TRANSLATION: THE PROBLEM OF PURPOSE

BY RICHARD E. BRAUN

"Translations are a problem for us," the editor of a great Canadian press writes me, "since they are often not susceptible of consideration following our standard procedure, which is to get reports from two or more competent scholars, or other authorities." She concludes:

> Passions rage over translations in a way in which they do not rage over anything else, and thus the obtaining of an adequate picture of a particular translation and its value can be difficult.

If Americans read closely, they will perceive, through the conventions of northern over- and understatement, a familiar message of dismay; they may call their act of perception criticism, analysis, or even translation. But recollecting the truisms of literary scholars regarding all kinds of paraphrase, they will not be surprised at the dismay. Rather, they may be puzzled that they have understood the Canadian text so well.

We have heard that "form is meaning," and that poetry "is what is lost in translation." Useful statements, these, in special circumstances. The first might be used as a rejoinder to the vulgarian who asks of a poet "Why can't you just say what you mean?" It might lead to explanations of the play aspect of literature, to reminders of the contrived suspensefulness of the book one can't put down, or to analogies with the styles of sports commentators. So too, the second: ethnic flavor and local atmosphere are quickly recognized as perishable elements of style. "And style," the clincher might run, "is the only difference between an Englishman and a Frenchman."

So much for that. But now comes the dictum of an eminent linguist, a scientific investigator:[1]

> Phonemic similarity is sensed as semantic relationship. The pun, or to use a more erudite, and perhaps more precise term — paronomasia — reigns over poetic art, and whether its rule is absolute or limited, poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible: either intralingual transposition — from one poetic shape into another, or inter-

[1] Roman Jakobson, in Reuben A. Brower, *On Translation* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature **23,** Cambridge, Mass., 1959), 238.

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lingual transposition — from one language into another, or finally intersemiotic transposition — from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting.

These words are welcome to some esthetes, bred in schools which declare that the purpose of poetry is to perfect its own form.[2] These words seem to place on a foundation of firm learning what the *litt®rateur* had probably supposed was only the reaction of a freer and more sensitive generation against the classical prescription that poetry is meant to delight and to instruct.

The classicist, though — and I here affirm that that is what I try to be[3] — is prepared to argue. "Transposition" necessarily assumes that there exists something to be transposed. "Creative" need not imply falsification of that something. Moreover, the literature of linguistics, semantics, and communication theory does furnish the troubled republic of letters with better hope than the dictatorship of the pun.[4] The distinction between the meaning of forms, discoverable in the totality of their fitting grammatical and contextual positions within a given language, and ordinary content, related to situational substance, is a happy confirmation of what we have believed since the time of £tienne Dolet. Meaning, in terms of situation, is goal-

[2] An attitude found, for instance, in R. S. Crane, *The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* (Toronto, 1953), 60, 155.

[3] I take the term "classicist" — commonly used as a synomym of "classical scholar" — as a praise word (like "Christian") which signifies one who strives to embody, in life and letters, the abiding spiritual and cultural values of Greek and Roman civilization. The finest recent epitome of the ideals which a classicist may post beside his door is by William Arrowsmith *(Arion,* New Series 2/1, 90-1):

> What is extraordinary in Greco-Roman antiquity is that it founded human rights upon the consortium of human fate, on the solidarity and compassion imposed by a common tragic condition. Morality was, in fact, derived from the perception of mortality--derived as the Sophoclean Odysseus derives it from the condition of his fallen enemy, Ajax:
>
> . . . I pity
> his wretchedness, though he is my enemy,
> for the terrible yoke of blindness that is on him.
> I think of him, yet also of myself;
> for I see the true state of all of us that live-
> we are dim shapes, no more, and weightless shadow.
>
> It is the discovery of this morality — this ancient, noble sense of human rights as deriving not from God's likeness but from solidarity and shared suffering (and shared joy — that speaks to our present condition and suggests how it is that human dignity can be refelt, rethought, and recreated. Even if we grant the existence of ancient slavery, and the infamy of atrocity, no other human society has ever achieved, or preserved for so long, so high a sense of human powers and human skills or so vivid a sense of human rights.

See Joshua Whatmough, *Language* (New York: New American Library, 1956), Ch. 5, especially pages 75-7; Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964), Chs. 3-6; and J. C. Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), Chs. 5-7.

directed; it is purpose, and may be transmitted by a translation equivalent felt to be appropriate to the real-life situation. Languages differ more in what they must specify than in what they can.

It is this recognition, of the difference between meaning as a property of language and as the effective purpose of utterances, which permits Prof. Jakobson to qualify himself so gracefully. From a view of poetry as an exquisite, accurate, frivolous and frail art, where ambiguity is supreme, he goes on to assume—with gusto—that poetic content, the poetic message, the meaning, is sturdy enough to thrive through imitation, translation, and worse. One tends to feel vindicated. There must be something beyond its own, perfected form to a poem if it is to survive such rough use. If—after Berlioz, Pasolini, and Europe's acres of canvas-Vergil, Sophocles, and Ovid have not scattered into a cloud of "culture," surely Dryden and Humphries and Copley, Yeats and Fitts and Fitzgerald, Golding and Sandys and Gregory did not all delude themselves when they decided there was substance there which English would not dissipate.

Plus *-a* change . . . Dryden's categories—metaphrase, paraphrase, and imitation-fit well in this context.[5] The first is designed to help people learn a foreign language: it is commonly faced with the original text, and often equipped with marginalia where the translator invites scrutiny of the untranslatable paronomasia, impossible chiasmus, and alien cultural allusion. But all this paraphernalia is in pursuit, finally, of subject matter--even as is a bilingual dictionary. The third category, "imitation," also presupposes that there is an animating purpose in or behind the original poem, and that it is worth one's changing the text, cutting, expanding, and inventing in order to make this motive spirit perceptible to readers in a strange place or time. The middle ground—where critical passions most rage—seeks to compromise; but whatever liability it incurs by trying to stand as the honest broker, the aim of the "paraphrase" is to communicate the content of the original "sense for sense," as Jerome has it, "not word for word."

It will be clear by now that I am proposing that the function of a translation is to transmit the message of the original, the content; that the level at which form and content are not identical, but

[5] "Metaphrase" corresponds to the linguist's "formal equivalent," both "paraphrase" and "imitation" to "dynamic equivalent" translation. See Nida, op. cit., Ch. 8, especially 161-71.

related, in the classic sense, as wine to its bottle, is normally the most important level, the highest. This is not to suggest that the esthetic layer is insignificant, but that it is, in the major genres at least, subordinate. Condensation, inflation, euphony, simile, conceit, are all devices of communication, tools in the task of delight and instruction. The meaning of the work is its final cause; the purpose of the translation should be that of the original.

Now, in this age of relativism, I know of but one serious attempt, in the western world, to describe the purpose of poetry, that of Yvor Winters.[6] Poetry, he says, is artistic literature written in verse. Artistic literature is writing which "endeavors at one and the same time to clarify a subject rationally and to move the emotions appropriately . . .

> a poem (or other work of artistic literature) is a statement in words about a human experience . . . . *The Iliad, Macbeth,* and *To the Virgins to Make Much of Time* all deal with human experiences. In each work, there is a content which is rationally apprehensible, and each work endeavors to communicate the emotion which is appropriate to the rational apprehension of the subject. The work is thus a judgment, rational and emotional, of the experience—that is a complete moral judgment in so far as the work is successful . . . we regard as greatest those works which deal with experiences which affect human life most profoundly, and this criterion is not merely one of the intensity of the experience but of the generality or inclusiveness of the implications.

I shall not try to analyze this statement, which is wonderful in its clarity. I should add, though, that within the domain of artistic literature Winters includes materials which immediately apply to humbler mental processes than complete moral judgment. The passage quoted makes it clear that Winters regarded human experience as interesting in itself: value is implicitly attributed to "human interest." The communication of ordinary personality, as in the domestic novel of Wharton, is a worthwhile, if not a great subject.[7] Second, he admits a further worthy form of curiosity, which I may call "factual interest," satisfied in historiography and the Melville novel by details which, "since we are gentlemen and scholars," we find interesting.[8] At best, literature orders and judges, suits emotion

[6] An abiding principle of Winters, codified in "Problems for the Modern Critic of Literature," in *The Function of Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 40, 25-7. The essay first appeared in the *Hudson Review* in 1956.

[7] Ibid., 30-1.

[8] Ibid.. 40-1.

to fact; but even at less than best, it satisfies a hunger for knowledge, that is for vicarious experience.

If, then, the purpose of poetry is rationally to communicate experience with the appropriate emotion, the purpose of translation is to communicate that same subject and emotion. The problem of the literary translator is how to execute the job of communication. That is a problem of literary quality; for, as Winters warns, "a work which is poorly executed is bad, no matter what the conception."[9]

There are translations, noted translations, which are so far removed from the purpose of the original, that I would be glad of a new term to describe them. "Imitations" will not do; for those are compositions which depend on fidelity to the spirit of an original. Possibly "impressions" will suit the case, since the authors stamp their model with new, often special or personal meaning.[10] "Parody" is the ancient word; but its present connotations are wrong. Writers of impressions usually love and respect the original.

It would be unfair to criticize an impression — Lattimore's ***Iliad,*** for example — as a bad translation: as unfair as to criticize the ***American Standard Revised Bible.*** It is notorious that the latter is full of unintelligible "translatorese," in the manner of a close metaphrase in a bilingual edition. Yet many people would reject Phillips' translation, or one like it, precisely because it communicates the content of the original in correct, plain English. These people, feeling that the

[9] Ibid., 27. Let it be specified that Winters regarded the conventions of "imitation" as obstacles to consistently good writing, and evidence of the inferiority of the major poetic forms, epic, tragedy, comedy.

[10] In defense of multiplying terminology, I should like to point out that in current teaching-practice the word "metaphrase" is applied to direct word-for-word and form-for-form transfer, such as this of John 1:6-7 (cf. Nida, op. cit., 186):

became/happened man, sent from God, name to-him John;
this-one came-he into restimonyiwitness
that testifyiwitness-might-he about the light
that all believe-might-they through him

"Literal" (Dryden's "metaphrase") is used of versions in the range of the Revised Standard Version:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
He came for testimony,
to bear witness to the light,
that all might believe through him.

Another suitable word for works that step beyond the definition of "imitation" might be "descant." The old practice of inscribing "After Homer" or "After Catullus" below the title was a signal that an impression or descant was to follow. But it was sometimes used of imitations and even paraphrases..

matter of religion by nature includes much that is mysterious, much that is magical, regard the cryptic Standard Version as more authentic. The argument that the Gospel is a vital message, meant to inform and to move, will be regarded as impertinent by such an audience. After all, what is the ministry for? I am perfectly serious about this. The congregation requires a measure of distortion of content and emotion because of its heartfelt faith.

The Iliad, it seems, is no longer regarded as a sacred text. Lattimore's distortions, nevertheless, serve a quasi-sacerdotal purpose: affective obscurantism. The character of the audience, here too, is paramount.

Now, Homer is the creator of the Greek language. Like the itinerant poets of Arabia, he blended dialects into a national literary medium. He is a champion of useful language. Accordingly, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* demand to be translated into the freshest and richest modern English. However, observe:

> These then putting out went over the ways of the water-
> while Atreus' son told his people to wash off their defilement.
> And they washed it away and threw the washings into the salt sea.
> Then they accomplished perfect hecatombs to Apollo,
> of bulls and goats along the beach of the barren salt sea.
>
> (*Iliad* I, 312-16)

This is not translation of any recognizable type. Its speech is not natural English, or its style effective as English style; but neither is it "translatorese." It is not a work of literalism, but a thoughtfully contrived impression, which achieves a distinct emotional accompaniment to the material—a new emotion, utterly foreign to Homer. Lattimore's purpose is to arouse nostalgia in a particular audience. For, those who once studied Greek, and read some Homer, and were called away too soon by life's pursuits, will respond to Lattimore via the memories he invokes: the old feeling of working one's way through the original with the aid of Keep's English translation of Autenrieth's Homeric dictionary, the satisfaction of winning greater ease with the idiom and of learning about ancient religious practices—all this at a time of life where vigor is high and all that is strange is exciting.

It is the sanctity of past youth that has made Lattimore's the Standard American *Iliad.* Its odd phrases and sentence structures function much like the poignant snippets of Homer and Horace in Norman Douglas' *South Wind,* where echoes of schoolboy and schol-

arly pursuits act as counterpoint to more severe themes. Thus, false to the emotion of the original, Lattimore substitutes new wistfulness, and so abandons the possiblity of communicating Homer's "complete moral judgment."[11] However, I repeat, it is foolish to censure an author for not accomplishing what he never intended. Even in a radical "impression," much of original value can be translated. So, Lattimore transmits — to the intellect — the narrative movement of Homer's *Iliad,* its historical information, its measurement of the gulf between men and immortal gods, and the exposition and delineation of fate and free will. That is, Lattimore, like Homer, feeds the hunger for knowledge.

Another famed impression is the Zukofsky Catullus. I have written elsewhere that this book is not meant to communicate Catullan logic and feeling, but to induce readers of Latin to learn more English.[12] It is addressed to learned litterati. The Zukofsky Catullus can do nothing but good — to the intellect — and for this reason: through most of its history, English was formed by bilingual authors — men whose Latin was as good as their Anglo-Saxon, then by those whose French was better, and then, again, by men who had spoken only Latin in their Tudor-and-later grammar schools; and it is useful, even vital for us, as gentlemen and scholars, to experience this state of mind once more, to practice approaching the renewed chaos of English, living and changing, from the still, reliable base of Latin. But let me specify here too, that the Zukofsky impression communicates much of human interest: one's natural curiosity gathers something of Catullus' personality — the false innocent, the good hater, the waggish experimenter in disparate levels of discourse.

If, then, such free creations — where one poet alters the emotional, another the rational order of a model — bringover worthwhile material from the source, what is to be expected of orthodox paraphrase translations? The critical cruces, and the crises of poetic strategy are

[11] **D. S. Carne-Ross, in "The Classics and the Man of Letters," (*Arion,* Vol. III, Number 4, Winter, 1964), 30 speaks of**

> **the contrast, which I take it is what the poem supremely offers, between the terrible circumstance of the story and what C. S. Lewis called "the unwearying, unmoved, angelic speech of Homer." The *Iliad* envisions a depth of human suffering darker even than *Lear,* yet the language never loses its accent of joy and triumph, never ceases to glorify the human condition.**

[12] **Richard Emil Braun, "The Original Language: Some Postwar Translations of Catullus," *Grosseteste Review,* Vol. *3,* No. 4, Winter, 1970, 27-34.**

even more obvious when the methods are less radical. The problems of intent and content, of course, remain those of audience: especially when the cultural difference is great.[13]

One of the most persistent problems in translation of Greek and Latin classics is the suitable treatment of passages of strong emotional content. In both Greek and Roman culture it was felt that *sincerity or intensity of emotion is in a direct ratio to the amplitude of its expression.* This is the opposite of present-day feeling in the English-speaking nations.

Few would deny that the Fourth Book of Vergil's *Aeneid* is a well-executed clarification of delusive amorous passion; that it applies to this content the correct emotions of anguish, pity, and regret; that it is tragic because it is public and great because it applies generally to mankind. Yet, it is a work which, today, in English translation, as often embarrasses as convinces. Take, for example, Anna's discovery of Dido's suicide. Here is a situation to move us. A Canadian or American would probably say no more than:

> Dido? . . . Dido!
> My God . . .

She might say nothing--on stage, or on the page, as well as in life. The English signal of sincerity is silence. But see how Anna begins (675-9):

> Hoc illud, germana, fuit? Me fraude petebas?
> Hoc rogus iste mihi, hoc ignes araeque parabant?
> Quid primum deserta querar? Comitemne sororem
> sprevisti moriens? Eadem me ad fata vocasses:
> idem ambas ferro dolor atque eadem hora tulisset. Etc.

This is beautiful verse. Reading the Latin—accepting, with it, the value of another culture—one believes, and to some degree feels that the emotion Vergil conveys is appropriate to the situation.

But read a good English prose rendering:[14]

> O Sister, so this was the truth? You planned to deceive me! Was this what your pyre, your altars, and the fires were to mean for me? How shall I begin reproaching you for forsaking me so? Did you scorn your own sister and not want her with you when you died? You should have asked

[13] A brilliant discussion of strategies employed when ancient conventions are not viable, per se, in English is William Arrowsmith's "The Lively Conventions of Translation," in William Arrowsmith and Roger Shattuck, *The Craft and Context of Translation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 122-40.

[14] W. F. Jackson Knight, *Vergil, the Aeneid* (London: Penguin Books, 1956).

me to share your fate, and then one same hour, one agony of the blade, might have taken us both.

The same content becomes excessive, tedious. Turn, then, to one of the finest modern verse versions:[15]

Dido, was this what it meant? You lied? to me?
Was this the purpose of pyre, altar, and flame?
You left me! What shall I say? You died, but scorned
to take me? You might have let me share your death:
one hour, one stroke of pain had served for two.

This is a decent compromise. It stresses the feeling, omits all qualifications. It cuts twenty syllables from the count of the original, while the prose version added twelve.[16] But, in the garb of normal syntax, plain, manly English diction, and modern-stage blank verse, this version would need to be pared still more in order truly to convince us—that is, to cause us to share in, rather than merely approve of the emotion. What these lines do succeed in communicating, is the fact that the emotion *was* real: this appeals to the underlying unity of mankind; for a common characteristic of all peoples is the realization that the styles of all peoples differ.

Finally, to demonstrate, by contrast, the severity of the strictures on emotional expression which our present, puritan language imposes on the classical translator, I would like to exhibit the same passage in the common idiom of Restoration heroic drama:[17]

"Was all that pomp of woe for this prepar'd;
These fires, this fun'ral pile, these altars rear'd?
Was all this train of plots contriv'd," said she,
"All, only to deceive unhappy me?
Which is the worst? Didst thou in death pretend

[15] Frank O. Copley, *The Aeneid—Vergil* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965).

[16] I propose that the syllable is the only honest measure of comparative length. Latin hexameters average fifteen syllables, English blank verse, ten; and the Latin and Greek words also are, on the average, longer than English. But the roots, relationals and endings of Latin and Greek, like the roots, conjunctions, pronouns, and auxiliaries of English, are of one or two syllables.

[17] John Dryden, published in 1697.

For a fundamental discussion of the style of translations and their acceptability, see Reuben A. Brower, "Seven Agamemnons," in Brower, op. cit. (note 1), 173-95. Brower's main thesis is that widely-used translations are composed in the general idiom currently regarded as "poetic". Thus, (Ibid., 173-4).

A reader quite familiar with Dryden will find it impossible to distinguish Dryden's own translations of Juvenal from those of his helpers. . . . If we should define the poetry of Pope or of Dryden from their translations alone, we should find we were omitting most of what distinguishes them from their contemporaries.

To scorn thy sister, or delude thy friend?
Thy summon'd sister, and thy friend, had come;
One sword had serv'd us both, one common tomb . . ."

Again, as with Vergil's ornate, rhetorical Latin, we are persuaded of the propriety of the emotion within its cultural context. It is perfectly at home in the now-obsolete tradition of stage-rant it represents. However, if it were judged by the standards applied to Copley's translation, Dryden's would be condemned outright as frigid exaggeration, which not only does not let us share the emotion, but forbids us to approve it as credible.

For the taste of his day, it may be granted that Dryden effected a creative transposition; and it may be said, too, that Copley began but stopped just short of achieving a parallel adjustment for our day. What should he have done? To have written, as suggested,

Dido? . . . Dido! . . My God . . .

would have turned the translation from paraphrase into imitation. No, given the cultural gap, Copley made the logical and honorable choice.

Here, we are faced by another epigram:[18]

Because it (sc., translation) is always a compromise, and great art is rarely a compromise, the odds are against it.

This admonishment goads us, in the quest of masterwork, to cross the barrier between paraphrase and imitation. If we must omit passages to satisfy the temporal or national spirit, may we not also insert others to gain the same end? Again, there comes the support of science.[19] Communication theory suggests that the message should be made to fit the decoder's channel. Otherwise, there is a communication overload, and for two reasons: because in translation the normal redundancy of the source language is lost, and because the audience of the source message was provided with circumstantial information which the receptor-language audience lacks. The translator is obligated to provide redundancy to match the original; and, when an idea or image is implicit in the source language, he will usually have to make it explicit in translation. How far this process of adjustment may go will define the boundary between paraphrase and imitation.

[18] Robert M. Adams, *Proteus, His Lies, His Truth, discussions of literary translation* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973), 179.
[19] Nida, op. cit., 129-32.

The problem is commonly a subtle one. The imitator is, after all, not nearly so radical as the impressor.[20] For the author intending paraphrase, the border of imitation may not be clearly marked. As an example of the peril involved, I shall expose part of a project of my own, the *Rhesos* of Euripides.

At the turning-point of the play, the Chorus is trying to persuade Hektor to admit Rhesos as an ally. We, the audience, know that if Rhesos settles in Hektor's camp, he will die. Hektor does not know this, but is indignant because Rhesos has arrived at so late a date in the war. "We've kept Troy safe without his help," Hektor says; and the Chorus, "Then your're convinced we've won?" Hektor answers

> Yes, I am. And the daylight will prove I'm right.
> The gods will shine on us.
> CHORUS Please, sir,
> we can't know the future before we see it.
> The gods can change anything.

The Chorus' reply is a single Greek verse **(332)**

ὅρα τὸ μέλλον . πόλλ' ἀναστρέφει θεός.

Which Lattimore translates

> Look to the future. God often reverses fortunes.

Now, Lattimore was aiming to retain the simplicity of the *Rhesos,* an under-written play, terse, elliptical, allusive, which depends, for much of its impact, on an audience's knowledge of Homer and the cyclic poets. How am I to justify the fullness of my version? On the very principle stated above: the need to fill out ellipses, and explain the implicit message, in order to avoid overload. "Please, sir" is added as functional redundance, and to maintain the tone of a soldier addressing his superior — a small concession to the naturalistic mode of the English stage. The gnomic ὅρα τὸ μέλλον is changed into argument because it is part of a debate; the isolated, sententious phrase might be obscure in this context. "Know" is added to "see" (Lattimore's "look") because one of the play's main themes is know-

[20] Nor is the impressor necessarily so fully conscious of the degree of his radicalism as are some of Jakobson's intersemiotic transposers. Tartini must have been aware of the conditions of transfer, being both poet and composer. *The Seasons,* of course, presents parallel arts in its sonnets and concerti. But his sonata *Didone Abbandonnata* is still bolder abstraction; for here, Tartini proposes to convey the emotion appropriate to part of *Aeneid* IV without a jot of Vergil's rationally-apprehended content. The sonata may delight, but I doubt that Tartini thought it could instruct.

ledge and ignorance, light and dark, perception and deception, and I felt the necessity of signalling this motif at this crucial position in the plot. The final sentence is virtually the same in both versions: it means, in metaphrase, "a/the god turns over many things." Thus far, I submit, my translation, like Lattimore's, is a paraphrase.

But then I began to think that "change" fell far below the potential suggestiveness of the image implicit in ἀναστρέφει. "Turns over" what? Fortunes? Certainly. But, to me, "often reverses fortunes," is an Aristotelian gloss. So I began to seek a poetic gloss. Having observed that throughout the *Rhesos* Euripides associates the power of the Greeks with the sea and ships, and that of the Trojans with the land and the life of the soil, I decided that here, with the play's outcome about to be decided, was the time to write strongly. No, *decision* is too cool—the choice was sensed, at the time, as a call. Turn over . . . the earth! I wrote

> Please, sir,
> we can't know the future until we see it.
> Till then, a god can change it.
> We see the earth.
> Then a farmer cuts it, turns it upside down,
> and buries it. The place we knew is hidden,
> and things from underneath are crawling in the light.

A bit much? I felt not. My three and a half intruded verses are in keeping with the themes and images of the play as a whole—with the "motivating spirit" of the poetic structure. Luckily, William Arrowsmith took the trouble to prove to me that I had transgressed the boundary between translation and imitation; that this was a perfect example of how such categorical borders come to be violated. Yet it had not appeared to me, when I did it, that I was shifting to a different literary mode; weeks afterward, I still had to be persuaded to make the logical and honorable choice.

It will be observed, too, that in my imitation, I not only overexpanded an implicit metaphor, but psychologized the passage—converted unconscious content into full, self-conscious awareness. This, again, is typical of the imitator's strategy of introducing topicality. It would have been just, had I planned to call the finished product the *Rhesos* of Braun, *after* Euripides. True, many have noticed, from the use of dreams, for instance, in Aeschylus' *Choephori* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos,* that the Greeks—possibly by way of the cult of Asklepios—had knowledge of what has come to

be called "Freudian" psychology.[21] Likewise, one hears the arrogant expression "prefreudians" used of such writers as Melville, who used certain kinds of symbol. However, the belief--even the certainty—that Greek tragedians used a similar system does not permit a translator (paraphraser) to emphasize his perception of this fact beyond certain bounds.

The trouble is that the bounds are not always certain. The trap of topicality is often well hidden. It is for the intelligent critic to preserve distinctions which enthusiastic translators readily overlook. The procedures of committee translation which the United Bible Societies employ may be worth the consideration of literary translators who believe deeply in the value of their chosen authors[22]

The appeal I have made to the human or humane content of major works does not invalidate Jakobson's remark about the reign of the pun over some literary genres. The epigram, the short lyric and conceited reflective poem are indeed less translatable than the epic, drama, or novel. Lacking plot, often without argumentation, the short forms are more elliptical and more dependent upon linguistically relevant features. The most important of these linguistic features is ambiguity. Translation equivalents, in cases of shared exponence and polysemy, occur only by sheer coincidence.[23] Therefore, the dynamic-equivalent translation of these highly-condensed yet fragile genres is not subject to methodical treatment.

Even in larger forms, the drama and satire, ambiguous words and exocentric expressions, including proverbs, are sometimes employed to combine the experience with its proper emotion. Here, the translator may not elect not to proceed. He must com-

[21] As Brower says in "The Classics and the Man of Letters" (*Arion*, cited in note 11), 22: "Freud revived the Oedipus myth in the most unlikely place, the doctor's office."

[22] See Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, The *Theory* and Practice *of* Translation (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), Ch. 8, and the Appendix, 174-88. The Oxford Greek Tragedy in New Translations is using many of the principles and procedures suggested for use by the United Bible Societies translators, but, perforce, lacks the organizational rigor of that body.

[23] The success of Ezra Pound's adaptation of Catullus 26 is due to the fortuitous coincidence of Latin and English idiom: the polysemy of *oppositus* ad ("exposed to—" and "placed as security for a loan of–"), and "draft" happily correspond.

This villa is raked of winds from fore and aft,
All Boreas' sons in bluster and yet more
Against it is this TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND sesterces,
All out against it, oh my God:
some draft.

promise — Adams' remark notwithstanding — and hope for the best, trusting that the whole work cannot stand or fall by his choice.

Here again, I shall illustrate with a piece from my own work. Verses 115-18 of Persius' Satire V read as follows:

> sin tu, cum fueris nostrae paulo ante farinae,
> pelliculam veterem retines et fronte politus
> astutam vapido servas in pectore volpem,
> quae dederam supra relego funemque reduco.

They may be literally translated thus:

> But if, though just a while ago you were of our flour,
> you retain your old hide; and if, though your forehead
> is smooth, you're hiding a sly fox in your stale chest;
> if so, I'm taking back what I gave you before, and drawing
> back the rope.

None of this means much to the English reader. None of the Latin means only what it says. It is a wild mixture of metaphors and proverbs. It is also an extreme, but characteristic, sample of Persius' literary tactics: for Persius generates glee—his conception of the suitable emotional accompaniment—while exhorting to virtue. So, here, he treats a segment of an earnest sermon joyfully, as a comic extravaganza. The passage is actually a warning, and might have been expressed in such sober prose as:

> If you are a sincere Stoic now, and successful in your moral self-reforms, I will acknowledge that you have really changed, have freed yourself from the bonds of folly, and I will treat you accordingly, as a free man and an equal; if not, not.

That is explanation, not translation. To translate, I tried to substitute parallel exocentric expressions current in English:

> But if, though just a bit ago you flocked
> together with us, you've retained your old spots;
> or if you're wearing sheep's clothing to hide
> a sour grape; if so, I've given you
> enough rope.

This, left to itself, is risky. The feeling may be right; but what of the message? I decided I had no choice but to supply a literal version and expound it:

> Now, "to be of the same flour" refers to the different grades which millers ground, the finer being the more costly; metaphorically, the expression means "to be of the same sort or quality, to share similar

tastes, or to be devoted to like beliefs." The "old hide" is a piece of a proverb of the variety "Your fur is dyed, but the hide below is the same as before." The "smooth forehead" disguises a troubled heart or guilty conscience. The "chest" is where the heart is, but "stale" *(vapido)* refers to "bad wine in a good barrel." This image is distorted by mixture with the saying (Suetonius, *Vespasian,* 16) "the fox changes his fur, not his character." The introduction of a hidden fox further suggests the old tale (see Plutarch, *Lycurgus,* 18.1) of the Spartan boy who stole a young fox and hid it under his coat and, rather than be detected in the theft, let the animal disembowel him; he stood thus in silence, and so died. The anecdote was repeated as a sample of the success of Spartan educational methods; but, in Persius' context, it comes to signify the self-destructiveness of concealing guilt. The "rope" figure in Latin does not imply suicide by hanging, but has to do with the vain efforts of an animal on a rope (compare *Satire* V, lines 158-60) that strains and chokes itself, or goes too far and is dragged painfully back.

The success or failure of my Persius is, of course, a function of the judgment of the critical reader. That judicious reader may prove difficult to find. He may be someone as hard-pressed for reliable criteria as my Canadian editor, and say "translations are a problem for me." This is about what Johnson did in the famous discussion of 1778:[24]

GARRICK. (to Harris.) "Pray, Sir, have you read Potter's Aeschylus?" HARRIS. "Yes; and think it pretty." GARRICK. (to Johnson.) "And what think you, Sir, of it?" JOHNSON. "I thought what I read of it *verbiage:* but upon Mr. Harris's recommendation, I will read a play. (To Mr. Harris.) Don't prescribe two." Mr. Harris suggested one, I do not remember which. JOHNSON. "We must try its effect as an English poem; that is the way to judge of the merit of a translation. Translations are, in general, for people who cannot read the original.

And, I must say, to be faced with such an approach—to have his translation judged as a poem—is not likely to give the translator courage. For now, unlike Johnson's day, passions do in fact rage over poetry in the same way as over translations.

Every writer who merely turns his taste or temperament to practice, is in danger of elevating his practice to principle. The same risk belongs to all of us who accept others' principles chiefly because they suit our habits of thought. I am describing common custom. The result is, that the criteria used to judge of the effect of literary works are narrow and subjective.

[24] James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson LL. D.,* London, 1793 (the 6th ed. of Malone, reprinted, New York: The Modern Library, 1931), 784.

It may now be time to begin cooperative, interdisciplinary effort toward the establishment of such general principles of literary purpose and method as will have the force of reason. It is only in this way that we can hope to get reports from authorities who are competent to describe and evaluate translations. But this course of discovery demands greater seriousness than the average writer, scholar, and scientist appears, today, to possess. It demands high committment to values of life, and belief in the fundamental unity of knowledge.

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