

## Clive Scott: An Appreciation

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This year saw the publication of Clive Scott's most recent book, *Translating Apollinaire*. As he notes in the book's prefatory remarks, the work on Apollinaire is itself a point of convergence between 'two converging trilogies'. One of these began in 2000 with the publication of *Translating Baudelaire*, to be followed in 2006 by *Translating Rimbaud's Illuminations*. The other began with two more recent publications: *Literary Translation and the Rediscovery of Reading* and *Translating the Perception of the Text: Literary Translation and Phenomenology*, both published in 2012.

These 'two converging trilogies' are themselves part of a longer series of publications, that include his numerous and groundbreaking studies of French verse and his two books on photography, *The Spoken Image*, published in 1999, and *Street Photography*, published in 2007. Over the span of a publishing career that began in 1980, Clive has published seventeen books and over two hundred articles, essays and reviews. The prolific energy of his authorship is matched by its intellectual verve and searching curiosity. Few critics working in this country over the last few decades have done so much to change the ways we think about poetry and poetics. Some of this work has been done at a microscopic level of analysis, noting the way, for example, in which verse rhythm can destabilize the boundaries between words in a line from Verlaine. But if an endlessly renewed attention to the life of 'minute particulars' is at the heart of his critical practice, so too is a set of wide ranging and intellectually provocative questions about the nature of reading itself, especially when those questions have engaged, in a spirit of generous

polemic, with the idea that the basic purpose of reading is to interpret the meaning or meanings of a text or with its equivalent in the field of literary translation, the idea that the purpose of translation is to provide a faithful rendition of the original text in another language.

The radical implications of his work have become evident over the last decade as he has developed and enriched his account of the experience of reading. Distancing his thought from the idea of a semiotics or a hermeneutics of the text, he has instead created a phenomenology of reading, one that engages affect as well as cognition, recollection as well as immediate perception, the paralinguistic as well as the linguistic, the present and emerging milieus of reading as well as its inheritances from the past. Drawing on a wide range of sources, including Barthes's notion of the 'scriptible' text, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the rhizome and minor literature, and Merleau-Ponty's distinction between constituted and constituting language, Clive has developed a concept and a practice of reading as translation and translation as reading. The recent work on Apollinaire gives a lucid restatement of what is at issue: 'By "capturing the phenomenology of reading" I mean both capturing reading as a psycho-physiological experience of the text, as an adventure of consciousness and perception in reading, and *writing* that experience, that consciousness and perception, *back* into the translation of the source text' (*Reading Apollinaire*, p. 1).

To imagine reading as an 'adventure of consciousness', one inseparable from acts of writing, points to another important distinction. Critical practice is no longer mired in a sense of melancholy belatedness, a retrieval, against the odds, of one form or another of past greatness. Drawing this time on the work of Benjamin and Valéry, Clive has invented a form of criticism that opens up works from the past to new contexts and new futures. The literary work is never complete in itself. Its language is a set of potentials to be realized as much as a series of meanings to be discovered. It becomes an operation in a culture organized according to a 'digital mentality', one in which, as he has set out in one of eleven provocative maxims, 'Everybody becomes an expert . . . Everybody can become a writer.'

Clive Scott's work has gained widespread national and international recognition. He was appointed a Fellow of the British Academy in 1994, promoted *Officier dans*

*l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques* by the French Ministry of Education in 2008, and gave the Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge in 2010. It is a fact to be cherished by his friends, colleagues and students that the main location of his work has been the University of East Anglia. He came to the University in 1967 as an Assistant Lecturer in European Studies and was appointed to a Chair in European Literature in 1991. His conversation is, like his published work, a matter of delight and ongoing inspiration. We can expect the next development in a work that is far from finished with a keen and grateful anticipation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The essays included in the volume came out of a two day symposium in Clive Scott's honour, that took place on 29-30 June, 2013, at the University of East Anglia, organised by David Nowell Smith, Clive Scott, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and Ross Wilson. The organisers wish to thank the Society for French Studies and an anonymous donor for their financial support in making this event possible.*