

# Enantiomorphosis and the Canadian Avant-Garde

Reading Christian Bök, Darren Wershler,  
and Jeramy Dodds

I want to consider enantiomorphosis as one of the dominant forms of experimental translation in the poetics of the Canadian avant-garde. This analysis focuses on Christian Bök, Darren Wershler, and Jeramy Dodds, and uses a variety of theoretical approaches including those of Deleuze and Guattari, Lacan, the Toronto Research Group (TRG), translation theory, McLuhan, Baudrillard, and Žižek in order to better apprehend the implications of enantiomorphosis for avant-gardist experiment. Definitions of enantiomorphosis are not initially receptive to an association with problems of translation; however, I will demonstrate that enantiomorphosis is an unrecognized strategy of Canadian avant-gardist practice by first considering it as a modality of the mirror, and subsequently as a modality of translation.

*Enanti* means “facing” and is from *en* (in) *anti* (against) and *morph* (form). “Enantiomorph” is a term used in chemistry and crystallography that describes the relation between two crystalline or geometric forms that are mirror images of each other. Related terms in this context are “enantiomer” and/or “optical isomer.” Deleuze and Guattari extend the word’s meaning beyond its scientific sense:

This is the sense in which Canetti speaks of “enantiomorphosis”: a regime that involves a hieratic and immutable Master who at every moment legislates by constants, prohibiting or strictly limiting metamorphoses, giving figures clear and stable contours, setting forms in opposition two by two[.] (*Plateaus* 107)

Deleuze and Guattari use the Greek *enantio*, “to oppose” (*Plateaus* 528), to render the term from Elias Canetti’s German word *Entwandlung* (as opposed to *Verwandlung* which means “metamorphosis”). Deleuze and Guattari’s use

of the term is restrictive insofar as it renders the term prohibitive; I would like to combine this prohibitive definition of enantiomorphosis with Bök's more ludic definition of *enantiomers* found in *Crystallography*: "Crystalline forms that mirror each other through an axis of symmetry are called *enantiomers*. . . . Words form enantiomers of each other only when one *translates* into the other through reflection" (150, my emphasis). Therefore, enantiomorphosis, as I use it, is related to opposition—"setting forms in opposition two by two"—and also textual translation achieved via reflection. This essay considers how such a concept, which is both scientific in the sense of optical isomers and philosophical in terms of Deleuze and Guattari, can be related to a Canadian poetic tradition which has remained marginalized in the popular poetry scene.<sup>1</sup> Reading the Canadian avant-garde through the lens of enantiomorphosis offers a useful way to speak of the intent of a translation (repetition with difference), while speaking to the contingent status of a subjectivity that is signified through language (*vis-à-vis* Lacan) where, as Craig Owens argues, the "dispossession of the subject by the mirror" can be considered "a law of language" (82).

### **Christian Bök and The Mirror of Canadian Poetics**

In the process of doubling, enantiomorphosis sets two variables against each other while questioning the very nature of such an opposition. If there is any opposition against the specular image, as there would be for the subject during Lacan's mirror stage, then this opposing force would be enantiomorphic. To clarify the type of oppositional doubling intrinsic to enantiomorphosis, I would like to refer to the section "Enantiomorphosis" found in Bök's *Crystallography*:<sup>2</sup>

The Catoptriarchs (AD 711-777), a Slavonic sect of Christian Gnostics, advocated the Enantiomorphic Heresy, which declared that all earthly existence was but a fleeting reflection in a looking glass unveiled in the gardens of the Heavenly Father. Catoptriarchs expressed their *contemptus mundi* by refusing to gaze upon the world unless it was reflected in a mirror; any disciple of this sect was easily identified by his periscopic obsession with a sheet of silver plating, which he always carried with him in one hand and from which his glance never strayed, even when riding on horseback. (142)

By utilizing the discourse of a Borgesian historiography, Bök emphasizes the strictly narrative aspects of history, speculating on the impossibility of authenticating historical events, while vicariously positing an imaginary space of fictional plenitude within which to construct his narrative of the Catoptriarchs. The name itself is a play on "catoptric" which means "of

or relating to a mirror” from the Greek *katoptron* (“mirror”). Also, the word acoustically and paragrammatically suggests “Coptic” which is the liturgical language of the Coptic Church. The significance of this may be the association of “patriarch”; that is to say, “Coptic-patriarch” (or the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch or Pope of Alexandria) who is the head of the Coptic Church and can be considered representative of a “hieratic and immutable Master.” In a less specific perspective, the acoustic resonance of “patriarch” is related to power and institutional structures that utilize hierarchical bias. An additional association of the “iarch” suffix could be to Borges’ “heresiarchs” who feature in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius.”

In “Enantiomorphosis,” Bök writes of a crystallographer named Christian Weiss who purchases “a medieval treatise on the use of mirrors in the game of chess—a treatise that he found at an antiquarian bookstall on the verge of the ghetto” (145). Bök wrote *Crystallography* in 1994, but this reference cites a book from 1983: Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*. Eco comments in his fictional preface: “as I was browsing among the shelves of a little antiquarian bookseller on Corrientes, not far from the more illustrious Patio del Tango of that great street, I came upon the Castilian version of a little work by Milo Temesvar, *On the Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess . . .*” (3). In my correspondence with Bök, I inquired about the Catoptriarchs and he informed me that I would find information about them in a book by Milo Temesvar entitled “On the Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess” (“Re: An Enantiomorphic Query”). Bök ended his e-mail with “Pataphysically yours” leading me to conclude that the email message (as well as the section from *Crystallography*) was a ludic puzzle. His reference to ‘Pataphysics (Jarry’s “science of imaginary solutions”) is already a hint about his compositional style in the *Crystallography* excerpt.

In the “Postscript” to *The Name of the Rose*, Eco talks of the poem that inspired the book’s title. The title came from Bernard de Morlay’s *De contemptu mundi* (505). Bök alludes to this title in “Enantiomorphosis”: “Catoptriarchs expressed their *contemptus mundi* by refusing to gaze upon the world unless it was reflected in a mirror” (142). Eco explains that in order to feel “free” to write about the sleuthing of a Franciscan monk in the Middle Ages he had to mask his historical distance from the topic by hiding his authorial voice behind “four levels of encasement”: “My story, then, could only begin with the discovered manuscript, and even this would be (naturally) a quotation. So I wrote the introduction immediately, setting my narrative on a fourth level of encasement, inside three other narratives: I am saying what Vallet

said that Mabillon said that Adso said. . . .” (512). This fictionalization of narrative hidden behind the prose style of academic scholarship bewitches the reader, who falls prey to the rhetoric of historical discourse.

The purpose of an enantiomorphic compositional approach is related to *contemptus mundi* (or “contempt of the world”) where the world’s reality is constructed through the fictional narrations of an epistemic structure. Martin Jay argues in “Scopic Regimes of Modernity” that the dominant epistemological model of visual knowledge is Cartesian perspectivalism—a theory of perspective that considers how “[t]he transparent window that was the canvas . . . could also be understood as a flat mirror reflecting the geometricalized space of the scene depicted back onto the no less geometricalized space radiating out from the viewing eye” (6-7). Mirrors traditionally have acted as the conventional symbol of realist narration; enantiomorphosis, on the other hand, has come to be used in the avant-garde tradition to privilege the *concave mirror* of the baroque instead of the *flat mirror* of Descartes. The Cartesian mirror is the hegemonic mirror that privileges a “monocular subject” (12), whereas the avant-gardist use of enantiomorphosis privileges the “anamorphosistic mirror, either concave or convex, that distorts the visual image” (17). Martin Jay reminds us that in modernity each scopic regime is available for use by artists in a “plurality” (20) of possible visual techniques. It is important to contextualize the avant-garde within the scopic regime that enantiomorphosis matches most closely; that is to say, the regime of the baroque mirror. The Catoptriarchs are a literal fabrication, but the style in which Bök writes the passage alludes to their “real” existence; he writes about them as a chronicler of history, not as a poet telling a story. This is the purpose of enantiomorphic writing: it relies on the author’s *contemptus mundi* to ground the creation of fictional world that mirrors the real one, but mirrors it in a reversed form (like a real mirror). This mirroring causes the reader to question the reversion, thus opposing the reader’s own textual perceptions. Enantiomorphosis is a postmodern technique of literary production because it fictionalizes the world while satirizing the self-reflexivity of writing (as in the academic mimicry of Bök and Eco) or it undermines hegemonic conceptions of “reality” while satirizing the nature of writing itself.

Enantiomorphosis can be considered an effect of a *contemptus mundi* insofar as an enantiomorphic approach can be motivated by a differing philosophical view of the world: this is what is found in the work of Jorge Luis Borges. “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” (1941) begins with the narrator

saying: “I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia” (17). The narrator finds the “*Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*” in a mirror where “the mirror was watching us; and we discovered, with the inevitability of discoveries made late at night, that mirrors have something grotesque about them” (17). He continues, “Bioy Casares recalled that one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar had stated that mirrors and copulation are abominable, since they both multiply the numbers of man” (17). This moment from Borges’ story may provide another possible definition of enantiomorphosis: an unsettling experience of doubling that has a “grotesque” quality due to the destabilizing effects of enantiomorphosis on hegemonic conceptions of “reality.” This opposition in relation to reality hints at Bök’s argument: “all earthly existence was but a fleeting reflection in a looking glass unveiled in the gardens of the Heavenly Father” (142). What is seen in Borges can also be seen in Bök. To list Borges’ many references to an enantiomorphic *contemptus mundi* would be tedious; instead, let me draw the reader’s attention to a crucial example: “For one of those Gnostics [Uqbar heresiarchs], the visible universe was an illusion or, more precisely, a sophism. Mirrors and fatherhood are abominable because they multiply it and extend it” (18). Mirrors and fatherhood (or, a “patriarch”) extend the illusion of the “visible universe.” In Bök’s story, the Catoptriarchs attempt to circumvent this problem by looking at the world (“reality”) in the reflection of a mirror. The Catoptriarchs are attempting to see what could be called a “paravisible universe”—the universe *beside* this one—or whatever exists within the ‘pataphysical potentiality of the inversion of a hegemonic constraint.

### **Darren Wershler and a Technology of Enantiomorphosis**

By tracing the history of the typewriter in his doctoral thesis, Wershler prefaces his own poetic achievement within programming (the most famous example is no doubt his co-“authored” book *apostrophe* with Bill Kennedy). Wershler’s 1996 text, *NICHOLODEON: a book of lowerglyphs*, finds its current home on the Web as *NICHOLODEONLINE* (1998), on Wershler-Henry’s personal website.<sup>3</sup> *NICHOLODEON* and *NICHOLODEONLINE* are homages to bpNichol’s poetics, but they also display the conceit of an enantiomorphic practice. The primary example of this can be seen in one of Wershler’s translations of bpNichol’s “Translating Translating Apollinaire.” In “Translating<sup>n</sup> Apollinaire 1: Enantiomorphabet,” Wershler utilizes a bizarre symbolic language to pay homage to bpNichol:



Wershler's translation of bpNichol's "Translating Translating Apollinaire" may well be the only remaining fragment of Just-Haüy's diary, thus engaging in a conversation with Bök's own oeuvre.

Wershler's choice emphasizes computer technology and speaks to a different sort of mirror: the computerized mirror that faces us when we check our email, surf the web, do research or compose written work. By publishing a book like *NICHOLODEON* online, Wershler is producing the gestural aspects of his enantiomorphic interests as a very real experience for the reader. The reader addresses the text through the medium of the computer and reads the words and sentences through the stark delineation of the computer screen, itself a form not unlike a mirror; however, whereas a mirror simply reflects, a computer screen also projects, rendering a visual space that nonetheless mirrors the enantiomorphic semblable of a subject working at a computer. Žižek argues that, "the interface screen is supposed to conceal the workings of the machine, and to simulate our everyday experience as faithfully as possible (the Macintosh style of interface, in which written orders are replaced by simple mouse-clicking on iconic signs" (131), and, Žižek takes this one step further by arguing (in a similar vein as Cartesian perspectivalism) that consciousness itself is its own frame or interface (132). It is possible that the enantiomorphic interface/mirror may also speak to society's McLuhanesque state of technological immersion where, as opposed to McLuhan's emphasis on the film and television screen, the dominant screen has become the computer. It addresses us and indeed interpellates us in a manner not unlike Althusser's ideological critique of "hailing": "the Subject's interlocutors-interpellates: his *mirrors*, his *reflections*" (53, original emphasis). The computer "hails" us as a technological force, pulling us into the mirror of its own construction while acting as a cornerstone of enantiomorphosis, which risks switching our identities with that of a computerized imago.

Earlier I mentioned the connection between enantiomorphosis and translation; in much the same vein Wershler describes his process in *NICHOLODEON* this way: "[m]any of the poems in this book, including these treatments of Nichol's first published piece, are what the TRG refers to as 'homolinguistic translations,' texts in which the emphasis lies not on semantic import but on the formal procedure of the translation's development" (n. pag.). The TRG, formed by Steve McCaffery and bpNichol, write about "homolinguistic translation": "In speaking of translation we are referring to a possible activity both *homolinguistically* based (which is to say as a transmittance and reception within the same language but issuing from discrete speech

communities) and *heterolinguistically* (i.e., between two different languages)” (27-28). I should mention that this avant-gardist appropriation of the term “heterolinguistic”<sup>4</sup> runs counter to the current definition used in Translation Studies.<sup>5</sup>

Heterolinguistic translations are of little interest to the Canadian avant-garde (either in McCaffery’s use or in the terminology of Translation Studies); rather, the use of homolinguistic translation is a prevalent conceit in avant-gardist experimentation as seen in everything from bpNichol’s translations to the manipulations of source texts by Ronald Johnson in *Radi Os* (where Johnson excises elements of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* to create a new text from the negation of the existing one) or Tom Phillips’ *A Humument* (which treats the original text of W.H. Mallock’s 1892 novel *A Human Document* to similar Johnsonian excisions).

Returning to a Canadian context, as well as to the purview of Translation Studies, Sherry Simon points out: “[t]ranslation in Canada is quite properly a rite of passage, a process of transformation . . . which guarantees passage from one identity to another” (96). In a moment that seems to hint at enantiomorphosis, Simon avers: “as literature becomes understood to be less inspired creation of genius than a text made up of other texts, translation loses much of its devalored ‘secondary’ nature to become a figure for all writing and a privileged player on the postmodern scene” (106). The “postmodern scene” conventionally includes the avant-garde, thus including the more experimental approaches so prevalent in avant-gardist practice.

Enantiomorphosis is an essential tool in the act of homolinguistic translation. Take the example of Nichol’s “Translating Translating Apollinaire” and Wershler’s enantiomorphabetic translation: if both texts are placed across from each other, then a dialectic is created between original/translation, source text/adaptation, real/copy, and self/other. However, the self/other binary is unfixed, allowing both versions to circulate within each other. Wershler’s version is a cryptogrammic mirroring where the text is taken word by word, but the font is altered to create a dissonant reading experience. The original version no doubt belongs to Apollinaire; however, the various translations only enrich the canonic trajectory of such a poetics, adding textures to the texts created via mirroring. The texts mirror each other in the same way as Milton’s *Paradise Lost* mirrors Johnson’s *Radi Os*, but in this mirroring there is no ur-text—only doubles are reflected.

Dr. Jules Verrier, the fictional physician from Bök’s enantiomorphic history, claims (in his insane state) that his mirror reflection has replaced

his real being. Verrier is “insane” because he has gone into the ‘pataphysical world of enantiomorphosis. Mirrors, when properly placed reflect each other creating a fractal illusion where the reflection represents an image at an ever-smaller scale, diminishing into the nothingness of a *mise-en-abyme*. The story of Jules Verrier is an application of the apperception of Lacan’s mirror stage that originates the dialectic of self/other: “the real image formed thanks to the concave mirror is produced inside the subject, at a point which we call *O* [or Other]” (Lacan 165). As Bök writes of Jules Verrier: “*Le Monde* reported in its morning edition on the same day as this academic symposium” (149)—at which Lacan delivered his “seminal essay” on the mirror stage on 17 July 1946 (148)—“that Dr Jules Verrier, a clinical psychiatrist, had gone insane while trying to escape from an elevator that had trapped him alone overnight between the floors of his office building. Verrier had apparently screamed for almost seven hours straight, all the while clawing away at the mirrored interior of his compartment, before firemen finally rescued him” (149). Connecting Verrier’s case with Lacan’s talk implies the negativity of the communal uproar from psychiatrists at the newfound prominence of Freudian psychoanalytic principles taking hold in France due to Lacan’s “return to Freud.” However, that is only one possible interpretation; the other possible interpretation regards the full implications of Lacan’s theory taken from the perspective of an adult who is long past the “*infans* stage.” Lacan’s theory introduces a simulacrum of imaginary (and unseen) mirrors all around us. At no point should his theory be seen to talk about actual mirrors; rather, his theory introduces the inclusion of a potentially spectral realm of wraiths and ghosts, objects which function beyond the purview of human control and mirror back semblables that act as *homme-onyms* only—mirroring our own subjectivities, forcing us to react and address our own subjective constructions in the face of reality and a social order of intersubjectivity. Lacan suggests that reality as such is a simulated construct, built in the mind of the subject, reinforced with countless mirrors; therefore, reality becomes, through Lacanian theory, an artifice somewhat akin to an elevator with a mirrored interior, in which we are all forced to dwell, trying desperately to address the Other but coming up short with the narcissistic impression of our semblable.

Bök continues:

Sources close to the scene testified later that the psychiatrist had behaved quite hysterically, insisting to authorities that he had become involved in a case of mistaken identity, that he was the wrong person taken into custody, since his

reflection in the mirrored wall of the elevator had somehow traded places with him. His reflection had suddenly refused to imitate him and had stepped out of its frame so as to force him to occupy the space vacated in the glass. (149)

This is the anxiety experienced during the mirror stage, the irrational fear that the other (and the Other itself) can replace the imaginary being, that something gets lost during the moment of recognition where whatever it is that is seen to “anchor” the self to sanity becomes unhinged by something as simple as a glance in the mirror. Looking in the mirror is essentially a journey inward, a narcissistic experience that exposes the face, risking the sort of self-hypnosis experienced by Narcissus at the edge of the lake, as McLuhan explains:

The Greek myth of Narcissus is . . . from the Greek word *narcosis*, or numbness. The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system. (41)

Verrier responds badly to his treatment for his enantiomorphic narcosis: “he insisted that this world was itself the very world beyond the mirror, a world from which his reflection had escaped, tearing itself free so as to wreak havoc upon the true reality. Medical authorities at the asylum diagnosed the patient as a paranoid catoptrophobic, but confessed ironically that they now preferred to exit buildings via the stairs” (149). The breakdown of Jules Verrier is foreshadowed by his very name which connotes both *verre* (or glass) and *verrier* (a glassmaker or craftsman of glass): his name is an image of fragility where the glass of Verrier’s consciousness is shattered by its own reflection, becoming the “servomechanism” that induces a feedback loop of self-reflection and self-refraction. Earlier in *Crystallography*, Bök writes in his poem “Glass”: “Glass represents a poetic element” (29), that leads to “the misprision of transparency” (33). Enantiomorphosis is an attempt at misprision that questions itself via transparency, thus revealing whatever knowledge is concealed through its opposition.

Eerily, Lacan seems to narrate a step-by-step process of Verrier’s breakdown: “We have placed the subject at the edge of the spherical mirror. But we know that the seeing of an image in the plane mirror is strictly equivalent for the subject to an image of the real object, which would be seen by a spectator beyond this mirror, at the very spot where the subject sees his image” (139-40). To put this idea another way, Craig Owens writes of the “dispossession” that occurs when one is confronted with the specular

image: “The mirror accomplishes both the identification with the Other and the specular dispossession which simultaneously institutes and deconstitutes the subject as such” (77). The institution and deconstitution of the subject is what McLuhan intimates in his reading of Narcissus—a breakdown of meaning that is simultaneously the feedback loop of a closed system while also functioning as an extension of consciousness through either a mirror (as in Lacan) or a computerized imago (as in Wershler).

### **Jeremy Dodds and the Sublime in the Enantiomorphic**

Dodds, critically acclaimed author of *Crabweise to the Hounds*, is fascinated by the potential of enantiomorphic translation. He is currently translating the *Poetic Edda* from Old Norse to English. This translation project is arguably more traditional (or heterolinguistic) than some of his translational experiments in *Crabweise*. Dodds explains some of his thinking on translation during an interview with Clarise Foster: “Typically a finished, ‘translated’ poem has gone through a bit of a telephone game, and I am definitely exploring that distance in these translations” (17). Dodds’ poem “Glenn Gould Negotiates the Danube in the Company of a Raven” is a translation of Gould’s recording of Bach’s Chromatic Fantasy in D Minor. Dodds describes the process of the poem’s composition here: “Using an invented, baroque and highly suspect form of hieroglyphics and/or tablature, I have attempted to translate the fugue into English” (68). Dodds further expands on his approach in conversation with Clarise Foster:

I slowed down Gould’s recording of Bach’s “Chromatic Fantasy in D-minor” using an audio program on my computer. I proceeded to map the recording on the Bristol board using an overly simplistic set of symbols. Each symbol eventually grew written footnotes and other more elaborate symbols each time I listened to the piece. I listened to the piece too many times at varying speeds, attempting to get between the notes, until I had this poem spread out like a historic timeline poster, but a timeline of Gould’s recording. (11)

Dodds’ translational procedure in this example is highly complex and cannot be categorized as either heterolinguistic or homolinguistic translation because the process is not one of language-to-language or sign-to-sign, but rather translates two different media. This process is close to what Roman Jakobson calls “intersemiotic translation” (Jaeger 241). By translating a piece of music into a poem, Dodds is engaging in a sort of Dick Higgins experiment within an intermedium that interrogates the difference between music and poetry. Any classically trained musician has to translate musical notation into a physical expenditure of energy to create the acoustic experience of music.

Dodds' experiment is quite different from say, a violinist's or cellist's, in that he is inverting the traditional methodology and is creating a notation out of a sonic code in order to render an English poem from that symbology. Dodds' experiment is more aligned with the task of a composer where the poet occupies the place of both Bach and Gould. Dodds chooses to translate Gould in free verse, eschewing stanzas or regular metre. This choice suggests a stream-of-consciousness aspect to Gould's playing that itself translates the constraint-based notation of Bach's original score. The structural method that Dodds uses to re-encode Gould's playing of Bach acts as a sort of mirror where each of the semblables (Bach-Gould-Dodds) become interrelated in the lines of flight of a translational servomechanism that both extends meaning and constricts the immanence of each iteration in a closed system.

I also want to consider Dodds' translation of Ho Chi Minh's phone call. Dodds claims that "The Official Translation of Ho Chi Minh's August 18th, 1966, Telephone Call" "has been 'transliterated' from so-called CIA cassette tapes of a wire-tap I bought over the Internet. As far as I know, none of the lines are accurate translations of the Vietnamese; however, they are true to cadences in the recorded speech" (*Crabwise* 68). Dodds describes his process in detail here:

The Ho Chi Minh piece started as an exercise to hone the transference of recorded cadences to written English. The cassette tapes were of a single recorded voice—they were only one side of a phone conversation—and so were quite different from the complexity of Gould's Bach recording. I didn't need to slow the voice down; I would just listen to it as I drove to and from work each day . . . I still don't know if it's really Ho Chi Minh on the tapes. ("Interview" 12).

Dodds bought the recording from eBay and he himself admits that he does not know if the voice actually belongs to Ho Chi Minh. This ignorance of the authenticity of the source material is essential to Dodds' translation. Obviously, Dodds does not know Vietnamese; however, he responds to the sounds of the monologue to create an enantiomorphic translation of it. By recording only one part of a dialogue-based telephone call, the poem takes on an aspect of Kenneth Goldsmith's *Soliloquy* where Goldsmith walks around New York recording everything he says during a week. Dodds' experiment is different from Goldsmith's insofar as Dodds is engaging in a collision between heterolinguistic/homolinguistic translation; he translates Vietnamese into English based on sonorous vocalizations and his own auditory impressions. This returns to orality an emphasis on the physical experience of speaking, with its sonorisms, vocalizations, fricatives, breath, etc., and renders the acoustic (and the acoustic only) into a chance-based

poem of English signifiers, including sounds occurring in the background that take on the quality of stage directions:

*[On the tape he leaves the telephone and you can hear the sound / of latches tumbling, sheets flapping on the line, a match striking. / He coughs in the distance before returning to add:]*

If, by the time you get here, the telephone  
is dangling from its carriage  
and emptying into the room, it is  
because I have gone outside to repair  
the night through a colander of stars. (30-31)

Dodds effectively raises questions about the authenticity of translation, reminding the reader of the spurious distance between original/copy in a sort of Baudrillardian poetics of the simulacrum. The enantiomorphic, during the experimental act of translation, requires an imaginary mirror between the original and the copy and it is this imaginary mirror that forces the poem (original and copy) to engage in its own mirror stage, with the new iteration becoming a semblable after the process is complete.

### **Bök and Rimbaud: Additions to *Eunoia***

The recent 2009 edition of *Eunoia* has added material to the section entitled “Oiseau.” The additional material centres on Bök’s various homolinguistic translations of Rimbaud’s “Voyelles.” In the first edition, the cover image was a visual poem by Bök called “Of Yellow,” which was a polychromatic transcription of “Voyelles.” The new cover image features the title with bands of six colours extending up from each letter; these colours correspond to the instructions given in Rimbaud’s poem that *A*=black, *E*=white, *I*=red, *U*=green, and *O*=blue. The lone consonant of *N* appears as grey (which corresponds to Bök’s original transcription in “Of Yellow”). The additional addenda of the “Voyelles” translations correspond to interesting enantiomorphic experiments.

Bök begins with Rimbaud’s original and contrasts it with his various translations. I will do the same, but will focus on the first stanza of the sonnet each time. From Rimbaud’s original poem, “Voyelles”:

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles,  
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes:  
A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes  
Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles (84)

Bök’s first (and most straightforward) translation of “Voyelles” maintains Rimbaud’s rhyme structure, measure, and meaning. It is called “Vowels”:

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: the vowels.  
I will tell thee, one day, of thy newborn portents:  
A, the black velvet cuirass of flies whose essence  
commingles, abuzz, around the cruellest of smells (85)

The second translation is more complex in that it still sustains the sonnet form by retaining the original measure and rhyme scheme, and also preserves the *exact sequence of vowels* which originally appear in Rimbaud's "Voyelles." This translation is entitled "Phonemes":

Phantoms, infernal,  
without refuge or return—phonemes.  
We will hark if such  
resurgent souls ordain a dreamt verse:  
A (offspring of perfect  
murders, so unseen that stranglers (86)

The second experiment is already nearing a mirroring where the original version is becoming directly imbedded in a new poetic formation: by maintaining the exact progression of vowels from the original, Bök is beginning to question the essence (if such a word could be used) of Rimbaud's original. Because the second translation features the same progression, it is more closely related to a direct re-writing of Rimbaud; more precisely, it is a re-writing veiled behind enantiomorphic reinscription.

Bök's third translation maintains the sonnet form by maintaining the original measure and rhyme scheme, but here he has anagrammatically re-permuted all the letters from the original French poem. Therefore, the poem is—in terms of its letters—an *exact copy* of Rimbaud's; however, the order of the letters has changed. This poem is called "Vocables":

Eternal, you beguile love or ruin—vocables.  
Jejune vassals quote ten codas in reliquaries:  
A (the ceaseless verses at occult monasteries;  
requiems of dust, bound to nebulous particles (94)

Bök has always been a 'pataphysician as well as a poet, and this third iteration draws attention to a linguistic atomism of the written word. Essentially, Bök is engaged in an experiment of atom-smashing where every letter can be analogically considered as an unsplittable entity. A letter is to language what an atom was originally thought to be to matter for science.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Bök re-permutes Rimbaud's original as if it were a molecule being re-composed or engineered in a laboratory. The third poem is a mirrored reflection of the original (if only a re-permuted reflection) and it is this incantatory experiment that emphasizes the imaginary distancing between an original

word and its translated semblable. Since the third translation consists of exactly the same letters as Rimbaud's, the "translation" is in essence a reflection. It is this interest in the components of language that allows Bök to continually interrogate the essential ideological/mythological prejudices that exist within the very words we use, and in the discourses created therein. I have argued elsewhere that "[t]he primary impetus of Bök's inverse-lipogram is the epistemological question of meaning or the interrogation of the different ways in which mythologies are formed" (146), and I would argue that the various re-permutations of Rimbaud's "Voyelles" constitutes this same engagement with potential meanings that remain dormant within language, only to be revealed when pressurized through constraint-based experimentation.

In their poetics, Bök, Wershler, and Dodds implicitly deal with problems of enantiomorphosis. There are, no doubt, other examples of this in the Canadian canon; however, I hope that this essay is an early consideration of this problem. The correlative of enantiomorphosis (beyond doubling and translation) is the relation between enantiomorphosis and identity. I would suggest that the avant-garde's interest in the mirror is a retroactive nostalgia that can be located in the late Middle Ages where the cheap mass production of glass by Venetians gave rise to "a new Hamletic consciousness, a post-Cartesian increase in reflexiveness of thought" (Joseph 410). I would like to leave the question of enantiomorphosis and identity open-ended and conclude with a passage from Bök's *Crystallography* that epitomizes the problem of mirrors and mirroring raised in this essay:

Each mirror  
infects itself  
at every scale  
with the virus of its own image.

Each mirror  
devours itself  
at every point  
with the abyss of its own dream. (24)

## NOTES

- 1 Recently, the tension between the "normative poetry scene" and the "avant-garde scene" in Canada came to a head during the unfortunately named "Cage Match of Canadian Poetry" which pitted Bök against Carmine Starnino in a recorded debate on the merits and future of Canadian poetry. I do not want to consider this debate at length; instead,

by gesturing toward it I hope to contextualize this essay in relation to a contemporary dialectic regarding such a poetry and poetics. The “Match” took place on November 26, 2009, at Mount Royal University. Watch a version of it at the following URL: <http://vimeo.com/7963755>.

- 2 The section is reprinted in the anthology *Imaginary Numbers* where it is called “Enantiomorphosis (A Natural History of Mirrors).” See pp: 267-73 in the William Frucht anthology and 142-50 in the original.
- 3 Wershler’s website can be found at the following URL: <http://www.alienated.net/>.
- 4 The term “heterolinguiistic” is reminiscent of Bakhtin’s notion of “heteroglossia.”
- 5 Reine Meylaerts reminds us that “heterolingualism” is a term that originates from Rainier Grutman in his study of the Quebec nineteenth-century novel in which it “refers to the use of foreign languages or social, regional, and historical language varieties in literary texts” (4). Translation Studies considers “heterolinguiistic translation” a translation that deals with creating a monolingual text from a polylingual (or heteroglossic) text. As well, what McCaffery and bpNichol call “heterolinguiistic translation” would be called “interlingual translation” in Roman Jakobson’s tripartite categorization of translational types, and “homolinguiistic translation” would be called “intralingual translation” (Jaeger 241).
- 6 Based on the etymology of atom that comes from the Greek *atomos*, meaning “indivisible.”

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