forest and went from line to line. ("The Fourth Poem," 14-20)

Or we might argue that their focus is on the unavailability of truth, an awareness akin to Einstein's speculation on space and time, an awareness of the way in which the late twentieth century life has absorbed into itself the postmodern assertion of the absence of a centre or provable ground. Without such "provable ground" the final or original point of reference is lost and with it the coherent speaking subject. The "I" undergoes a change which is also reflective of the aesthetic play in Ashbery's and Haavikko's poetry. The focus is on differences, or what one might see as the fragmentation of being. In Haavikko's "The Fifth Poem" a dialogue ensues between the Other (in this instance "a pretty child") and the "I." The child says:

I am at odds with myself
and full of contradictions; I converse about everything,
I am girl and boy, one and two,
and are you night and day?

the "I" replies:

I am a poor robber, a productive consumer
who wants to work,
I want to go back to where I was born,
either/or or and/or
the siding on the walls either vertical or
horizontal or/or not,
I want to be silent there. (14-25)

In Haavikko's lines "the self" is a host of contradictory beings as well as contradictory and interfering messages. We read of a will to be and produce, and a will to regress into silence, a will to live in the present as well as retrace steps into past beginnings. The self is at once a host of instabilities and overriding nostalgia for meaning that haunts the lines but is denied by the

coincide with emotions and events of the poetic imagination and language. Significantly, Ashbery's and Haavikko's poetic discourse can be seen expressive of a moving patch of a world which is ultimately neither specifically Finnish nor American — however those categories are determined — central or marginal, but simply there, space which is common to both.

Concordia University

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DOUGLAS ROBINSON

Foreignizing Experience

I.

Are we seeing, in the theory and practice of translation, a rebirth of literalism? At the 1993 American Translators Association meeting in Philadelphia, Marilyn Gaddis Rose argued that we are — that "taste, or accepted rhetorical norms, in translation appears to have been drifting into a new literalism, rather like that espoused by Walter Benjamin in 'The Task of the Translator' 70 years ago" (266). Not only, she notes, are Lawrence Venuti's article "The Translator's Invisibility" (1987) and introduction to his essay collection *Rethinking Translation* (1992) powerful polemics in favor of what he calls, respectively, "visible" and "foreignizing" translation; but more and more academic translators, rendering problematic texts by Derrida and Baudelaire and others, are pursuing neo-literalist projects, projects that move deliberately and decisively past "plodding word-for-word translation" to "translating to bring to the TL text the interlingual language that bilingual readers experience between Baudelaire's French lines and the lines of his translators" (267).

And Rose is largely right: while, as she admits, "the drift into visibility and foreignizing which by the mid80s we might have expected to prevail stayed in its channel and has not affected the mainstream" (267), it has had a profound impact on academic thinking about translation. Of course, if we were to read this as a *recent* development, introduced in the 1980s — or even in the 1920s by Walter Benjamin — she (or we) would be wrong: literalism, even neo-literalism, has been around as long as translation has been around, at least since Livius Andronicus in the third century before the Christian era, and has been at the uneasy antipodes of mainstream translation theory at least since Cicero in 55 B.C.E. In his letter to Pammachius (395 C.E.), our seminal statement of sense-for-sense translation, Jerome admits that when translating Scripture, "where even the syntax contains a mystery" (137 — *ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est*), he translates word-for-word; and famous medieval commentators on translation from Boethius to Burgundio of Pisa defended literalism against the orthodox encroachments of Jeromean sense-for-sense translation. Various qualified or modified literalisms continued to inspire fine translators and translation theorists through the Renaissance and on into the eighteenth century, when literalism was picked up in a major way by the German romantics, for