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THE TRANSLATIONS OF VALERY LARBAUD AND THEIR RELATION TO HIS ORIGINAL WORK AND *CRITIQUE*

VALERY LARBAUD HAD A GARGANTUAN APPETITE for the literatures of both modern and classical languages. He might have produced another history of European literature but he was convinced that literary promotion was a much more important activity, assuming such forms as presentations of new or neglected works, the launching of new literary journals (in his own sphere *Le Navire d'Argent* and *Commerce*) and above all translation.

He saw himself as a man with a mission: the advocacy of a United Europe through the medium of Europe's literatures. Sometimes he expresses this cause in terms of a "conquest." In fact his famous collection of toy soldiers might be interpreted as taking a stand for European unity against the forces of nationalism, the dangerous social neurosis that threatened it in his day.

The activity of translation, then, is one of the many ways in which these cultural conquests are carried out because they integrate a work in a second language into the maternal language of the translator and, on rare occasions, the reverse. Translation, as understood by Larbaud, is an uncompromising dedication of the translator's own time and resources to a cause that he or she feels to be just because of the new insights being "translated," that is "given," to fortunate readers in their own language.

From childhood Larbaud had been enthusiastically learning Spanish and English as well as classical Greek and Latin and as a young man he studied Italian and German. (He was later to become even more proficient in Italian after his marriage to an Italian speaker.) Portuguese was also acquired when he was in his forties, *à coups de dictionnaire*, as he puts it.

Apprenticeship

To look first at his translations from English and beginning with what we might call the period of his apprenticeship, we find that only one of a number of the early translations to which he refers so enthusiastically in his letters to his friend Marcel Ray (of Coleridge, Shelley, Dobson, Hawthorne, Parkman) was actually published, namely Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in 1901, when he was twenty. As there were a number of problems in this translation it eventually came out in a revised edition ten years later (1911). He had embarked on a particularly ambitious and hazardous project here.

Looking for a moment at detail, there is a problem in the word "rime" in the sense in which Coleridge uses it because that usage of the word was already anomalous if not archaic. The same could be said of "ancient." Larbaud translates the title simply as *La Chanson du vieux marin* which had been Auguste Barbier's title for the first French translation (1876). (In 1901 it was *La Complainte du vieux marin*.) Curiously enough, Samuel Butler comments on Coleridge's title in his *Note-Books,* which Larbaud was later to translate, so that he later knew Butler's opinion on the matter: "This poem would not have taken so well if it had been called 'the old Sailor'". (Samuel Butler *Note-Books* London: Fifield, 1912, p. 229).

Larbaud's effort to provide an honest, "correct" and unpretentious translation, in the hope that this would be enough to conjure up the spellbinding effect of the original, takes us immediately to the whole question of the translatability of poetry which Larbaud does not yet seem to have pondered. The romantic notion of poetry as capable of being the equivalent of a drug, un *divin opium* , which allows the listener or reader to escape into it as if he were under hypnosis, is the basic challenge this poem presents to the translator. Neither the first nor the second editions succeed at that level.

It is also amusing to find in it a number of beginners' *contresens*:

1901: "The ship was cheered the harbour cleared"
"l'eau du port était claire"

1911: "Le navire, salué d'acclamations, sortit du port"

1901:"Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk below the hill"

"le long de l'église, puis au pied de la colline"

1911: Joyeusement nous laissâmes
Derrière nous l'église, puis la falaise

Auguste Barbier's translation had been illustrated with Gustave Doré's famous engravings which appeared again more recently in Henri Parisot's, published by Gallimard in 1975.

So in this phase of Larbaud's apprenticeship there seems to be no attempt to come to grips with the underlying depths of meaning which he soon came to realize were more essential than the "literal": the meaning implied by tone and such qualities as irony and innuendo, the implicit, and in general what is suggested rather than explicitly stated. Since Larbaud was later to become a consummate master of these subtle inferences in language (as seen for example in the Joyce translations) we can appreciate the remarkable evolution of his talent as a translator.

He discusses this issue in his major study of translation, *De la Traduction*, which appeared only in 1946 in *Sous L'Invocation de St. Jérôme*. Here he quotes his own translation into French of a part of Francesco de Sanctis' *Studio su Giacomo Leopardi* (concerning Leopardi's translation of Virgil into Italian as compared with Annibale Caro's): "Chaque texte a un son, une couleur, un mouvement, une atmosphère qui lui sont propres. En dehors de son sens matériel et littéral, tout morceau de littérature a, comme tout morceau de musique, un sens moins apparent et qui seul crée en nous l'impression esthétique voulue par le poète." (Op. Cit. *Oeuvres Complètes de Valery Larbaud* VIII p.85)

The Coleridge translation is a disappointment in these terms as it is hardly more than faintly rhythmic French prose. Larbaud's "last word" on it is to be found in a letter of March 12, 1912 to Cyprien Godebski: "Malheureusement il n'est pas possible qu'une traduction fasse justice à ce chef-d'oeuvre, et la mienne n'est pas bonne non plus. Qu'elle puisse donner envie de lire l'original...." (G. Jean-Aubry *Valery Larbaud* Monaco: Rocher 1949 pp.193-194.)

His translation of Stevenson's well known *Requiem* (*La Phalange* 20/9/1909) also seems to show that he had not yet developed the criteria he was later to admire so much in the words of De Sanctis, although similar reflections of his own appear in an earlier article also entitled "De la Traduction" (in *Effort Libre* nov. 1913) in which he favours translations that express "l'esprit, l'intention, le génie" but not necessarily the literal. (Ibid. p.97)

Again, with *Requiem*, he was boldly attempting to translate lines that many anglophones know by heart. Larbaud was well aware of this since he had made a study of

traditionally popular English verse (even in the Northumbrian dialect) and of traditional aphorisms and proverbs, given their importance in understanding the literature of every language. This is an area in which translators may be assumed to meet their limits since one is always more expert in the sayings of one's maternal language than in those of acquired languages. He was later to apply his formidable knowledge of English aphorisms, as well as famous quotations in English literature, to his major translations.

The last lines of *Requiem* are familiar:

"Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill."

"Le marin est rentré chez lui
Et le chasseur est revenu de la colline."

Here the obsessive resonance of the repeated word "home," indicating a very meaningful *signifié* for an anglophone, is obviously not rendered by the appropriate French *significant*. The translation, consequently, sounds flat.

Chesterton

Nevertheless we are approaching the point at which the master translator begins to emerge. His translation in 1910 of Chapter 6 of Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* demonstrates his ability to put English polemical prose into French, a talent that would later be applied to the work of Samuel Butler. Chesterton thought he sounded better in Larbaud's French than in his own English. *Orthodoxy* is an ambitious defense of the essence and relevance of Christianity as secularization advanced in England and a refurbished republicanism after the Dreyfus Affair threatened it in France. Larbaud was clearly fascinated by Chesterton's debates with Shaw, resulting in his book on Shaw which Larbaud reviewed while living in London (*La Phalange,* 20 janvier 1910, pp. 279-288) creating a link between his *critique* and his translations. He was thus thoroughly familiar with Shaw just before his discovery of Shaw's acknowledged master, Samuel Butler.

Landor

An important turning point in Larbaud's career as a translator was his translation of W S Landor's *High and Low Life in Italy*, an epistolary novel (*roman par lettres*) published in 1911. At the time Landor was one of Larbaud's major interests. He had worked on a doctoral thesis on Landor and actively collaborated in the production of Stephen Wheeler's edition of the complete works. Larbaud often committed himself to such causes, especially if he felt a work needed rescuing from neglect or oblivion.

Larbaud created a shorter novel than Landor's original by extracting a sequence of letters that trace a tragic love story between the English protagonist and the innocent Italian maiden he courts. She belongs to the local establishment and her family disapproves of the proposed marriage with Edward Talboys. Landor is revealed as a subtle psychologist and finds in Larbaud the perfect interpreter for the Tuscan idyll. Landor's Italy and Larbaud's are the real marriage in this translation.

Toward the end of the translation there may be an allusion to the famous words of Caliban: "Got a new master, got a new man" in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "Master is another man." Larbaud may possibly not have noticed this as he translates simply: "On a changé mon maître." (*The Complete Works of Walter Savage Landor* Vol. X *High and Low life in Italy* New York, Barnes & Noble [Methuen Library Reprints] p.159 Cf. W S Landor *Hautes et Basses Classes en Italie* Paris, Beaumont 1911 p. 59)

Some Larbaldians have seen in this translation from Landor a source of the "Angiola Caccace" episode in Larbaud's only full length novel A. *O. Barnabooth*. In his diary (*journal intime*),which takes up most of the novel, Barnabooth relates a conversation with another of the characters, his friend the Marquis de Putouarey, who, during a sojourn in Naples arranges to support the seductive Angiola for a time while the numerous men in her family exploit him as much as they can. The mother figure is important here as it is she who agrees to the financial terms of this aventure and in a sense is the *metteur en scène*. However this episode is an extravagant *comédie de moeurs*, and in that respect unlike Landor's piece except to the extent that there is implicit satire in the latter. Nonetheless there are structural similarities: in each it is the matriarch who pulls the strings and in each there is a failure to integrate the heroine into a society other than her own. They are important because they show not only Larbaud's understanding of the Italian family of both periods but also his remarkable versatility. In fact in his original work Larbaud was able to perform in virtually every genre, including social satire.

Whitman

He was also a considerable poet, as Barnabooth's poetry had already revealed in the 1908 edition. This poetry, attributed to his "heteronym," had fictitious sources, explained in the *Biographie de M. Barnabooth*, and real sources as well. In both we find that these are essentially the French symbolist tradition and Whitman, whose work made a deep impression on Larbaud from the age of eighteen, only seven years after Whitman's death. In *Les Poésies de Barnabooth* there are many lines which deliberately emulate Whitman's *vers libres* so that recognizing their Whitmanesque rhythm might become a source of interest for francophone readers familiar with Whitman, although at the time of their first publication Whitman had not yet been translated into French. (Larbaud, typically, was able to hail Whitman's translation into Italian before the Bazalgette translation appeared in France in 1912.) Such lines may seem a parody of Whitman but Larbaud assumes that his character Barnabooth has assimilated Whitman as a natural poetic influence of the period

since Barnabooth's poetry is situated among many poetic influences, this being an example of the kind of literary game Larbaud enjoyed.

He was therefore eminently qualified to translate Whitman when *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, under the direction of André Gide, undertook to publish a number of Whitman translations in an effort to improve on Bazalgette. These were preceded by a superb synthesis of the *état présent* of Whitman studies by Larbaud, who also translated the major poem *The Sleepers* (*Les Dormeurs*). The book was published in 1918 although it seems that Larbaud`s translation was carried out several years earlier at a time when he had not only been very active as a poet himself but had become intimately familiar with the work of his great contemporary poets (and friends) including Claudel, Fargue and St.John Perse, then known as Alexis St.Léger Léger. (Cf. Whitman, Walt *Oeuvres Choisies* Paris, Gallimard (NRF) 1918 pp 282 - 294)

We may therefore expect this translation to be genuinely Whitmanian in French and we do find pleasing equivalents:

> "Onward we move, a gay gang of blackguards! with mirth-shouting music
> and wild-flapping pennants of joy!"

> "Et en avant nous allons, brave bande de vauriens! dans la musique de nos
> cris de joie, et le claquement fou des oriflammes de notre gaîté."

Larbaud, who had already revealed the poetry of Perse in a noteworthy article in *La Phalange*, seems to find his solution to translating Whitman in occasional echoes of Perse's *Eloges* and the parts of *La Gloire des Rois* that were published in 1910. Similarly Perse's manner of extending the poetic vocabulary to specialized and esoteric realms could be reflected in lines such as:

> "The consumptive, the erysipalite, the idiot, he that was wrong'd,"

> " Le phtisique, celui qui est atteint d'érésypèle, l'idiot, l'homme à qui on a fait tort."

Finding poetic qualities in technical words like "érésypèle" was also typical of Perse and seems to unite Larbaud's creative enthusiasms for the work of both poets as the rhythm of the translation does as well. David S. Reynolds, in *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York, Knopf, 1995) points out (p.275) that *The Sleepers* is "perhaps the only surrealist poem of the nineteenth century, remarkable in its anticipation of later experiments." It is precisely this quality of evolving experimentalism that probably appealed to Larbaud who also admired the primitive freedom expressed by Whitman and American culture in general, qualities he could not enjoy in Europe, according to Patrick

MacCarthy in his interesting unpublished thesis *Valery Larbaud and English Literature* (p. 44).

Butler

We now arrive at the most significant of all of Larbaud's "alter egos" in *La République des Lettres*: Samuel Butler. It seems that Larbaud, although encouraged by Arnold Bennett and André Gide, did not immediately appreciate Butler's importance both as a debunker of false values and the creator of a humanism deriving in part from his original evolution theory and his admiration for the life of rural Piedmont, where he sojourned almost every year. But once Larbaud had understood that a major English writer, Shaw's master, in many respects comparable not only to Goethe but also to Montaigne and even Pascal, had not been translated into French, and once he had made a thorough study of all of Butler's published works as they were available before the publication of the definitive "Shrewsbury" edition, he became totally captivated and felt he had found "une âme soeur" despite what was for him the hurdle of Butler's agnosticism.

Larbaud himself had written satires in his youth. One, *Gaston D'Ercoule*, is about a snobbish young man in a small provincial city (a transparent thrust at Vichy) a large fragment of which was discovered by Robert Mallet and published in the "Pléiade" edition of Larbaud's works. Another is to be found in the caricature of the myths surrounding the very rich in the New World. It takes the form of the fictitious "Biographie" of Barnabooth in the first edition of his poems: *Poèmes par un riche amateur* (1908) already mentioned.

Larbaud's translations of five of Butler's books were carried out between 1915 and 1919. Erewhon was the first to appear in 1920. Ainsi va toute chair came out in 1921, La Vie et l'habitude in 1922, Nouveaux Voyages en Erewhon in 1924 and Carnets in 1936.

Erewhon

Erewhon , which Butler had published anonymously in 1872, belongs in the lineage of satire that is now termed the "satirical dystopia," and which had been revived from classical models during the Renaissance. It is actually a "dystopia" only partially, being at other times a "utopia" expressing his vision of the ideal society. Inevitably *Erewhon* reminds readers of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and Butler did of course make a careful study of this famous predecessor in preparation for Erewhon, resulting in occasional echoes of Swift's prose in his own. Larbaud, in creating a French Butler, had no difficulty in locating a French source absorbed by Swift: Cyrano de Bergerac's Etats *de la lune et du soleil*, (1656) a copy of which is to be found in Larbaud's library. He also reread Voltaire's *Candide* and a number of other eighteenth century French works (Chamfort, Senancour etc.) in preparation for his translation.

Gulliver's Travels had been translated into French in the eighteenth century by Abbé Desfontaines whose views on translation were creative in the extreme: not only did he use the censor's scissors at times but, as he says in a letter to Swift, he added certain elements "selon que votre sensibilité échauffait la mienne." (Samuel Butler, *Nouveaux Voyages en Erehon,* Paris, Gallimard, 1924, p. xxiv) Larbaud found this comment significant in terms of the evolution of translation theory which only began to express a need for more scrupulous precision at a later period in the eighteenth century.

(In passing, the bitter rivalry that developed between Voltaire and Abbé Desfontaines could be remembered. When Voltaire gave Desfontaines his *Essay on Epic Poetry* for translation into French he found a major *contresens* in the French version and publicly made great fun of it.)

In his very perceptive and enthusiastic study of Butler published as a preface to the French *Erewhon* in 1920, Larbaud remarked that in many respects Butler was still very contemporary. Europe was undergoing "une crise de valeurs" at the time as reflected for example in Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. Gide, in fact, showed a keen interest in the Butler translations, reading the proofs as they became available. It is even possible that the counterfeiter allegory was suggested to him by Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* and that the literary roots of French existentialism could be shown to have a Butlerian source among others. One could refer here to the second line of Chapter 57 of *The Way of All Flesh.* (Ernest the anti-hero, not an ordained priest, has come under the influence of a wayward brother.)

"He had fallen, as I have shown, among a gang of spiritual thieves or coiners, who passed the basest metal upon him without his finding it out…." (S.B. *The Way of All Flesh*, 1903, Signet Classic, The New American Library, New York, 1960, p. 233).

"Ainsi que je l'ai fait voir, il était tombé au milieu d'une bande de voleurs ou de faux-monnayeurs de la vie intellectuelle, qui lui passaient toute espèce de pièces fausses sans qu'il s'en rendît compte…" (S.B. *Ainsi Va Toute Chair,* Paris, Gallimard, (1921), 1936, p. 259)

Thus, from our perspective, it is by translating "coiners" as "faux-monnayeurs" and "spiritual" as "la vie intellectuelle" that Larbaud succeeds in this passage in placing Butler in the intellectual context of the 1920s.

Before looking at examples of Larbaud's translation of *Erewhon* it is noteworthy that after the narrator has "crossed the range" and arrived inadvertantly in Erewhon (in Chapter V) he comes out of a deep sleep to the sound of tinkling bells and then sees two beautiful girls who hurry away. This is reminiscent not only of Gulliver but also of the Nausicaa episode in the *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* is present as an undercurrent here rather as it is in Joyce's *Ulysses*. There also seems to be an augury of Butler's later theory of

Nausicaa as the authoress of the *Odyssey* and of his own future translations of Homer in the 1890s.

Turning to the text of the translation we could stop at Chapter XV ("Les Banques Musicales") where Butler's satire is aimed at the Anglican Church, as it is again, more forcefully still, in Chapter XVII ("Ydgrun et les Ydgrunistes"). It is possible that Larbaud may have had reservations about Butler's radical anticlericalism; however he manages to make it blend with the tradition of French satire, especially as it existed in the eighteenth century. In this passage the narrator is observing life in one of the "musical banks":

"a sinister-looking person in a black gown came and made unpleasant gestures at me for peeking." S. B. *Erewhon* (1872) Signet Classic, The New American Library 1960, p.116.

"un homme en robe noir, l'air sombre et méchant, s'approcha et me fit des gestes menaçants parce que je regardais." S. B. *Erewhon* Tr. V. L. Gallimard, 1920 p. 101.

The tone and manner of Voltaire in *Candide* are clear. Regarding the education of students destined for the priesthood, which the narrator sees as an indoctrination, he says:

'...they had had the misfortune to have been betrayed into a false position at an age for the most part when their judgment was not matured, and after having been kept in studied ignorance of the real difficulties of the system." (Ibid.p.121)

...ils avaient eu le malheur d'avoir été placés malgré eux dans une situation fausse à un âge où la plupart d'entre eux n'avaient pas encore de maturité de jugement, et après avoir été habilement tenus dans l'ignorance des vraies difficultés de l'Organisation." (Op. Cit. p.106)

When "false position" becomes *une situation fausse* it seems to foresee the almost obsessive use of the expression in Sartre and it becomes apparent that Larbaud places Butler in the movement toward the reinvention of ethics in the 1920s that would soon manifest itself in "littérature engagée" as it came to be understood, although Larbaud entertained serious reservations about that trend, as well as the use of literature for the purposes of the social sciences. However, as we shall see, there is, in the work of Larbaud, an implicit *engagement profond*.

But it is in Chapter XVII, "Ydgrun and the Ydgrundites," when the narrator quotes the opponents of a sect that believes in immortality, that one finds an especially radical manifesto of positive humanistic values whose advocacy is therefore twice removed from Butler, although this old satirical technique can disguise neither the depths of Butler's revolt nor his attack on fundamentalism. This is how these Erewhonians develop their critique of the immortality doctrine:

"...it would lead people to cheapen this present life, making it appear to be an affair of only secondary importance....the doctrine tended to encourage the poor in their improvidence, and in a debasing acquiescence in ills which they might well remedy." (Ibid. p. 136)

These words seem clearer and hence even more "revolutionary" in Larbaud's French and it would hardly be an exaggeration to suggest that in general the translation is stylistically an improvement on the English:

"...ils seraient amenés à faire trop peu de cas de la vie présente, que cette doctrine représentait comme une chose d'importance secondaire....cette doctrine tendait à encourager les pauvres dans leur imprévoyance, et dans leur avilissante tolérance à l`égard de maux dont ils étaient très capables de s'affranchir." (Op.Cit. pp. 120 - 121)

To the extent that it may be said that Valery Larbaud had a translation theory, such a theory would be a synthesis of "le bon sens" in translation rather than a new one in any way. Thus he returns to the image of the translator weighing his words on a pair of scales, "les balances du traducteur," long since invoked by Cicero and St. Jerome and familiar to all translators. In Anna-Marie Aldaz' thesis, *Valery Larbaud as Translator of Samuel Butler* (University of Oregon, 1969) this traditional notion of a balance (in its English sense) is extended further to include what she terms "compensation." Since translation cannot always be a matter of *mot-à-mot* as one is translating the effect of whole clauses and sentences, one may have to take a liberty in one place and compensate for it in another while ensuring that the effect of the whole sentence is faithfully rendered. Similarly Larbaud sees translators' "rights" as including suppression and substitution.

An example of such a balance through compensation is to be found in *The Book of the Machines* in *Erewhon*. Here the narrator discovers a very old treatise in which an Erewhonian sage, five hundred years before his arrival, had advocated the abolition of all machines because he was convinced that the idolatry of machines was threatening to turn Erewhon into a nation of slaves, victims of the very machines they had so cunningly evolved for centuries. Machines, that is, are seen as a form of accelerated evolution, an effect of Lamarck's "forward thrust" that Bergson would call *l'élan vital*. However the sage was convinced that machines represented evolution in an undesirable and ultimately disastrous direction to which people were blinded by the power of ingrained habit. Erewhon must therefore banish its machines before nature banished both machines and people in her Darwinian processes of natural selection and survival of the fittest. (The abolition of machines is later accomplished by decree during Erewhon's revolution.)

Here is a key sentence in the sage's exhortation to his fellow citizens:

"Our bondage will *steal upon* us noiselessly and by imperceptible *approaches*."(Ibid. pp. 194-195)

"Notre esclavage *s'approchera* de nous sans bruit et à *pas* imperceptibles."(Op. Cit. p.181)

The concepts of "stealth" and "approaches" are interchanged and the cognate adjective "imperceptible" is moved from one to the other, the noun "approaches" suggesting the French verb "s'approcher," and "steal upon" suggesting the French noun "pas" which conjures up the motion of a predator. The compensation is thus achieved within the sentence, which is translated precisely.

When appropriate, Larbaud also brings out the common roots of certain words and phrases of the text and the *métatexte* (as Professor Barbara Folkart terms the translated version in her major study "Métatextualité et Traduction", *Revue Canadienne de Littérature comparée,* décembre 1986, pp. 548-584). Here, for example, Hamlet's famous soliloquy on suicide is summarized for an Erewhonian, who comments:

"If a man cuts his throat he is *at bay*." (Ibid.p.137)

"Lorsqu'un homme se tranche la gorge c'est qu'il est *aux abois*." (Op. Cit. p.121)

This of course is, etymologically, the perfect *mot juste* as we are going back to the common origin of this metaphor of baying hounds in the Anglo-Norman dialect of French.

There are also examples in the Butler translations of quotations from other works which have already been translated into French. In *Erewhon* two lines from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are quoted as a couplet (Ch. XVI "Arowhena") when the narrator is introduced to the king of Erewhon and makes an amusing "faux pas" by reciting them to the king:

"There's a divinity doth hedge a king,
Rough hew him how we may."

These, then, are two separate lines each occurring in a separate act but combined as in the game of misquotations in which Butler and his friend Miss Savage indulged. Larbaud provides his own translation and then, in the *Notes du Traducteur*, gives Pierre Letourneur's eighteenth century version (Tr. p. 223):

Larbaud: Quelque chose de divin protège encore les rois,
Si informes que soient les blocs que nous en ayons faits.

Letourneur: Il est une force divine qui environne et défend la majesté des rois

Quelqu'informe qu'en soit le plan ébauché par l`homme.

It seems that in the second line Larbaud follows Letourneur in using the word *informe* but improves on him with *les blocs*, suggesting the verb "hew" in the original English text.

The Way of All Flesh

Butler's satirical *Bildungsroman The Way of All Flesh* (*Ainsi va toute chair*) was to become a much greater success in its French translation than *Erewhon*, possibly because of the universal qualities which Larbaud had recognized in it. (Maurice Martin du Gard thought the French *Erewhon* "ennuyeux.") It also corresponds to a particular type of novel which Lukacs had admired and to which Lucien Goldmann drew attention in France: the novel that depicts a "degraded" society through the eyes of a protagonist who is its victim and therefore also "degraded," but who is ultimately capable of achieving a new equilibrium in his own life on a foundation of new values.

In this story of Ernest Pontifex, the young anti-hero who thinks he wants to be a priest, there is another allusion to some of Hamlet's famous words (this time from the end of Act I) which Butler parodies (Ch. 55). Only certain phrases of the original remain, and Larbaud appears not to have used an existing French translation of *Hamlet* for them:

"The world was *out of joint*, and instead of feeling that it was *a cursed spite* that he was *born to set it right*, he thought he was just the kind of person that was wanted for the job." (SB *The Way of All Flesh*, Signet, p.228)

"Le monde *allait tout de travers*, et au lieu de sentir que c'était *une vraie malédiction* pour lui que *d'être né avec la mission de le remettre sur la bonne voie,* il pensait qu'il était exactement l'espèce d'homme à qui cette tâche convenait..." (SB *Ainsi va toute chair,* Paris, Gallimard, 1936, pp 252-253)

These allusions to Shakespeare's well known lines are rendered in the same unassuming but very correct prose style that we find everywhere else in the translated narrative. Consequently one might wonder whether most readers would recognize their source, which would have to be read *en filigrane*. This prose translation nonetheless maintains the ironic tone of Butler's original.

The young Ernest, in this *situation fausse* in which he is training to be a priest (a projection of the young Butler) is constantly observed by the narrator (a projection of the mature Butler) who, at one point, learns about Ernest's life in a seedy apartment building. When Ernest decides it is time to convert some of the other tenants, beginning with a wife beater who lives directly above him, the novel becomes as much a vehicle of satire as any comedy by Shaw:

"If the man were to be violent what should he do? Paul had fought with wild beasts at Ephesus...but perhaps they were not very wild wild beasts; a rabbit and a canary are wild beasts; but formidable or not as wild beasts go, they would, nevertheless stand no chance against St. Paul...." (SB *The Way of All Flesh,* Signet, p.237)

"Si cet homme s'emportait que ferait Ernest? Saint Paul avait lutté contre des animaux sauvages à Ephèse...mais peut-être que ce n'était pas (sic) des animaux sauvages très sauvages; un lapin et un canari sont des animaux sauvages; mais féroces ou non, ces animaux sauvages n'avaient aucune chance de vaincre Saint-Paul...."(Op. Cit. Gallimard p.263)

The mere fact that St. Paul is portrayed in this way could easily seem irreverent, which of course it is, especially when Butler continues:

"The miracle would have been if the wild beasts escaped, not that St. Paul should have done so." (Id.)

"Le miracle eût été que les animaux sauvages en réchappassent et non que St. Paul les vainquît." (Op. Cit. p.263)

By belabouring this point Butler seems to infer that things could have been the other way around but it is more difficult to see this "insinuendo" (Butler's *mot-valise*) in the very "correct" French translation. Larbaud was always irritated at Butler's irreligiosité imbécile as he called it, so we may be sure that this is not a passage in which we can observe a sense of his identity with Butler.

On the other hand there are passages that seem made for Larbaud, bringing out the affinity between the two humanists. Their styles of travel through continental Europe are often expressed in similar terms. Larbaud might have identified with this evocation of a stop in Marseilles when Ernest and Overton (the narrator) are on their way to Italy. Ernest is recovering from a nervous breakdown resulting from the disturbing events of the novel's central crisis:

"I remember being ill once in a foreign hotel myself and how much I enjoyed it. To lie there careless of everything, quiet and warm, and with no weight upon the mind, to hear the *clinking* of the plates in the far-off kitchen as the scullion rinsed them and put them by; to watch the soft shadows come and go upon the ceiling as the sun came out or went behind a cloud; to listen to the pleasant murmuring of the fountain in the court below, and the *shaking* of the bells on the horses' collars...not only to be a lotus-eater but to know that it was one's duty to be a lotus eater." (Op. Cit., p.327)

"Je me souviens d'avoir été malade, une fois, dans un hôtel, à l'étranger, et je me rappelle combien cela était agréable. J'étais couché, bien tranquille, au chaud, sans aucune espèce de souci...j'entendais le *bruit lointain* des assiettes qu'un marmiton lavait et posait l'une sur l'autre, là-bas dans les cuisines; je suivais des yeux les ombres atténuées qui paraissaient et disparaissaient sur le plafond selon le mouvement des nuages sur le soleil; j'écoutais le joli murmure de la fontaine, en bas, dans la cour, et le *tintement* des clochettes sur les colliers des chevaux....Non seulement j`étais un mangeur de lotus mais je savais que mon devoir était d'en être un...."(Op. Cit., p.360)

The passage also provides insight into the "epicurean" balance between work and leisure that both of these two model writers apparently aspired; when Larbaud, in his various studies of Butler, sees an epicurean in him, he is at the same time expressing an aspect of his own philosophical ideal.

Butler's admiration for Italy and his ability to immerse himself in everyday Italian life, as Larbaud also did, means that they quite literally crossed paths in northern Italy, Larbaud pointing out the exact hotel in Turin where Butler had stayed. In his essay "Le Vain Travail de voir divers pays" in *Jaune Bleu Blanc* (Pléiade, p.864) he observes that Butler was an important participant in the debate in the world of art history in his time. There had been an attempt to redefine the Renaissance, partly as a reaction against the Preraphaelite movement. Thus Butler attempted to rehabilitate such remarkable sixteenth century artists of western Piedmont as Gaudenzio Ferrari, Giovanni d' Enrico and Tabachetti, whom he saw as belonging to the real Preraphaelites. In *Alps and Sanctuaries* and *Ex Voto* towns and villages in which he sojourned such as Varallo and Varese (especially their "sacri monti") also inspired his own work as an artist, yielding sketches, paintings, and photographs. This aspect of his work is studied in detail by Elinor Shaffer in the significant and handsomely produced *Erewhons of the Eye*. (London, Reaktion, 1988.)

Life and Habit

Probably the most ambitious and challenging of the Butler translations was *La Vie et l'Habitude*, Larbaud's translation of the first of the book length treatises in which Butler developed the neo-Lamarckian theory of evolution which permeated most of his other work. Larbaud was genuinely impressed with *Life and Habit* to the point of considering it to have been "la vraie *Evolution Créatrice*" in a letter to Gide. (V.L. *Lettres à André Gide,* Stols, LaHaye, Paris, 1948, p. 121). In this work Butler is not yet totally opposed to Darwin; he merely modifies Darwin by working in the lineage of Lamarck and the earlier *transformistes*. Larbaud immersed himself thoroughly in this field before beginning his translation.

During his New Zealand years (early 1860s) on his isolated sheep ranch, Butler became fascinated with Darwin's *Origin of Species* which had only recently appeared. However readings in earlier evolution theory and his own observations led him to adopt the

position that Darwin had been too "mechanistic" in his premise that evolution combined the principle of natural selection (i.e. pure chance but including its possibilities of variations) with the principle of the survival of the fittest. He thought that Darwin had dismissed the work of the earlier *transformistes* too arbitrarily, including that of his own grandfather Erasmus Darwin and especially Lamarck's, whose theory that acquired characteristics could be transmitted to later generations he thought required a more cautious and respectful examination.

Curiously enough, Darwin does make statements in *The Origin of Species* that sound Lamarckian. For example in Chapter VIII "Instinct" we read: "No complex instinct can possibly be produced through natural selection, except by slow and gradual accumulation of numerous slight yet profitable variations." (Darwin, *The Origin of Species,* Modern Library Paperbacks, 1998 p.320). However in these passages Darwin is not necessarily suggesting that variations are caused by acts of will power or effort as Lamarck had done and as Butler was to do with his premise of an inherent design.

Darwin and Butler were participating in one of the major debates of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a debate that included many participants in their time as in its continuity to the present day. Much of this debate had been articulated in French so that Larbaud, in his translation of *Life and Habit*, would have little difficulty in placing Butler in a French language context, enabling a further development of his creation of a "French" Butler.

Another remarkable feature of the debate at that time is that it depended entirely on observation, deduction and hypothesis, given that the work of Gregor Mendel on the genetics of peas, and his discovery of chromosomes and genes, because of the long delay in its diffusion, was unknown to Darwin and Butler: that is, the actual biology of hereditary transmission. However it is noteworthy that this circumstance has recently been shown not to have affected the value of Butler's arguments.

In *Life and Habit* (1878) Butler quotes liberally from a French source: Théodule Ribot *L'Hérédité, étude psychologique sur ses phénomènes, ses lois, ses causes, ses conséquences* (Paris 1873). In his "Notes du Traducteur" for his translation, *La Vie et l'Habitude*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1922) Larbaud explains that by using the original edition of Ribot's work he had found all the quotations made by Butler and had given them in Ribot's French. It is typical of Butler that he uses the words and phrases of others as sounding boards for establishing his own position.

Modifying Lamarck's hypothesis on the transmission of acquired characteristics, Butler set out, in *Life and Habit*, to show that life, over a great number of generations, does make a series of very small choices resulting, for example, from a need to adapt to new environmental conditions. These choices may be described as purposefulness, a striving or

minimal acts of will. (Bergson's phrase "l'élan vital" is clearly appropriate here.) In philosophical terms, life is "teleological" in this view.

Butler was interested in the ways in which certain acquired skills, once they are well practised, are performed without conscious effort as "second nature." He used the example of the piano virtuoso among others. He believed that once skills and habits among sentient beings had become unconscious, they (or a predisposition to develop them) could then be transmitted to the next generations.

His thesis was that evolution includes, therefore, more than mere "luck" as the Darwinians thought. This theory was considered "heretical" by a majority of scientists before the second world war. Niels Bohr was among the first to defend the teleological principle in recent times. More recently still, a major work has not only supported Butler but gives the theory great prominence in its final chapter (Lynn Margulis & Dorion Sagan *What is Life* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1995).

It was important to Butler to demonstrate that organic life must, of necessity, be a continuum from one generation to the next through the transmission of unconscious memory. As he puts it, the ovum is a "continuation of the personality of every ovum in the chain of ancestry....This process cannot stop short of the primordial cell." (Samuel Butler, *Life and Habit,* (1877), Shrewsbury, vol. 4, p.70)

In his translation of *Life and Habit* Larbaud continually clarifies Butler's text by improving on his style, which is sometimes weak in logical connections and at other times doesn't emphasize the important points effectively. Once again the French version makes the argumentation much clearer and more readable than the original:

"The weak point in Mr. Darwin's theory *would seem to be a deficiency, so to speak, of motive power* to originate and direct the variations which time is to accumulate." (SB Ibid. p. 261)

"Le point faible de la théorie de M. Darwin, c'est qu'on n'y trouve pas ce qu'on pourrait appeler 'la puissance motrice' qui produit et dirige les variations que le temps se charge d'accumuler." (Samuel Butler, *La Vie et l'habitude,* Paris, Gallimard, 1922, p. 241)

Here Larbaud moves from a somewhat vague and roundabout manner to a much bolder, unhesitant phrasing that reinforces Butler's argument.

"That creatures have conceived the idea of *making themselves* like other creatures or objects which it was to their advantage or pleasure to *resemble* ...."
(SB Ibid. p.164)

"Qu'il y a des êtres qui ont conçu l'idée de *s'efforce*r de se rendre semblables à d'autres êtres ou à des objets qu'ils avaient avantage ou plaisir à *copier*..." (Op. Cit., p. 191).

In this last example, concerning mimetic achievements, as in some butterflies, we can see how Larbaud brings in the idea of choice and applied will power through the use of the verb "s'efforcer" for "making themselves" and "copier" for "resemble," thus reinforcing Butler's main point more than Butler himself does. Larbaud is able to take this liberty of substitution of one concept with another with a clear conscience as a result of his intimate familiarity with Butler's thesis. As Maurice Pergnier points out in *Les Fondements socio-linguistiques de la traduction* (Ch.I : "La Traduction dans la théorie générale du langage") it is the "message" that is translated, not words or again, it is "le contenu" rather than "le contenant."(op. cit., Presses Universitaires Lille, 1993, pp. 18-19) As we have seen, Larbaud subscribes to such liberties in his essay *De la Traduction*.

It is quite possible, but not certain, that his translation of *Life and Habit* (*La Vie et l'habitude*) may have had some influence. Maurice Maeterlinck was clearly interested in it and attended Larbaud's second lecture on Butler in Geneva. His *L'Ame de la fourmi blanche could* be studied from that point of view. Jacques Monod, more recently, refers to "le projet biologique" in *Le Hasard et la nécessité* (1970) but further inquiry would be necessary to determine whether or not he had read Butler. In England Butler's theory has recently interested Rupert Sheldrake, the author of *The Presence of the Past*. (1988)

On the other hand it is certain that Larbaud's preoccupation with Butler's evolution theories is visible in his own work. One example is to be found in the essay *La Lenteur*, first published in 1930. It contains the fantasy of the the first class railway car compartments that yearn to be liberated from the train and go wherever they please over the road network. The railway car then breaks away from the train at the first opportunity and proliferates, leading to such sub-species as the car, the airplane, the tank etc. The motor car then multiplies "too easily for our peace of mind" and becomes a servant that is not always wanted, leading to the situation of the sorcerer's apprentice with the potential risk that it might become a "servante-maîtresse." (Pléiade, pp. 1043 - 1045)

Here Butler's view (from his earliest writings on the subject) that the rapid development of machines in his time and ours is a manifestation of the same applied volition he sees in nature, both as a benefit and a threat, seems to be adopted by Larbaud. Like Butler, he doesn't conclude that we should take one position or the other but there is an implication that we should be on our guard. The railway car has a "cunning" design in this fable whose implementation has significant results; it could be seen as a reflection of Butler's hypothesis.

Again, in Larbaud's *conte Le Vaisseau de Thésée* (1932) we have the image of Theseus' flagship preserved in the port of Athens so long that every plank has been replaced several times but its "idea" has remained intact. The protagonist observes:

"Notre forme change, mais l'idée de nous-mêmes en nous-mêmes, indestructible, demeure...et je ne peux m'empêcher de sentir à chaque instant la solidarité de moi-même avec toutes mes pensées et tous mes actes aussi loin que peut aller ma mémoire consciente et au-delà encore, aussi profondément que plonge ma mémoire inconsciente." (Pléaide, p.1097)

This passage seems to be inspired by Butler's chapter on identity in *Life and Habit*, and is referring to Butler's use of the word "unconscious," not Freud's, although at the time this work was composed Larbaud was of course thoroughly familiar with Freud. The expression *mémoire inconsciente* occurs in the translation. Butler, like some scientists today, postulated that unconscious memory was inherited although the precise way in which that might happen was unknown to him and is still unknown today.

Note-Books

As we have seen, Larbaud, in his translations of Butler, manages to place Butler in a French context so that Butler relates to a number of major works of French literature. That is especially true of Butler's *Note-Books* which might be called his *Pensées* since they may be said to belong to the same *genre* as Pascal's. In fact the argument in Chapter XX ("First Principles") concerning free will versus necessity might be said to be in the manner of Pascal. However in the very personal anecdotes of much of the Note-Books, in which Butler seems to take us backstage into his workshop as Larbaud does in many of the chapters of *Technique* (now incorporated into Vol. VIII of the *Oeuvres Complètes*: *Sous l'Invocation de St. Jérôme)* Larbaud prefers to draw a parallel with Montaigne and develops it at some length in the *Avant-Propos du Traducteur* of his translation (S. B., *Carnets,* Paris, Gallimard, 1936 pp. 11-12): "J'incline à penser que Butler avait lu Florio et que, par exemple, l'anecdote de la pie imitatrice des trompettes dans *La Vie et l'Habitude*, vient plutôt de *L'Apologie de Raymond Sebond* que directement de Plutarque."

He even admits to having created some pastiches of Montaigne for his own amusement from some of Butler's notes. More seriously he comments:

"... on y retrouvait, tout naturellement produit, cet air de loisir, ce ton de conversation bien assise, ces précautions dans le progrès du discours, enfin tout cela qui ...nous attarde si confortablement dans nos lectures de Montaigne." (ibid. p.12)

The section of Chapter XX entitled "Free-Will and Necessity" refers to the title of another of Butler's books on evolution, *Luck or Cunning*? , because the next sections draws a parallel between free-will and cunning and also between necessity and luck and although

the argumentation is quite closely knit here, Larbaud's translation still seems to echo the manner of Montaigne:

"[Free will] is quite as much a *sine qua non* for action as necessity is; for who would try to act if he did not think that his trying would influence the result?" (The Note-Books of Samuel Butler, London, Fifield ,1912, p.317)

"Le libre-arbitre est donc, tout autant que la nécessité, une condition *sine qua non* de l'action; car qui voudrait seulement agir s'il ne croyait pas que sa volonté influencerait le résultat de son acte?" (S.B., Op. Cit., p. 314)

At one point in the translation of *Note-Books* Larbaud is confronted with a quotation from Butler's namesake, "Samuel Butler l'Ancien," the author of *Hudibras*, (1663) a satire in verse composed under the English Restoration ridiculing the republican cause:

"Surely the pleasure is as great
Of being cheated as to cheat." (S.B., *Note-Books,* p. 208)

This poem had already been translated into French by J. Townley in the eighteenth century (1757) an instance of a successful translation from the maternal language into a second language (Voltaire also attempted a translation) and it would seem that on this occasion Larbaud used the text of Townley's translation:

"Le plaisir est bien aussi grand
D'être déçu que décevant." (S.B., *Carnets,* p. 214)

Although the primary meaning of *décevoir* is still "to deceive" it is clearly used less and less in that sense in standard French now than it was in the eighteenth century. It might be said *en passant* that Larbaud was an expert on appropriate usage of words that are in the process of becoming archaic. (Cf. "Balistique" on the word *retardement* in *Sous l'Invocation de St. Jérôme,* O C VIII, p.259).

The *Note-Books* also contain one of Butler's rare comments on the processes of translation. These are valuable because he translated Homer in such a way that it "would not be jaded by academic study of the language." (*Note-Books,* p.98) Elinor Shaffer points out that this shift toward colloquial language from the artificially archaic language of Gladstone, for example, or the Biblical language of Butcher and Lang in popular Victorian translations of Homer, eventually led to the style of Leopold Bloom during his peregrinations around Dublin in James Joyce's Ulysses, creating an important link between Butler and Joyce. (Op. Cit. p.168 & 171)

Regarding his own translation of *The Odyssey* Butler writes:

"A translation is at best a dislocation, a translation from verse to prose is a double dislocation and corresponding further dislocations are necessary if an effect of deformity is to be avoided." (*Note-Books,* p.198)

"Une traduction, si bonne qu'elle soit, n'est jamais qu'une dislocation; et la traduction en prose d'un ouvrage en vers est une double dislocation. Si donc on veut éviter qu'elle produise une impression de difformité il lui faut subir des dislocations partielles correspondant à ces dislocations générales." (*Carnets,* p.204)

It is significant that Butler here expresses the notion of "compensation" which Aldaz sees as an important aspect of Larbaud's technique as a translator. Butler makes another comment on translation in *Erewhon Revisited*, this time indirectly, in the mouth of the narrator, Higgs, son of the narrator of *Erewhon*. In this instance he is translating from Erewhonian into English:

"[Je] traduirai tout avec cette liberté sans laquelle aucune traduction ne s'élève au-dessus du mot à mot." (S B *Nouveaux Voyages en Erewhon*, Paris, Gallimard, 1924, p. 56.)

Translators are thus viewed by both Butler and Larbaud as having a mandate to reincarnate the original text with considerable freedom. Here Butler must have the last word: "If (*The Odyssey*) is ever to be well translated it must be by some high-spirited English girl who has been brought up at Athens." (*Note-Books,* p. 198)

Ulysses

For Larbaud *le domaine anglais* in literature naturally included that of Ireland, for which he had shown a particular interest. Since he was always prospecting for new talent it is not surprising that he frequented the famous bookshops of Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach on the Rue de l'Odéon, resulting in his discovery of James Joyce's *Ulysses* while it was still being written and declaring himself "raving mad about *Ulysses*" ("fou d'*Ulysse*"). He gave his lecture on the work of Joyce at La Maison des Amis des Livres (Adrienne Monnier's bookshop) a year later, on December 7, 1921, having already translated some passages from *Ulysses* himself. His final role in its translation was that of a "rédacteur en chef" although Larbaud is remembered in France today as the "translator" of *Ulysses*. Even the revision of the translation meant an immense and disinterested sacrifice of his time (his diaries reveal that he often spent ten hours a day on it) a veritable "don de soi".

The statement on the title page of the Gallimard (Folio) edition admirably simplifies the structure of the team of translators: "Traduction d'Auguste Morel revue par Valery Larbaud, Stuart Gilbert et l'Auteur." It was Stuart Gilbert who published the guide to

Ulysses (*James Joyce's Ulysses*, 1930) which allows the reader to identify each of the episodes.

Is it possible to recognize, here and there, the mark of Larbaud's stylistic originality or mannerisms that might have resulted from his revision, in collaboration with Joyce himself? A familiarity with Larbaud's style might lead one to attempt this but any results would still be speculation. In order to be on firm ground we would need the hard evidence in his correspondence with Joyce and others. Fortunately James Ellmann, in his biography of Joyce, does give Larbaud's comments on Morel's translation of the first paragraph of the second part of *Ulysses* (Episode IV, "Calypso"). He quotes a letter from Larbaud to Joyce of June 14, 1928:

"Text:...'he like grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine tang of scented urine.'

Morel:... 'il aimait (les rognons de mouton au gril) qui gratifiaient ses papilles gustatives d'un fumet de chaix mâtiné d'un rien d'urine.'

"...'Fumet de chaix' is a *cliché*, while 'a fine tang' is not. 'Mâtiné de,' another cliché, 'd'un rien de' is both recherché and facile. The feeble strain of humour in the French sentence is vulgar; of the commercial-traveller sort; the way they talk when they try to talk 'well.'

I leave 'gratifiaient' because it is etymologically right; I accept 'papilles gustatives,' though the expression is a little *prétentieuse*, more 'learned' (cheap science) than the simple 'palate' of the text, because it gives equilibrium to the French sentence and arrests the reader's attention on that aspect of Mr. Bloom's physical life.

The rest I reject, and translate more literally....

Thus...the phrase stands as follows:..'il aimait (les rognons de mouton au gril) qui gratifiaient ses papilles gustatives d'une belle saveur au léger parfum d'urine.'

Text: 'Kidneys were in his mind as he...'
Morel: 'Il songeait à des rognons tout en...'

Of course, this is the meaning, but it is not a literary translation of a literary sentence. The humorous side of the phrase in the text is lost. I translate:

'Il avait des rognons en tête tandis qu'il....' " (Richard Ellmann *James Joyce,* New York, Oxford U.P., 1959 p.614)

One can only agree with Ellmann that Larbaud was "brilliantly sensitive to style." (id.)

Larbaud's now published correpondence with Adrienne Monnier, the first publisher of the translation, is another very valuable source for his opinions as editor of the Morel drafts. In a letter to Adrienne Monnier (June 17, 1924) referring to a "séance de traduction" hosted by Monnier, Larbaud comments on the language (*langage*) of Molly Bloom: "je faisais des efforts lamentables pour me rappeler des expressions populaires que pourtant je thésaurise dans mon coeur en tout pays. Ma femme de ménage de Paris dit en parlant de sa concierge: 'C'est une horreur de femme.' Voyez-vous une place où cella peut aller? Mais Molly Bloom n'est pas aussi plébéienne que l'avait faite Fargue. Je crois que le ton trouvé par Sylvia [Beach] est beaucoup plus juste. Molly a un beau vocabulaire bien vivant et plastique, vulgaire mais pas au point d'exclure les mots littéraires, enfin le vocabulaire de *Mallarmé*." (Valery Larbaud *Lettres à Adrienne Monnier et à Sylvia Beach*, Correspondence établie et annotée par Maurice Saillet, Paris, IMEC, 1991 p.163)

The remarkable poet Léon Paul Fargue, known as "le piéton de Paris," and a close friend of Larbaud's, was called upon to suggest French equivalents for slang and colloquial expressions in the original text.

In another letter to Monnier, (Oct. 6, 1927) Larbaud stresses his main point again: "Il me semble que [Morel] n'a pas bien saisi le caractère de Bloom, son niveau social, son degré d'ìnstruction. Même chose pour Molly; ils les fait beaucoup plus peuple et grossiers qu'ils ne le sont. Molly a souvent, chez lui, des mots de femme de bordel qu'elle n'a jamais dans Joyce, et Bloom parle ou pense avec des expressions de potache qui ne sont pas dans le texte. Exemple caractéristique:

Joyce: Like to give them the ODD cigarette. (Mr. Bloom et les cochers de fiacre dans *Les Lotophages*.)
Morel: J'aime leur allonger une VIEILLE sèche.... [*vieille* is a "contresens"]
Je corrige donc: "J'aime leur passer de temps à autre une cigarette." (ibid. p.317)

Thus, in his work on *Ulysse*, Larbaud constantly shows his masterful sensitivity to tone and the subtleties of the *langage* of various social backgrounds. He is also very expert on the *mise en valeur* of words and phrases, their positioning for the right effect. One might, for example, suspect Larbaud's intervention in the last words of Episode V, *Les Lotophages*: "languide et flottante fleur" (Joyce *Ulysse* I Paris Gallimard [Folio], 1976, p.128) in which the order of the original English has been maintained: "a languid floating flower." (Joyce *Ulysses* Penguin, 1969, p. 88)

This order is a little unusual in French usage, yet at the same time *languide et flottante* would be too prosaic if they followed *fleur*. As it is, an effect is created expressing the notion that we may "take for ganted" that the "lotus" is languid and floating rather than giving the concept the needless overemphasis it would have if the adjectives were placed after *fleur*. An important aspect of the style of Larbaud's modernism is that it is

experimental. Long adjectives coming before the noun they modify are one of Larbaud's "signatures."

This is nonetheless speculation. To return to his correspondence with Adrienne Monnier we find Larbaud's statement of Oct.1, 1927: "j'ose autant que possible; néologismes; mots agglutinés (odeurdemusc); je tâche de rendre le ton. Stuart Gilbert le demande...chaque personnage a son ton, ses tics, ses exclamations propres (ou sales, mais pas toujours)...et c'est cela qu'il faut traduire." (ibid p.312)

Again (Oct.6, 1927) Larbaud comments on what he considers a major problem with Morel's draft: "Je trouve la touche générale de Morel rude et grosse en présence de ce texte tout en nuances et en finesses....Joyce ne se moque pas de Bloom parce qu'il n'est pas un "Monsieur." ... Bloom est un "Monsieur" comme, et plus que, Bouvard et Pécuchet....Bloom et Molly [ne sont pas] nos inférieurs sociaux." (ibid p.317-318)

In a letter to Joyce a year later (Oct.2, 1928) Larbaud makes what is perhaps his best known revision in the translation:

Text: "Two shafts of soft daylight fell across the flagged floor."

Morel: "Deux flèches de jour tombaient moelleuses sur le sol dallé."

Larbaud: "Deux javelots de jour adouci tombaient rayant le sol dallé."

He also defends his version: "I prefer "javelots de jour" for several reasons:
1. it is longer; 2. it is uncommon and arrests the attention; 3. the alliteration j....j, gives it more strength; 4. it seems to me that it suggests the word "Apollo" more than "traits de soleil" would do...." (ibid. p.342)

A hurdle in the translation is that occasionally there are snatches of popular verse, well known to middle class anglophone readers but not to francophones. In *The Lotus Eaters* an unfinished line from a nursery rhyme that was fashionable at the time, ("Sing a Song o'Sixpence" from *Mother Goose*), runs through the mind of Leopold Bloom in his monologue as he arrives home: "Queen was in her bedroom eating bread and ------." (Ulysses p.76) The reader supplies the word "honey" from memory and also the word "parlour" for "bedroom." It is likely that Larbaud knew the rhyme since he had taken part in the cultural life of London at the time Milne was popular. (Otherwise S. Gilbert could have come to the rescue.) However this reference is not used in the translation although it is clear that *la reine* refers to Molly Bloom:

"la reine était dans son lit qui mangeait son pain bis, biribi." (*Ulysse* I p.110)

Another challenge in the translation is that some of the colloquial speech of Leopold Bloom and other characters in the novel presents a deformation of English words, for humorous effect, of a kind that is rarely considered permissible in French even in the transcription of dialect. The interests of onomatopoeia were apparently considered to supersede that principle, as in Episode 10, ("The Wandering Rocks") in which pigeons "roucoucooed." (*Ulysses* p. 227) Here Joyce is creating a portmanteau word by combining the English "coo" and the French "roucouler" which is thus already present in the English text. This leads to further play on "roucouler" in the translation and we get: "roucoulouhoulaient." (*Ulysse* I p.332 "Les Rochers Errants")

There are in fact many other onomatopoeic effects in the English text. Again in "The Wandering Rocks" ("Les Rochers Errants") a wicker basket is bedded with "rustling fibres." (*Ulysses* p. 226) Words such as "rustling" are well known to translators to be more characteristic of English than of French. The French equivalent found here for "rustling": "bruissantes," (*Ulysse* p. 330) is only a relative success.

In Episode 6 "Hades" ("Hadès") "the carriage rattled swiftly along" (*Ulysses* p.99) is rendered: "la voiture dinguait le long..." (*Ulysse* I p.143) Dinguer is colloquial and expresses a sound of bells so that the effect is translated even if the meaning is not that of "rattle." There is often a "compensation" for such substitutions in places where the French is more onomatopoeic than the English: "Whispering gallery walls" (*Ulysses* p.84) is brilliantly translated: "Murs murmurants des corridors..." (*Ulysse* I p. 122). However "the bell whirred again," (*Ulysses* p.130) is rendered merely as "la sonnerie recommença" (*Ulysse* p.188) that is, with no effort to provide a corresponding onomatopoeia in the translation.

At other times the "metatext" is more perplexing. For example the not unexpected words: "They've gone round to the Oval for a drink" (*Ulysses* p.132) appear in the translation as: "...partis prendre une consommation à l'Oval."(*Ulysse* p.191) The translation of "drink" as "consommation" would astonish aficionados of Larbaud's creative work because of an episode in the *nouvelle Mon Plus Secret Conseil* in which the protagonist observes to his lady that "consommation" has a pretentious, even vulgar ring to it whereas "boisson" is perfectly correct and corresponds to the English "drink." (In V L *Mon Plus Secret Conseil* Pléiade p.687.)

One can only suggest that since Larbaud and the narrator of the *nouvelle* are (technically) not the same person, Larbaud may have considered "consommation" appropriate in this particular context, possibly to maintain a tone of gentle irony.

On the other hand a clear example of a Larbaldian pattern of speech may be found in the very first episode, "Telemachus," at the point at which Stephen is in conversation with an Englishman named Haines on the subject of nationalities and national identity.

Haines remarks: “We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame.” (*Ulysses* p.27)

The final French version of the last sentence is: “La faute en est sans doute à l’Histoire.” (*Ulysse* 1 p. 34)

This *tournure* seems to be an echo of a seventeenth century Bourbonnais poet, (that is, Larbaud’s compatriot) of whose poetry Larbaud was especially fond, Jean de Lingendes. He points out in his studies of a number of lesser known sixteenth and seventeenth century French poets that Lingendes is remembered for only one line, a line that has since found its way into the *répertoire* of French sayings:

> “La faute en est aux dieux qui la firent si belle.”

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Concerning the works Larbaud translated from Spanish, we have detailed published accounts of the *praxis* of translation only in his correspondence with the Mexican diplomat and poet Alfonso Reyes. In both Spain and the Spanish speaking parts of Latin America a literary Renaissance was in progress at the time of the peak of Larbaud’s career (1918-1935). He lived in Spain for almost four years and read a vast number of works in Spanish (especially novels) while encouraging Latin American writers to find not only their inspiration but their literary formulae within the context of their own traditions, rather than emulating European models : in other terms to bridge the gap between Poe and Whitman. That is exactly what was beginning to happen at that time and of course this development has since yielded a great many works of great interest and value (Bioy Casares, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Vargas Llosa etc.) Borges was one of the great innovators of the 1920s and Larbaud seems to have been the first to write about Borges in France, in an article in *La Revue Européenne* in 1925.

Ramon Gomez de la Serna

One of Larbaud’s enthusiasms in Spanish was the work of the Spaniard Ramon Gomez de la Serna whom he knew personally, often meeting him at the café Pombo in Madrid (1917) where Ramon held spontaneous colloquia during which he would sometimes present his latest creations. Ramon’s *Greguerias* were somewhat outré and provocative short epigrammatic utterances. Larbaud translated and published a selection in

Paris in 1918 and then a larger one, in collaboration with Mathilde Pomès, in 1923 (Paris: Grasset, Les Cahiers Verts) under the titles *Echantillons* and *Criailleries* (the title "Piailleries" was also considered).

Larbaud was not less a classicist for being one of the artificers of "el modernismo." His own observations of human nature often led him to fashion outlandish epigrams such as this one, somewhat in the style of Ramon, which he had been able to do by attributing them to his character Barnabooth, that is before encountering the *Greguerias*:

"Il y a des choses qu'il faut savoir saisir au vol." (O C IV, p. 47)

Ricardo Guiraldes

In Latin America Larbaud was able to count among his close friends an influential associate of Borges', Ricardo Guiraldes, who supported and contributed to Borges' new literary review in Buenos Aires: *Proa*. In Argentina Guiraldes is still considered a national figure of importance and one of his novels, *Don Segundo Sombra*, has become the object of a cult. It is one of the last of the *gaucho* novels and among the first to celebrate life on the pampas for its intrinsic interest. This friendship has a certain symbolic resonance since Guiraldes may be seen as a Barnabooth of real life, a case of life imitating art, as if he had been invented by Larbaud: a poet and novelist working from a totally independent base (his vast *estancia* at San Antonio de Areco) and able to transcend national boundaries with the greatest of ease, a *cosmopolite* and "un vrai Parisien."

The French translation of *Don Segundo Sombra* by Marcelle Auclair, who had been brought up in Chile, was encouraged by Larbaud who promoted a whole program of translations of Latin American literature. He facilitated the translation of *Don Segundo Sombra* by arranging introductions for Marcelle Auclair to French and Argentine specialists who could assist her on technical points since this was considered a particularly challenging novel to translate.

After Guiraldes' premature death Larbaud translated some of his poetry as a tribute. *Poemas Solitarios (Poèmes Solitaires*) appeared in Larbaud's avant-garde review *Commerce* (Cahier XV, Printemps 1928). The text and the metatext are printed on opposite pages of this olive green issue and the translation usually overtraces the original very closely:

Text: Me he acostumbrado a estar solo.
Como el ombu se ha acostumbrado a la pampa.

Tr.: Je me suis habitué à être seul
Comme l'ombu s'est habitué à la pampa. (Ibid. pp.102 - 103)

Alfonso Reyes

The Larbaud - Reyes correspondence was published in a critical edition in with very detailed notes, by Paulette Patout (Paris, Didier, 1972). Here we have the exchanges of two peers. They were alike in many respects, Reyes also being a translator who, like Larbaud, wrote about translation. ("De la Traduccìon" in *La Experiencia Literaria* [Buenos Aires, Losada 1941]). Larbaud particularly liked Reyes' incantation on the Tarahumara Indians entitled *Yerbas del Taraumara* and undertook to translate it for *Commerce*. (This translation appeared in Cahier XIX, Printemps 1929.)

Paulette Patout reproduces the translation opposite the original (ibid. pp.182 - 191) as well as giving a later translation by Guy Levis-Mano (1952).

One problem in the names of tropical plants, as discussed by Larbaud and Reyes in their correspondence, arose when Larbaud was unable to find a French equivalent for *sangre de grado* in any of the specialized dictionaries ("les livres consulaires") to which he referred. It then occurred to him that "grado" must be a metathesis of "drago" and that sangre de drago corresponds to the French *sangdragon*, a red resin given off by the tropical tree known in French as *le dragonnier*. (*Drago* is archaic in Spanish.)

Reyes' position on translation in *La Experiencia Literaria* and *Mallarmé Entre Nosotros* (1938) is that the translator of a poem must himself be a poet in order to maintain the "flavour" (*la saveur*) of the original, adding another term to the qualities of the "contenu" that must be expressed by the "contenant." This notion of the "flavour" might not appeal to a linguist but it is actually highly significant in the writings of these two connaisseurs. Adrienne Monnier commented that when one reads Larbaud's work one is "eating it."

This leads to a problem in the translation of Larbaud's own creative work into other languages since this quality, which could be seen as a twentieth century equivalent to Coleridge's implicit notion of literature as drug, is of course a problem for translators. The mesmerizing *Fermina Marquez* is a case in poiint. (Justin O'Brien made an attempt to translate the *nouvelle Beauté mon beau souci* into English.)

Both Larbaud and Reyes struggle with the conflict between very free translation on the one hand, which nonetheless might succeed in rendering the essence, and on the other the very literal and "correct" but possibly "flat" translation that risks missing this *sens profond*. (Cf. Op. Cit. pp. 192 - 193 [Notes for letters 39 and 40])

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Larbaud translated a number of short works from Italian, sometimes collaborating with others including his companion Maria Nebbia who was of Italian origin. His translation of a series of extracts, which he particularly liked, from Italo Svevo's *Senilità*, appeared in Adrienne Monnier's journal *Le Navire d'Argent* (Février 1926) in the context of a tribute to Svevo. Larbaud had discovered this important novelist through Joyce, who had known and admired his work during his time in Trieste. He liked Svevo's use of interior monologue, especially in his greatest novel, *La Coscienza di Zeno*. *Senilità* (1898) belongs to the first of the two major periods in the history of Svevo's novels.

La Coscienza di Zeno was later to make a major contribution to the development of the novel by demonstrating a very early effect of Freudian psychoanalysis, being in the form of an autobiography requested by a psychiatrist. *Senilità*, on the other hand, is clearly pre-Freudian but nonetheless has undercurrents in its realistic view of human weaknesses and strengths, challenging, in fact, that very concept as highly arbitrary. (Svevo was attracted by Nietzsche like many of his contemporaries.) The French translation of *Senilità* by Paul-Henri Michel, published in 1930, reflects the "launching" of Svevo's work in Paris due to the persistent efforts of Larbaud who rightly insisted on its intrinsic value, even in the face of adverse criticism. (Cf. Ortensia Ruggiero *Valery Larbaud et l'Italie* Paris, Nizet 1963 pp. 229 - 235)

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Larbaud's sojourn in Portugal during the winter of 1926 resulted in the Portuguese sequence among the essays of *Jaune Bleu Blanc*. One of them, *Divertissement Philologique* (Pléiade, p.934) relates his impressions of the Portuguese language as he proceeds to learn it, eventually mastering it. This was a voyage of literary exploration.

He did discover a great many works that were relatively unknown beyond the boundaries of Portugal and Brazil. Of course from our own point of view it seems unfortunate that Larbaud's literary connections in Lisbon were not able to put him in touch with the work of the already budding Fernando Pessoa who now overshadows all others of the period from a great height. In 1926 the extraordinary Pessoa had still published very little and only in very obscure journals. This is one of the great "ifs" of the literary history of Europe: one can only speculate on what Larbaud's reaction to Pessoa's great mass of unpublished poetry might have been, attributed as it was to several "heteronyms," and whether or not the idea of the heteronyms might have come to Pessoa as a result of reading Larbaud's *Les Poésies de Barnabooth*, given that he began inventing them in 1914, a year after the appearance of Barnabooth's *Oeuvres completes*.

Larbaud did quickly become interested in the novels of the cosmopolitan diplomat of the late nineteenth century, Eça de Queiroz, which reflected the realist and naturalist

movements of his day. Queiroz was already a classic in Portugal but almost totally unknown to the outside world. He is sometimes called "the Portuguese Dickens" and also compared with Zola and Proust with respect to the themes of *dégénérescence* and *régénération*. In *Ecrit dans une cabine du Sud-Express* Larbaud gives a résumé of a recently published early novel by Queiroz, [*A Capital* (*La Capitale*) Pléiade, p.951].

It is of interest that one of the volumes in Larbaud's *Bibliothèque Luso-brésilienne* is a novel by the Brazilian writer of the late nineteenth century Machado de Assis (1837 -1908): Dom Casmurro (*Cahiers des Amis de Valery Larbaud,* No. 34, 1997, p. 79) Its French translation, first published in 1920, is the work of Larbaud's friend Francis de Miomandre, one of the many fellow translators who surrounded Larbaud in the 1920s in the extended workshop revealed by Paulette Patout, a veritable *atelier des muses*. Machado was an "autodidacte" mulatto of humble origin who created the dialogue in the local vernacular. Miomandre, himself from Touraine, seems to find a French equivalent in the dialects of French speaking parts of the Caribbean and French Guyana. (An example from among many is to be found in Chapter 43: "aucun de nous deux n'a envie de s'amuser." (Machado de Assis *Dom Casmurro* Paris: Albin Michel 1956 p.117) The fact that the first third of the novel is an "*enfantine*" (if one thinks of Larbaud's collection of short stories about child characters) might have interested Larbaud since his own *Enfantines* could be related to many other works in several languages whose protagonists are children, such as W.H. Hudson's *Far Away and Long Ago* and LeClézio's *Mondo et autres histories.*

Machado once challenged Queiroz in the Brazilian press, taking exception to his "realism." "Je ne peux que conseiller aux jeunes écrivains de nos deux pays de ne pas se laisser séduire par une doctrine caduque..." (E. de Q. *Le Cousin Bazilio,* Unesco, 1989. Intoduction de Lucette Petit, p.9) This comment is quite in keeping with Larbaud's own views on the matter.

Later, in 1933, Larbaud worked with Georges Raeders who was translating another Queiroz novel, *A Reliquia*, (*La Relique*) into French. He also wrote a preface for it, given in G. Jean-Aubry's notes for *Jaune Bleu Blanc,* Pléiade, p. 1272.) (To the extent that it is a satire of the empty rigidity of religious rituals, it might be compared to *Erewhon.)* Paulette Patout stresses the importance of Larbaud's collaboration : "Le texte dactylographié de la traduction ...porte à chaque page des annotations de Larbaud, ses suggestions au traducteur." She then quotes a letter from Raeders: "Que de soirées prolongées tard dans la nuit....Il n'était pas rare que, le lendemain...je reçusse, à un des premiers courriers, un petit mot de lui... dans lequel il revenait sur un détail de traduction, s'excusant presque auprès de moi de son interprétation." (Valéry Larbaud – Alfonso Reyes, *Correspondance,* Paris, Didier, 1972, p. 289)

The translations of Valery Larbaud bring important work from four other major languages into French at a time when the translator could experience his mission as

responding to an urgent need: "expliquant un peuple aux autres peuples, unifiant la conscience de l'humanité." He is referring here to the forgotten novelist John-Antoine Nau (In *La Revue Européenne,* 1er septembre, 1924) but because of his inclination to identify with the works of his favourite writers, he is also defining his own role.

Larbaud, in his immense activity as a translator was actually cultivating the garden of the new Europe that is now coming into existence. Meditating on Montpellier as the natural capital of *L'Occitanie*, he says:

"[La] formation des Etats-Unis d'Europe exigeant la disparition des anciennes nations, trop puissantes pour la sécurité commune, et l'établissement d'un système d'Etats confédérés, on imagine l'Occitanie retrouvant son autonomie...." (V L *Septimanie* in *Jaune Bleu Blanc,* Pléiade, pp. 881-882). Here we find a vision of a United Europe made up of its real nations, the Europe that was also imagined by Ortega y Gasset and Leopold Kohr, and a Europe that would someday honour its inventors: "Quels honneurs recevra un jour de la grande Patrie mondiale, la mémoire des esprits qui l'ont servie avec désintéressement et sans attendre aucun profit!"[*]

Source : Article inédit, transmis par l'auteur, 2006.

[*] * *La Revue Européenne* 1er septembre 1924. Cf. Bernard Delvaille *Essai sur Valery Larbaud,* Paris, Seghers 1963 ("Poètes d'aujourd'hui", 100), p. 208