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# PUSHKIN THREEFOLD

## INTRODUCTION

[Fragment]

TRADUTTORE, TRADITORE—"translator, traitor"—mocks the Italian pun like a malicious echo; and it implies no question mark, but rather an exclamation point of *Schadenfreude,* a snigger of wicked enjoyment. From the safe port of criticism the expert who needs no translation hugs himself over the discomfiture of the wretch who set out to dismount a poetic artifact cast in an alien medium, and to reassemble it into a new poem of his own, calling the two the same— or seeming to. But as far as this Introduction is concerned, the added question mark is the point of the citation, which one could translate, punning back etymologically at the Italian, "translator, traducer." To me the translators-traducers are (as Pushkin says of his fellow poets) "a brotherhood I can't condemn, because, you see, I'm one of them."

In using this occasion to examine some selected modes and dilemmas of poetic translation, my motive is not merely personal experience and involvement. It is the evident truth that all of us who acknowledge an emotional stake in literature are ultimately at the mercy of the brotherhood of traitors or traducers; quite directly when we wish to look beyond our own linguistic boundaries; indirectly if we wish to savor fully almost any of the major pieces of our own national literatures, which are invariably impregnated with a supranational tradition reaching back into untraceable antiquity. We cannot read Pope's translation of the *Iliad* or much of Dryden simply as English poems without shortly confronting the question of how much of this poetry is Homer or Vergil, even how much of Vergil is Homer again. The massive borrowing by Milton from Salandra in the theme, characters, and structure of *Paradise Lost* was assuredly only the last and most wholesale of a series of loans. We cannot escape inquiry into the nature of the process of creative metamorphosis, when at its inception lies not an intricate blend of contemporary personal experience, but the already transmuted experience of another mind in an antecedent work of art, often continents and ages removed, and moving within its own associative and linguistic code. In such a case we find ourselves witnesses, to a degree proportionate to our linguistic sophistication, at both ends of the creative process. We are able, and tempted, to tell the artist "you cannot say this—you misrepresent your experience," for much of his experience is there for us to compare with his final product.

The poet is not so helplessly exposed to privileged eavesdropping as the translator; nor, on the other hand, is he a power behind someone else's throne. The translator is both of these—a gray eminence deciding what will reach the oligoglot

public, and in what form; and a poor relation at the margin of letters, poorly regarded despite the fact that his handicaps are in some ways more stringent than the poet's: he must be a poet, if not a great one, and one who will put what light he has under a bushel.

Those aware of this constant admixture of translingual experience in seemingly "national" writing of caliber are bound to wonder about the ambiguous likenesses-unlikenesses, as teasing as an elusive family resemblance, between any work and its partial matrix. When such a matrix is not only acknowledged but explicitly claimed as a nearly congruent and equivalent model, more searching scrutiny, on the part of both artist and reader, must attend the process of transmutation or carrying-across—the *trans-lation.*

The store of images and emotions unlocked by words in intricate conjunction, the secret world of associative relays that are set to operate on each other in an instantaneous, yet almost infinite chain reaction—this whole complex system exists, for anyone, only in his own, at most in two or three languages. And *it* is the medium of poetic experience, it cannot be synthesized piecemeal by affirmation, description, and persuasion through a commentator's already interpretive diction in another language. Hence, even an inferior associative orchestration, resembling it, in the hearer's language is superior to mere aural or visual reproduction of the original plus exegesis— "the cold way." This reproduction simply does not reproduce—it describes, analyzes, exhorts—it tries to teach rather than to transport the reader.

The central problem, surely, is that of accuracy; or more basically, the problem of what constitutes accuracy. Within it are contained many others, such as that of the proper *unit of translation*—word, phrase, stanza, poem; that of the alleged enmity between form and content, which, it is claimed, makes verse translation resemble a constant arithmetical product of two factors, rhyme and reason. If you increase one, the other diminishes, the product remains constant —a constant of inadequacy. Then, to name another problem within the realm of accuracy, there is the dilemma of allusiveness or associative authenticity of a special sort.

A particular blend of these, where accuracy assumes a more fundamental dimension of meaning, may be labeled the problem of simplicity—one of the most disheartening in verse translation into English. It is posed by a certain frugality and calm—lexical and metaphorical—in the original that to the English mind borders on triteness; an intractable quality that in the long poetic run, through some magic of craftsmanship, by way of a rejuvenation of the reader's imagination, turns into a haunting inevitability, a disarming utter Tightness. Verse translators into English from such media as Chinese, Greek, Russian, and at times German verse encounter this dilemma with especial force. Gilbert Murray's renderings or adaptations from the Greek, Oliver Elton's from Pushkin, Heine translations, have all suffered, consciously or otherwise, from the fundamental contrast in poetic instrumentation, as well as in the nature of the aesthetic hearer-response labeled "poetic," between those verse traditions and the English, or at

any rate the nineteenth-century English one. Edmund Wilson in his perceptive centenary essay on *Eugene Onegin* (1937) speaks to this problem in a vein similar to that of Maurice Baring's Introduction to the *Oxford Book of Russian Verse:*

> ... the poetry of Pushkin is particularly difficult to translate. It is difficult for the same reason that Dante is difficult: because it says so much in so few words, so clearly and yet so concisely, and the words themselves and their place in the line have become so much more important than in the case of more facile or rhetorical writers. It would require a translator himself a poet of the first order to reproduce Pushkin's peculiar combination of intensity, compression, and perfect ease. A writer like Pushkin may easily sound "flat," as he did to Flaubert in French, just as Gary's translation of Dante sounds flat. Furthermore, the Russian language, which is highly inflected and able to dispense with pronouns and prepositions in many cases where we have to use them, and which does without the article altogether, makes it possible for Pushkin to pack his lines (separating modifiers from substantives, if need be) in a way which renders the problem of translating him closer to that of translating a tightly articulated Latin poet like Horace than any modern poet that we know. Such a poet in translation may sound trivial just as many of the translations of Horace sound trivial—because the weight of the words and the force of their relation has been lost with the inflections and the syntax.

Gilbert Murray was reduced to well-tempered despair by the refusal of his Greek originals to get excited, or to erupt into stylistic shock effects of the kind that his English-trained poetic sense kept demanding. This mildest of men could become almost exasperated on the subject; and even in print he has ventured this mannerly half-complaint:

> I have often used a more elaborate diction than Euripides did because I found that, Greek being a very simple language and English an ornate one, a direct translation produced an effect of baldness which was quite unlike the original.

Maurice Baring, the anthologist of the *Oxford Book of Russian Verse,* was struck forcibly by a similar difference in climate and orchestration between Russian and English. Edith Hamilton has analyzed with a wealth of illustration the striking contrast in the very stuff and temper of poetry between Greek and English. Both she and Baring emphasized the seemingly inbred need for expressive hyperbole in English—understood by everyone as not merely "poetic license" but part of the poetic essential of a verbally fresh view, the most conventional variety of estrangement *(ostranenie).* Greek appears to abhor this device as cheap and needless. Our response mechanisms, says Edith Hamilton, are conditioned to "caverns measureless to man, down to a sunless sea," to "magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas." To which anyone can add uncounted examples: rose-red cities half as old as time, skylarks that are, all in the same poem, blithe spirits, clouds of fire, poets hidden in the light of thought, highborn maidens in a palace tower,

glowworms golden in a dell of dew. Intoxicating stuff, but as the poet says himself: "bird thou never wert. . . . "

In the calmer realms of Greek, Russian, and much German poetry, such exuberant music of the spheres, still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins, takes on a dubious aroma of the overripe and overrich. A skylark is a skylark over there, the ocean may be wine-colored, but it is still recognizably the ocean; no slimy things do crawl with legs upon the slimy sea. Fancy is tight-reined: milk is white and good to drink, girls are *dulce ridentes, dulce loquentes,* wide-eyed, dark-lashed, ivory-browed even: but their faces launch no ships, let alone a thousand; they are never fairer than the evening air, clad in the beauty of a thousand stars, splendid angels, newly dressed, save wings, for heaven. . . . Consider how Pushkin, not insensitive to beauty, but like Pericles' Athenians, lover of beauty *with economy,* evokes the seasons with a sparing stanza of calm shorthand here and there in *Eugene Onegin.* The following is a passage that Edmund Wilson preferred to render in prose in his essay; and it may be verified in the present volume that in verse translation some of the English verbal decoration has already accrued to it:

Autumn was in the air already;
The sun's gay sparkle grew unsteady,
The heedless day became more brief:
The forest, long in darkling leaf,
Unclothed itself with mournful rustle;
The fields were wrapped in misty fleece;
A caravan of raucous geese
Winged southward; after summer's bustle
A duller season was at hand:
November hovered overland.

And then he turns to sharp little genre pictures, all seen truly and calmly, never doped to overcharge the poetic nerve with imagery:

Through frigid haze the dawn resurges;
Abroad the harvest sounds abate;
And soon the hungry wolf emerges
Upon the highway with his mate.
The scent scares into snorting flurry
The trudging horse, and travelers hurry
Their uphill way in wary haste.
No longer are the cattle chased
Out of the stalls at dawn, the ringing
Horn-notes of shepherds do not sound
Their noontime summons all around.
Indoors the maiden spins, with singing,

Before the crackling pine-flare light—
Companion of the winter night.

Compare Byron, describing a high mountain:

. . . the monarch of mountains.
They crowned him long ago
On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds,
With a diadem of snow.

By way of more detailed illustration, one may select one of many short pieces by Heinrich Heine and despair over the mysterious alchemy of obscurely relevant irrelevancies, rhythmic mutations, and pivotal silences that transmutes commonplace lexical and semantic material into a memorable lyric evocation:

Es ragt ins Meer der Runenstein,
Da sitz ich mit meinen Träumen.
Es pfeift der Wind, die Möwen schrein,
Die Wellen, die wandern und schäumen.
Ich habe geliebt manch schönes Kind
Und manchen guten Gesellen.
Wo sind sie hin? Es pfeift der Wind,
Es schäumen und wandern die Wellen.

Here is the most hackneyed *Weltschmerz,* one is bound to say, in diction of well-worn pocket change, seemingly powerless to stab with any novelty of vision or insight. The poet sits on the seashore, musing on bygone love and friendship, as the wind whistles about his ears and the waves break and ebb below. The words for the most part are the most obvious at hand: *sea, wind, love, waves, sit;* the *schönes Kind* is quite faceless, and so are the *gute Gesellen.* There are, to be sure, three or four words of "big magic," which carry what may be termed a suprasemantic charge of associations: *ragt, Runenstein, Träumen, wandern;* but at least two of these had long worked overtime for the romantic poets. They contrive to radiate diffuse associations all about them, but they neither ravish the imagination with metaphor nor dope the nerves with hyperbole; they transcend, yet do not upset the surface boundaries of reason and syntax. It is by their very lack of display, their refusal to stun or transport, that they imperceptibly draw the reader more deeply into the creative process itself, as part of the fresh vision or mood of the instant of experience regenerates itself within him as his own. And this precisely is the must of highest poetic effect: not a passive gaping at verbal fireworks, not a vicarious orgasm, but the incomparable excitement of creative experience. How exactly is it brought about?

Of the charged words, the remotest from rational context, the most willful (though still fitting the contextual frame) is of course the *runestone.* Its enigma

presides over the first line, and subtly over the whole poem, like one of the three wrinkled hags that spin out our fate, like the dead sailor over a certain passage in Eliot. This runestone need not be there so far as the cognitive content of the poem is concerned. And yet, it adds something, precisely the something which, with some formal elements, is essential to save the two quatrains from triteness: it casts a note of inscrutability and despair over all that transpires there. Runes denote what is indecipherable fateful, and ancient, and the irrelevant presence of the runestone reinforces from a subconscious realm two suggestions already contained in the body of the poem: the idea of an aloof inanimate environment, and the helpless questioning plaint of human transience, powerless to cope with the riddle of existence. Beyond this, the associative connection between *Runen* and *raunen,* that mystery-charged word for "secretly whispering," adds its subterranean force to the tritely foaming waves and the tritely whistling seawind. On the surface, obvious agents do expected things: the wind whistles, the waves foam, the seagulls scream, the pretty flappers are loved, and so are the good companions. But all is estranged and newly charged under the secret auspices of the runestone's obscure despair; the stark loom *(ragen)* of its jutting into the sea; the "roving" of the waves (not aimless so much as "of unfathomed and unshareable purpose"), suggested in *wandern,* so banal a word in other contexts. The soothing and drugging effect of sea and wind, conjured up from everyone's childhood, draws fresh magic even from the worn surface of *Träumen.* When I tackled Heine's provocative bit of sorcery for the sake of demonstration, I came up, rather bruised, with this:

> The runestone juts into the brine,
> I sit beside it dreaming.
> The seawinds hiss, the seamews whine,
> The waves, they go foaming and streaming.
>
> I have loved many a pretty miss
> And some of the best lads roaming.
> Where have they gone? The seawinds hiss,
> The waves go streaming and foaming

I felt constrained to respect the three charged words as best I could; to render the surface lexical triteness of much of the rest; and most confining of all, to preserve the marvelously simple syntactic reversal of that keyline of the pulsing waves, which occurs in one order in line 4, in reversed order in line 8. It interrupts with its dreamy dactyls the iambic beat of the rest: first, *Die Wellen, die wandern und schäumen*—simple setting of the scene; and then, denying participation in the pathetic human query with a powerful echo of mocking repetition—*Es schäumen und wandern die Wellen.* This effect brings the poetic consummation—suddenly there is real ache, real poignancy. But for the translator, at once there begins the winding path of painful compromise: there is

no simple English term the equal of *ragen,* with its joint connotation of vertical looming and sharp cragginess. One has to settle for "jut." Because the subdued jingle of end rhyme is needed for the artful *Folklorelei* of the little piece, one may try "brine" for sea, despite its obnoxious Viking flavor, for the seamews cannot well "cry" or "scream" in English for reasons of rhyme and/or semantics. Only "whine/brine" lies at hand. Similarly with the "pretty miss" here brought in—she is far too pert for the dreamy, artless archetype of *schönes Kind,* but in response to "miss" the wind can "hiss," just as in response to "foaming," "many a good lad" has to yield to "some of the best lads roaming." Or is one to choose the more literal "many a good young fellow," and make the waves "bellow" indecently in the parting line— in which case they would duly have to bellow also in line 4, rudely bursting into the elegiac murmur that pervades the whole? The gray eminence of the translator may contrive to release an echo of the wistful music of the whole; but usually at a painful price.

It may now be clearer what a dragon there is to slay in the deceptive jejuneness of simplicity. Centuries of sophisticated English, stately, baroquely jeweled, evocatively obscure, rear up in revolt against perpetrating anything as flat and bland as "there I sit with my dreams" or "I have loved many a pretty maid." Remember Mr. Huxley's pathetic painter-poet, Lypiatt, who was laughed to scorn for using that inadmissible word, *dream—le rêve*—no really, it is far too late for that! Housman dared something similar, but his is after all a very special product, and he was steeped in classical simplicity himself. Yet when we try to translate, do we dare to go back to the very witches' caldron of the poetic laboratory itself (our own, necessarily, not Heine's or Pushkin's) and start the transformation process afresh with more gleaming and more cunningly startling words and similes ? Shall we talk of the *ambient stupor of the surf,* in fastidious fear of *waves that go foaming and streaming?* What shall we betray, the irradiated simplicity of the German, or the zest and shock of the English word?

There is no set answer. But we must not wholly despair of achieving some of the careless, deceptively casual felicity of interrhyming and rhythmically interechoing tritenesses with similar materials in English—if we wish to call what we strive for a translation, and not an *imitatio,* a poem of the second order, a poem-inspired poem. Is not the true translator, after all, what the lamented Poggioli called in an essay the *added* artificer, *artifex additus artifici?* English resources of rhyme and rhythm, within the given range of lexical elements, may accommodate us—even unto half the kingdom—by a constellation of happy coincidence and restless ingenuity; and if we then make the unit of translation large enough, we may hope, through a kind of mosaic technique, to achieve a similarly harmonious pattern of linguistic building stones, associative relays, and rhythmic elements.

Such interlingual salvage operations, and their cost, can be illustrated, if not assessed, by a crude little experiment in which several translation processes are

linked in a chain reaction. I once chose a random quatrain from Swinburne's "Chorus from Atalanta" and asked each of several sensitive and long-suffering friends to render it, successively, from English into French, from French into German, from German into Russian, and from Russian back into English. Here are three links in this cycle of cumulative compromises:

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and sins;
The days dividing lover and lover,
The light that loses, the night that wins.

Car les pluies et les deuils de l'hiver ont cessé,
Et le temps de la neige et le temps du péché;
Les heures qui séparent 1'amant de l'aimee,
La lumière qui meurt, et la nuit couronnée.

Denn Winterschauer, -trauer sind vergangen,
Die Zeit, die Sünde mit dem Schnee gebracht;
Die Stunden, da entrückt zwei Liebste bangen,
Das Licht das stirbt, und die gekrönte Nacht.

For winter's gusts and griefs are over,
Snowtime weather and sin-time blight,
Lone ache of lover for distant lover,
The light that dies, and the throne of night.

The versions are like turns in a spiral, coiling out ever farther from the sprightly though undistinguished original in spirit, tone, and rhythm. We notice that the last coil, which is English again, has sprung back, after all these vicissitudes, into a skippy four-footed rhythm very like the original's; and it has salvaged the identical end rhyme of one couple. Otherwise one observes a certain loss of simplicity, accretion of material, some obscurity and loss of tension in the last line. "The night that wins" lost its innocence by way of "la nuit couronnée" and "gekrönte Nacht" and "u trona noči." Still— the result is not as unrecognizable as was the rule in the similar post-office game of our youth, where a short message was hurriedly whispered from ear to ear in a circle of players, and the result was a hilarious shambles. After all, we deliberately courted here the cumulative effect of four subtle acts of "treason," and what emerged was by no means a complete travesty of the original.

A more general interlingual and intercultural translation problem than that of simplicity is that of allusiveness. Here a more or less esoteric allusion, or a whole sequence of intramural associations, more specific than those of linguistic hyperbole or estrangement, is to be set quivering and tittering in the reader's mind like a mobile. Here the translator has three choices, all distasteful: he may

brave it out with high-handed, literal brevity; or he may have to expand a pregnant line or two into three or four lightly loaded ones; or he may give up the precious form and goad the reader up a pile of footnotes. The latter way, alas, was Nabokov's with his prose paraphrase of *Onegin.*

On this kind of dilemma I know no better example than one that the late Dudley Fitts furnished in a thoughtful essay a few years ago. It concerns an anonymous Greek epigram about a girl called Daphne:

> Lektron henos pheugousa lektron polloisin etukhthe.

One may translate this, to a close equivalent of overt message and rhythm, as follows:

> She who fled from the bed of one
> A bed for many has become.

But this leaves the covert message, a multiple twinkling of simultaneous allusions, at the mercy of chance and faint hope. What to do? Shall one leave it at that and hope that the slow fuse will burn its meandering way by half-buried landmarks into those recesses of the reader's mind where his classical mythology languishes—and risk that when the spark arrives, there is nothing there to flash up in recognition ? Or shall the allusive sentence be studded with essential little signposts, to lose all bite in the process? To quote Fitts:

> By the time we have reflected that the girl who owns the bed is named Daphne and that *daphne* is laurel in Greek, and that her bed is made of laurel, and that upon that bed, since she is a gallant lady, she entertains the men that visit her, and that for this reason she is inappropriately named for the original Daphne, a nymph, who, far from being a gallant lady, was so prim that she preferred to be turned into a laurel bush rather than to submit to the advances of a god, that god being inflamed Apollo himself. . . .

By the time the fuse has burned this far, not secretly and in one flash of associative delight, but slowly and prosaically, and all of it has been pondered and savored and made explicit, nothing is left but a laborious learned exegesis, as dead as an explained joke. The reader will give the three widely spaced guffaws once attributed to Austrian field marshals when told jokes—one laugh when the joke is told, another when it is explained, and a third when it is understood.

The very opening lines of *Onegin* contain a similar headache of an allusion. The elegant young scamp, summoned to the bedside of a dying, moneyed uncle, ponders the legacy and its irksome price— a few weeks' attendance at the sickbed, feigned solicitude, dancing in and out with poultices and sympathy; and he begins an inner monologue like this: "My uncle of most honest principles . . ." He invokes most clearly, to Russians of his and later ages, the start of a famous Krylov fable: "A donkey of most honest principles . . ." Where to go for an

equivalent literary allusion in English? Provided you have caught the allusion in the first place?

By way of strategic retreat from the whole painful subject, let us consider the following attempts at Pushkinian stanzas; first in plain prose, then in my verse rendering:

*Onegin,* VII, 2

LITERAL TRANSLATION

How sad I feel at your appearing,
Spring, spring—season of love!
What languid stir
(Is) in my soul, in my blood!
With what a heavyhearted tenderness
I rejoice in the wafting of spring
As it breathes against my face
In the lap of rustic silence!
Or is enjoyment alien to me,
And all that gladdens, animates,
All that exults and glistens,
Brings boredom and languor
Upon the soul long dead,
And all seems dark to it?

VERSE RENDERING

How I am saddened by your coming,
O time of love, o time of *bud!*
What languid stir you send *benumbing*
Into my soul, into my blood!
What painful tender feeling seizes
The heart, as spring's *returning* breezes
Waft to my face *in silken rush*
Here in the lap of rural hush!
Have I become so alienated
From all things that exult and glow,
All things that joy and life bestow,
That now they find me dull and sated,
And all seems *dark as burnt-out coal*
To the long-since insentient soul?

*Onegin,* III, 14

LITERAL TRANSLATION

I shall recount the simple speeches
Of father and old uncle,

The children's appointed meetings
By the old lindens, by the brook:
The torments of luckless jealousy,
Separation, tears of reconciliation;
I shall set (them) at odds again, and at last,
I shall lead them under the wreath. . . .
I shall cite the speeches of passionate tenderness,
The words of languishing love,
Which in days gone by
At the feet of a beautiful lady-love
Have come to my tongue,
Of which I have now lost the habit.

VERSE RENDERING

I shall recount the simple speeches
Of dad and uncle *in my book,*
The children's trysts by ancient *beeches,*
And on the borders of the brook;
The ravages of jealous torment,
Partings, reunion tears, *long dormant,*
I shall stir up once more, and then
In marriage soothe them down again. . . .
The language of impassioned pining
Will I *renew,* and love's *reply,*
The like of which in days gone by
Came to me as I lay *reclining*
At a dear beauty's feet, *enthralled,*
And which I have not since recalled.

I have juxtaposed a literal prose translation, conceding for the moment that even such a thing is possible, and my published version in the so-called Onegin stanza of the original. The stanza, as must be evident, is dismayingly intricate in its ordered interplay of masculine and feminine rhymes, and its three differently patterned iambic tetrameter quatrains with a couplet at the end. The italics mark the departures the translator was forced into: mostly padding necessitated by the shorter English breath, some rearrangement of the mosaic stones, some omissions. Predictably, most occur at the end of the lines.

Other offenses against literal fidelity occurred in substituting for the rhythmic and structural grandeur achieved by the long Russian words a careful modicum of the more semantic and metaphoric ornateness expected in English—but all of it only under dire duress. If the translator makes similar accommodations in his work, has he tacitly conceded that his enterprise has failed, or was impractical from the start? Has he falsified the poem? Or has he rather shown it the surpassing

loyalty of a daring and creative sympathy? Is he a *traduttore,* or a *traditore?* For any corpus of poetry, only a handful of scholar-poets are qualified to say.

Nabokov's recent two-volume commentary in English on *Eugene Onegin* attempts to call into question again, not *a* verse translation, but verse translation itself. This happens once or twice in every literary period. The work illustrates this attitude of militant resignation by continually substituting exhaustive and highly imaginative exegesis for translation—while, however, retaining the word "translation" in its title. It will be clear now that I cannot regard the essential legitimacy of poetic translation—as distinct from the means and the areas and limits of tolerable compromise—as highly controversial. I would endorse the more challenging majority view of the task, which is that the task exists, and must be tackled. The goal is to create a poem in the target language, which should simulate, as near as may be, the total effect produced by the original on the contemporary reader. Total effect to me means *import* as well as *impact,* i.e., both what the poem imparts to the mind and how it strikes the senses; cognitive as well as aesthetic (stylistic, formal, musical, "poetic") values, pretending for just a moment that these two congruent entities can somehow be analytically separated. Again, "import as well as impact" means import *through* and *congruent with* impact; it does not mean a message in garbled prose, with subsequent assurances by way of stylistic and other commentary that the corpse in its lifetime was poetry. Eugene Nida has phrased the same postulate rather baldly like this :

> Translation consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning, and secondly in style.

I find precarious in this only the suggestion of consecutiveness or priority in the terms *first* and *secondly.* But then, Nida spoke of prose.

This disposes, to my mind (at least for culturally kindred languages like German and English, and even Russian and English), of both counsels of insouciance and counsels of despair; that is, on the one hand, of remote imitations or adaptations in distant meters and, on the other hand, of the spavined pony of would-be "literal" prose. The central problem of verse translation, then, in a sense the only one, is not whether there can and should be simultaneous fidelity to content and form, but rather how to decide, first, what constitutes double fidelity in a given case and how it can best be approximated. The proper formal frame of accuracy, i.e., the largest allowable unit of form within which maximum fidelity must be achieved, is a delicate matter of balancing the poetic pulse of the original against the stylistic sense of the reader in the target language, and against his syntactic comprehension span; but luckily a large enough unit *can* usually be chosen to afford desperately needed latitude for transposing and rearranging within it elements of message and lexical-stylistic effects. This latitude somewhat soothes the notorious enmity between form and content in the recasting process—what I am now tempted to call the Nabokov Relation of fated failure.

When I spoke of reproducing the total impact on the *contemporary* reader, I meant, in a sense, the reader contemporary to the author, not the author's present-day native public. I realize that here I am on more controversial ground. But I am convinced that the diction used in the target language, save for deliberate archaisms used by the author, should be essentially modern, as that of the original was modern at its first appearance. Here "modern" may embrace the still resonant linguistic strata of the past one hundred, perhaps one hundred and fifty years. The antiquarian pursuit of archaizing the language used, to approximate the surface quaintness or patina that the original may by now have acquired among its native readers, is tempting; but I feel it is not only a foredoomed quest—technically too formidable and treacherous—but essentially wrongheaded. It is not the translator's business to produce an imitation period piece, to fake up that "classic" of a translation, which at the time remained unborn because no Schlegel and Tieck or no Zhukovsky happened to pick up the original. No one should—and few could—try to make himself into a ghostly Heine because in his time Heine *might* have produced the ideal translation of his contemporary Pushkin's *Onegin.*

Let me go back for a moment to the "unit of fidelity." In prose, except for extreme cases that tend to depart from prose, the problem of the unit of fidelity is not acute. The unit is normally the sentence, and only extremes of syntactic yapping or hacking, as in some German expressionism, or of syntactic convolution as in Thomas Mann or Tolstoy, raise the question of where the demands of naturalness must call a halt to close stylistic-syntactic imitation. But in poetry, especially rhymed poetry, the rigors of prosody bring "naturalness" and fidelity into conflict much sooner and oftener— in fact, sometimes at every step. "Meaning" acquires a more rigorous, because more comprehensive sense; freshness of vision and linguistic novelty are of the essence of what is stated, meaning *is* form and form meaning, over quite small units of discourse. To *just that* particular poetic impact of a line or phrase, there seem to be no alternative "plain" forms that could produce it. By the same token, literal translation, so-called (i.e., atomistic and sequential substitution of lexical pieces, morphological devices, and syntactic structures), not only runs into the hard wall of rhythm and rhyme, but is intrinsically absurd and self-defeating. Poetic utterance is not produced from some underlying, neutral, merely cognitive statement by linguistic manipulation; and if it were, the manipulations could not be the same in language A as in language B, or else they would be the *same* language. Hence sequential literalness becomes worse than irrelevant. . . . All this would have been comically redundant to say again, had the notion of literalness as a technique not been resurrected by Nabokov in relation to a major work of world literature, and had it not been respectfully (or at least gingerly) handled by at least some critics.

The first and constantly recurring decision, then, which the translator of poetry faces, is that of choosing the unit of fidelity. In some short articulated forms like the sonnet or the quatrain, or in long narrative poems whose overall unity is as

brilliantly quantified as Pushkin's *Onegin* into stanzas, each of which is a viable and substructured microcosm of mood and meaning, the obvious outer unit is the stanza; within it, the whole delicate balancing act of restructuring and tint-matching necessarily consummates itself. What original effects have not been caught up within the translated stanza have been lost and cannot be made up before or beyond it. Within the outer unit, almost invariably there are subordinate ones that should be preserved, but with a less degree of rigor; for the poetic *mora* of the whole statement has not lapsed till the end of the stanza or other unit of fidelity: the ear is still open, all is yet in suspense.

Thus a mosaic technique of reconstitution within the unit, somewhat independent of the original order of poetic effects and certainly of the kind and sequence of linguistic elements, is possible, and not only possible, but necessary; and not only necessary *faute de mieux,* but often as a condition of fidelity. What the original, say, renders verbally (by verb) near the end of the first line, may or should be rendered adverbially, nominally, adjectivally, or even syntactically, say in the middle of the second line or still later—if thus the mosaic-making rules of the target language, its aesthetics and poetics demand it for the overall stanzaic impact. If, after a few days, the translator finds he cannot quite remember the stanza in the original, I submit this is not always a bad sign, or a symptom of a fatuous vanity.

Now if a line, or a larger subunit within the stanza, cries out for separate status as an integral felicity, or an inimitable local effect that cannot be moved or compensated elsewhere, it should be tackled in its place. But if move it must, then as likely as not it is the poetics and linguistics of the target language that demand it, not necessarily the denseness or stupor of the translator. The scar of the excision, or the local opaqueness caused in the image, may yet be partially remedied elsewhere; or the loss must simply be borne. It may be found that in such cases the light merely strikes another facet of the stanza; and the spatial sense of the reader may yet perceive, with luck, a refraction of the same jewel turned to another angle.

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Reference: *Pushkin Threefold. Narrative, lyric, polemic, and ribald verse. The Originals with Linear and Metric Translations,* (1972), New York, E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., p. xxxi-xlix.