

the admirably fast colors speak in linen



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the admirably fast colors speak in linen:
some reflections on note 16 of Kepler's *Somnium*

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16. Ita referébat Episcopus Islandicus Tychoni Braheo, Virgines Islandicas inter audiendum in Templo Verbum Dei, solere dicta aut voces nonnullas exceptas acu & filis coloratis admirabili celeritate in linteis exprimere nendo.

16. The Icelandic bishop informed Tycho Brahe that the Icelandic girls, while listening to God's word in church, are accustomed to copy some of the expressions or words that they hear by sewing them on linen with needle and colored thread with amazing speed.

¹⁶An Icelandic Bishop informed Tycho Brahe that the inhabitants of the Virgin Islands, besides listening to the word of God in the temple, were accustomed to embroider words or some prolonged phrases on linen cloth with a needle and colored threads, by spinning with remarkable swiftness.

So it was referring to the Bishops of Island Tychone Braheorum, the virgins in the temple, to hear the Word of God among the Island, but, usually is not unreasonable at incredible speed, or the voices of the colored threads on linen sheets, a needle, to express a number of excepted, he spun out



introduction

“What would the heavens look like if perceived by someone standing on the moon?” Though this question was one that Johannes Kepler hoped to answer in his scientific writings, it was only in the form of a fiction that we, in the twenty-first century, are able to read his answer. Published posthumously in Latin in 1634, Kepler’s *Somnium* is a text that is fascinating from numerous perspectives, literary, biographical, historical, and scientific. Composed in part as early as 1609, the *Somnium* presents Kepler’s findings from his dissertation in fictional form because, having been based on a Copernican view of the universe, they could not, during Kepler’s lifetime, be presented as fact.

The reasons why Kepler wrote the *Somnium* as fiction and why it was only published posthumously involve many different factors related to Kepler’s life and work. These have been discussed extensively by literary critics and historians of science, and you can read some of these by visiting the web based portion of this project, which can be accessed via the QR code and web address printed on the last page. The influence of Kepler’s *Somnium* on literary and science fiction has been extensive. However, its unique relations to scientific and historical fact are equally noteworthy. It would not be until the twentieth century that Kepler’s seventeenth century scientific observations about the moon would be verified with documentary evidence.

My own interest in the *Somnium* stems from a confluence of factors derived from my research into the history of science fiction as a literary genre, the history of the printed book and its relationships with information and communications technologies, and the import of both to constructions of history and of the academic disciplines that study them. Broadly speaking, I am interested in the histories and current realities of reading and writing and it is my belief that Kepler's *Somnium* is a text that has a great deal to say about the past and present of both. For, it is a text that signifies on many different discursive levels, the literary, the historical, and the scientific. As a result, it may assist all of us in better understanding some of the connections amongst all three.

In literary and writing studies, the concept of the palimpsest is one that has long intrigued both artists and critics. This idea of a multi-layered text that can only be understood by looking at multiple levels of meaning at one time is in some ways a perfect metaphor for the process of textual explication and reception itself. There are few texts that function as a better example of a palimpsest than Kepler's *Somnium*. In offering my own reflections on Note 16 of the text, I hope to provide one more layer to the evolving palimpsestic structure that is centered around Kepler's text.

About Note 16 of Kepler's *Somnium*

The literary critic Marjorie Hope Nicholson has pointed out the many autobiographical references in Kepler's *Somnium*, particularly with respect to his mother who, like Fiolxhilde, the mother of the fictional protagonist in the book, had recently died and who had been suspected of witchcraft. Kepler's Note 16 is attached to the incident at the beginning of the *Somnium* when the protagonist, Duracotus, out of curiosity, cuts open one of the goat skin bags that, we are told earlier, his mother fills with herbs to sell to ship captains and earn her living, which is necessary as a result of having been widowed when her son was three years old. Out of the bag that Duracotus has surreptitiously slit open fall not only the herbs but a "linen cloth embroidered with various symbols." As a result of his actions, which have made it impossible to sell the bag to the ship captain, the mother, out of anger, gives Duracotus, her son, to the ship captain in order to keep the money that he had paid for the damaged bag. The clear identification between the protagonist and the bag is noteworthy, as is the fact that in Note 16, Kepler, writing as Kepler, not as Duracotus, explains the significance of the embroidered linen cloth in the bag without offering any additional comment on the incident described. The cloth, we are told in the note, had stitched into it notes from a sermon that were taken by girls to record the words of God.

Fascinated by the idea of notes from a sermon being made by stitching on cloth, I decided to research this note further and explore the note in the original Latin text, the different translations that had been made of it, and the translations that could be made of it via "natural" language processing tools.

The Latin text is from a 1634 edition of Kepler's *Somnium* published in Frankfurt; the first translation of Note 16 is from a digital copy of Edward Rosen's 1967 translation, originally published by the University of Wisconsin Press and reprinted in 2003 by Dover Books; the second is from Norman Raymond Falardeau's unpublished 1962 master's thesis, which includes a translation of the *Somnium*; the third is a translation generated from Google translate on October 22, 2018. Interestingly, Note 16 is mistranslated in Farlardeau's 1962 unpublished translation of the *Somnium* in ways that are distinct from the mistranslation offered by Google translate in October, 2018. I have no doubt the translation offered now by Google Translate will differ from the one generated previously.

Having assembled the language from the various translations and mistranslations of the note, I used this collection of words to reflect on Note 16 and some questions it raised.

Although I am still learning about the import, historical context for, and influence of Kepler's *Somnium*, I now understand that the idea of stitching things together has some import to the original text and its reception. I offer these notes as one additional note to the remediation of Kepler's original text, which, it seems to me, has been in process ever since the text was originally conceived.

Brooklyn, NY
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16. The Icelandic bishop informed Tycho Brahe that the Icelandic girls, while listening to God's word in church, are accustomed to copy some of the expressions or words that they hear by sewing them on linen with needle and colored thread with amazing speed.

¹⁶An Icelandic Bishop informed Tycho Brahe that the inhabitants of the Virgin Islands, besides listening to the word of God in the temple, were accustomed to embroider words or some prolonged phrases on linen cloth with a needle and colored threads, by spinning with remarkable swiftness.

So it was referring to the Bishops of Island Tychone Braheorum, the virgins in the temple, to hear the Word of God among the Island, but, usually is not unreasonable at incredible speed, or the voices of the colored threads on linen sheets, a needle, to express a number of excepted, he spun out



The admirably fast colors speak in linen the word of god, said the Bishop according to Tycho Brahe.

What were those Icelandic virgins doing while they were listening or being forced to listen to the word of God? Were they spinning or weaving? Were they listening or not listening ~~distracting themselves~~? And what was important? The words or the pace of the spinning?

We know they did it quickly, but we don't know under what conditions they were doing it.

The colored thread.

The needle.

At incredible speed express spun into linen. Is it that the linen ~~is talking~~? Or is it ~~that~~ the girls ~~are not listening~~? They received some of the words. Which ones? Only those the linen expressed?

Are they copying or expressing?

~~To what end? To inhale and take up.~~

~~To ward off or relieve.~~

~~To take to oneself in a manner of
removing.~~

As a verb or an adjective?

To portray by spinning.

Are they composing the words or themselves?

Considerable or a few?
recording orders? Dictates?
expression?

Or are they
The tone or its

What are they meant to express?

Either because they are in the habit of doing so or because they must. Having been told to. By compulsion. They are in the habit of expressing or calling one another by quickly taking out their needle and colored thread to spin in linen what they want to say. Because the Bishop said (to) Tycho Brahe and there was no weaving or document, just the woven talking of the virgins who were there listening to God. It is the weaving that is expressed in the linen. Or is it the words? They are in the habit of expressing in linen through spinning some of the words and sayings. That is the said. So it is said. Or it is meant.

We are in the habit of spinning voices and sayings in linen because we are told to do so. In colored thread quickly with needle (uncolored?).

Is it the color or the speed that is so extraordinary?

It is only some words or voices, not both and not all that in the colored thread is spun the word of god.

Who is talking? Is it the Bishop? We know they are listening, but what is it that they hear? They are so accustomed to some of the words and phrases that they are spinning with needle and colored thread on linen what it is they decided they wanted to hear.

And what was important? The words or the pace of
the spinning?

We know they did it quickly, but we don't know under
what conditions they were doing it.

The colored thread. The needle.

At incredible speed express spun into
linen. Is it that the linen is talking?

They received some of the words.
Which ones?

Only those the linen expressed?

Are they copying or expressing?
To what end?
To inhale and take up.

To ward off or relieve.
To take to oneself in a manner of removing.

Oh Tycho. Oh Bishop. If you were in the Virgin Islands instead of Iceland?

And why was Tycho talking to the Bishop? And why was the Bishop talking about the virgins?

It is to console themselves while listening to the word of god that they are spinning with needle and colored thread in linen. To lighten some of the words or sayings, they quickly take out their needle and colored thread to let the linen express itself in spinning.

Those virgins! While god (or the bishop) is speaking, they are spinning linen with colored thread and needles. Is it that they are listening or spinning that is noteworthy?

Words and sayings.

In linen it is expressed by spinning. And so it is said by the bishop to Tycho Brahe that the Icelandic listening virgins in the temple of god's words were in the habit of recording some of the words and sayings in linen by spinning with needle and colored thread.

Expressing things quickly in the linen they are spinning. The linen is expressing the spinning. The spinning is expressing the linen. While listening in the temple of God's word, they are in the habit of choosing one word or another, or its expression, taking out their needle and colored thread and quickly spinning in linen what has been said. Are they recording or copying? Listening or interpreting? The admirably fast colors speak in linen the word of god, said the Bishop according to Tycho Brahe.



Translate

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Translate

inter audiendum in templo verbum dei, solere dicta aut x
voces nonnullas exceptas acu & filis coloratis admirabili
celeritate in linteis exprimere nendo

151/5000

Among listening to the Word of God's temple, usually
called except a needle, thread colors and sounds
incredible speed express spun into linen



Greek English Latin Detect language ▾



English Greek Spanish ▾

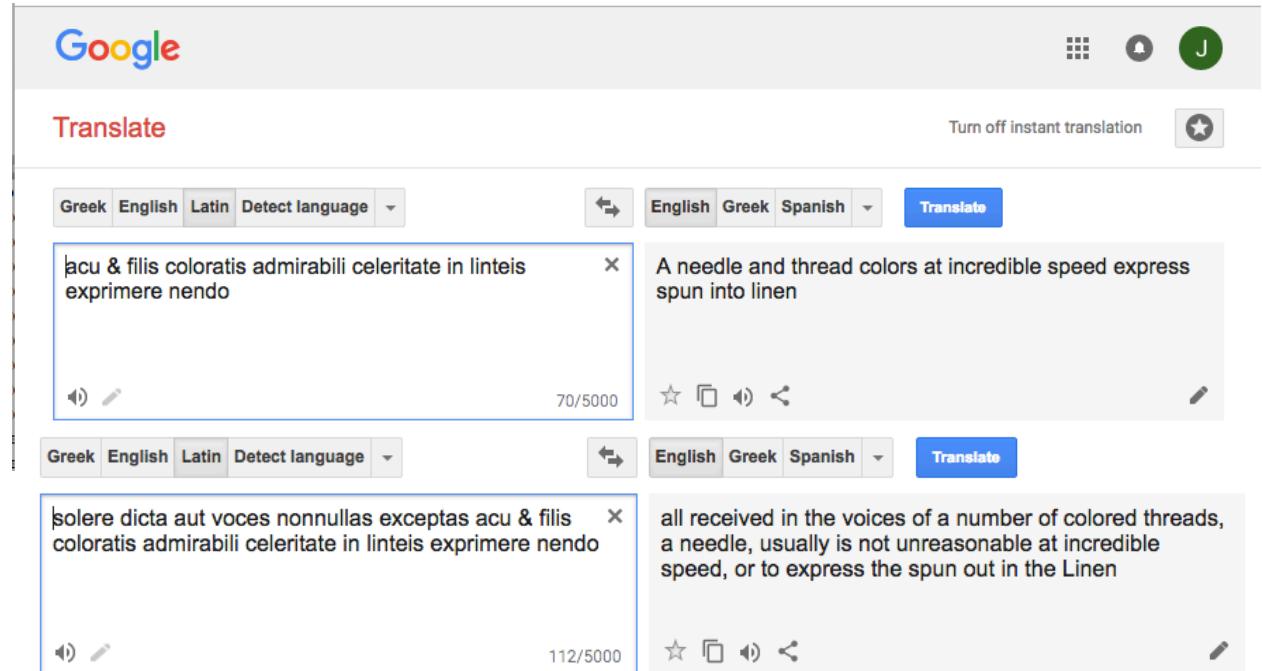
Translate

solere dicta aut voces nonnullas exceptas acu & filis x
coloratis admirabili celeritate in linteis exprimere nendo

112/5000

all received in the voices of a number of colored threads,
a needle, usually is not unreasonable at incredible
speed, or to express the spun out in the Linen







Translate

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Greek English Latin Detect language ▾



English Greek Spanish ▾

Translate

exprimere nendo

16/5000



express spun

☆ □ ↻ ↺ ↻





<http://www.digitalcomposition.org/aboutkeplersomnium.html>