

The right balance

Kim Eddy *reports on METM09, a conference that provided CPD spanning both science and the arts*

Translators rarely specialise in only one field. At first glance, art and medicine may seem to be an unlikely combination – but it is one of mine. Acquiring knowledge and keeping ahead in both fields is a challenge involving plenty of background reading and research, as well as a significant investment of time, updating skills.

As a freelance translator, I am aware of the many opportunities for CPD provided by UK-based organisations. However, as I am based in the Canary Islands, it is difficult for me to attend these events on a regular basis. So when a university colleague mentioned, way back in 2006, that she was giving a paper at Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET) in Barcelona, I took a look at the programme and decided to sign up.

This Barcelona-based association aims to build an international knowledge-sharing and peer-teaching network. It is open to editors, translators and other language professionals who work with or into English. Many of the early members live in or come from Mediterranean countries and work with Mediterranean languages. Current membership, however, spans Europe, the Middle East, and beyond. A wide variety of professions is represented from a range of backgrounds.

Since 2005, MET has held five annual meetings, involving panel discussions, parallel sessions, plenary sessions, keynote speakers, presentations and workshops. I have witnessed the expansion of areas of interest covered in recent years. My first METM introduced me to the intricacies of genre analysis, and the field of corpus-guided editing and translating. It also provided networking opportunities.



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I enjoyed the hands-on approach to CPD, dealing with topics for those working at the coalface. Consequent METMs gave me the chance to deepen friendships, strike up new ones, and to explore a range of issues – including author's editing at a distance, starting up your own business, plagiarism in the sciences, and many other topics. However, METMs seemed to focus on a core centre of interest – biomedicine and the sciences. Therefore, this year, I was delighted to see a broadening of scope with the inclusion of three new subject areas close to my heart: art, history and literature.

Contributing here was Professor Peter Bush, founder of *In Other Words*, the journal of the Translators Association (UK), and a renowned translator from Catalan, French, Spanish and Portuguese of writers such as Juan Goytisolo, Leonardo Padura, Luis Sepúlveda and Chico Buarque. Professor Bush's plenary talk, entitled "Re-translating classics old and new", dealt with aspects of the special ways translators read and their role as writers, and in particular with the writing strategies behind his new translations of Fernando de Rojas' bawdy renaissance tragedy *La Celestina* and Juan Goytisolo's *Juan the Landless*.

In his talk, Professor Bush spoke of translation as a unique act of communication and of the translator as an artist. He emphasised the importance of carefully researching the historical background, and of maintaining the rhythm and style of the original work. He then went on to provide a backdrop for *La Celestina*, arguably the first great European novel. Past translations into English had focussed on the text as a play rather than a narrative, expressing the language in a form of archaic English. Wanting to depart radically from that approach, Professor Bush chose to reflect the "shock of the new" – the feeling of innovation emerging in the Spanish spoken at that time – and he did so by using modern English. For him, the translation process involved not being cowed by the prospect of translating such a masterpiece, and producing a first draft as quickly as possible. The next stages included much editing and copious research, the final version not emerging until many drafts later.

I then attended a session entitled "Translating for art museums and galleries: >

REVIEWS

**CELEBRATING DIVERSITY**

The closing dinner of METM09 (previous page) and the writer Leonardo Padura (left), whose translator Professor Peter Bush gave a lecture at the event

< strategies for avoiding common pitfalls”, given by Joanna Martínez, a well-established freelance translator of numerous books on art and architecture, in addition to exhibition catalogues and audio guides for art museums and galleries. Martínez outlined some basic principles to bear in mind when translating or editing texts on art and architecture to ensure an accurate end result. These included how to approach translating quotations, artists’ and place names, titles of works, art and architectural movements, and how to deal with more sensitive issues (to quote Martínez, “the nude, lewd and rude”) such as the translation of private parts or descriptions of a sexual nature.

The ensuing panel discussion “Translating historical texts: issues and approaches”, coordinated by MET chair, Mary Ellen Kerans, dealt with problems arising from historical texts for translators used to working with living authors and writing in a modern style. Discussion focussed on how to utilise concordance and corpus-based analysis to ensure accuracy and cohesion, and when to analyse diachronically. Talk then moved onto the difficulties of finding publishers for obscure historical texts, and the need to check copyrights even when dealing with dead authors.

Merging the fields of science and the arts, Catherine Mark, a scientific editor and translator, gave an account of her eventually successful odyssey to publish her translation of what she considered to be a monumental work, *The Spanish Royal Philanthropic Expedition: The Round-the-World Voyage of the Smallpox Vaccine, 1803-1810*.

And so to the last plenary talk: “Information Transfer in Islamic Spain: how

ancient science came to Western Europe”, given by Professor Thomas Glick from Boston University. Professor Glick is an expert on the history of medieval Spain – particularly the development and spread of science, food technology, and the technical knowledge and parallel experiences of the Muslim and Jewish communities of early modern Spain as agents in the spread of technology. He sketched a picture of how the Islamic conquest of the eighth century eventually led to a flow of ideas and

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techniques between Spain in the West and India in the East. The ideas of Ancient Greece and India were translated, studied, and commented on in Baghdad and circulated throughout the Islamic Empire. The cultural contact between *al-Andalus*, as Spain was known to the Arabs, and the Christian Spanish kingdoms was continuous. It facilitated the appearance of centres of translation in 12th-century Toledo, where “schools”, or teams of translators, would produce Latin, Hebrew and Romance vernacular versions of Arabic manuscripts. Professor Glick considered that similar

translation techniques and standards would have been applied but that rationales and sources of demand would have varied. As news of this new Arab learning spread, scholars flocked to Spain from England, France, Germany and Italy to immerse themselves in acquiring it.

I welcomed these new arts-based additions to the METM programme – but did my fellow delegates share my enthusiasm? Attendance seemed to suggest just that, and chatting over a glass of wine with others revealed varied but largely favourable reactions. Sarah Griffin-Mason, a fellow ITI member and freelance translator based in Portsmouth – whose subject fields include biomedicine, Latin American NGOs, and education – commented that “the bulk of my work is in areas outside biomedicine, so it is great to get the professional angle on other genres”. She found the literary focus of the first plenary interesting because of the different approach required to translate a well-known 15th-century literary work. “The list of considerations is so different from those of contemporary biomed texts, and an immensely different group of freedoms and constraints are imposed on the translator,” she said. Griffin-Mason added that attending the art workshop had brought home to her “the critical need for subject specialism in the translator’s mother tongue”.

I came away from METM09 having learnt a considerable amount that I could put to practical use in my work, and armed with much food for thought. I also came away with inspiration to explore other areas that just might open up new avenues and lead to increased work flow. And, judging from my conversations with others, I wasn’t alone.