Philip E. Cranston

« ROME EN ANGLAIS SE PRONONCE ROUM... » SHAKESPEARE VERSIONS BY VOLTAIRE

"ROME EN ANGLAIS SE PRONONCE *ROUM* . . ." SHAKESPEARE VERSIONS BY VOLTAIRE

BY PHILIP E. CRANSTON

> Cacambo expliquait les bons mots du roi a Candide, et *quoique traduits,* ils paraissaient toujours des bons mots. De tout ce qui etonnait Candide, ce n'etait pas ce qui l'etonna le moins.
>
> *Candide,* chap. XVIII

In translations and translators Voltaire, like Candide, found much to criticize, little to commend. How to achieve the elegant—or merely adequate—translation was a question that preoccupied him early and late, from his first extant poem (an imitation of a Latin ode by his professor of rhetoric at Louis-le-Grand)[1] to almost his last critical and literary productions.[2] Not satisfied with castigating and correcting, he displayed, from time to time, versions of his own to serve as models for his contemporaries. Of particular interest and concern to him was the translation of poetry and, although he attempted but one poem of great length ("celui qui est capable de traduire bien s'amuse-t-il a traduire?" he wrote to Maupertuis),[3] his translations of shorter passages are numerous enough to permit us

[1] Le R. P. Lejai. See *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire,* ed. *L.* Moland (1877-1885), viii, 403-406, Ode I (Sur Sainte Genevieve; dated ca. 1709). Quotations from the Moland edition are hereafter abbreviated as follows, e.g., M.viii, 403.

[2] Two important *Discours* a *l'Académie française,* that of 1746 (Voltaire's reception) and that of 1776 (at the height of the Shakespeare *Querelle),* deal largely with questions of translation.

[3] Letter of 22 May 1738; see *Voltaire's Correspondence and related documents* (vol. 85 ss. in *The Complete Works of Voltaire),* ed. Th. Besterman, definitive edition (1968-), item D1508. Quotations from this edition are referred to by abbreviation, e.g., Best. D1508. Quotations from Besterman's earlier *Voltaire's Correspondence* (1953-1965) are referred to as, e.g., Best. 1445. For Voltaire's views on the translation of long poems, see M.xxv, 173, *Articles extraits de la Gazette littéraire* (2 May *1764):* "Il est impossible que la contrainte ne s'aperçoive dans un ouvrage de longue haleine. Une epigramme, un madrigal, peuvent gagner dans une traduction; une tragedie ne peut jamais que perdre." The art of the long poem is especially long; Voltaire, as we shall see, was tempted only once.

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to measure, with some precision, the dimensions of his talent—and the limits of his success.

Which authors did Voltaire find interesting or sympathetic enough to translate?[4] One must not, of course, infer sympathy in every case: some translations he undertook for polemical or propaganda purposes, some with the serious intention of informing his readers about a foreign literature--or making invidious comparisons, some to illustrate a point, others simply to satisfy his desire to outshine rival translators (a satisfaction not always accorded).

Vergil and Horace, not surprisingly, are much imitated in his poetry, often quoted in his correspondence, and occasionally translated by a single verse or a short stanza in his prose works—never, however, at length. The longest translation from Horace is thirteen lines; from Vergil, ten. Lucretius and Ovid are represented by numerous excerpts, none exceeding fifteen verses in translation. More than two dozen other Latin poets, ancient and modern, are rendered in snips and snatches, some by one verse only, others in prose. Why this relative dearth of significant translations from the language and literature which, after French, Voltaire knew best (—which, in some respects, he knew better than French)? Perhaps, because of his very familiarity with Latin authors—and by a reaction not uncommon among translators—he felt no need to translate them. Translation, for the translator, often represents an attempt to understand and appreciate the strange or the new—or, during much of the 18th century, to domesticate it. Moreover, Latin literature was readily available in the original to Voltaire's cultivated contemporaries.

Greek poetry (perhaps not translated directly from the Greek) appears in two versions from Homer (17 and 47 lines respectively), where Voltaire puts himself in what he judges to be a favorable light by comparison with La Motte and Mme Dacier; and in his longest rhymed translation, 186 lines from the beginning of Book 16 of the *Iliad*. There are two translations from Hesiod and a 16-line version—one of his best—from an ecologue of Theocritus, done, in part at least, to put Fontenelle (who did not admire this poet) in the

[4] "Quand on cherche a traduire il faut choisir son auteur, comme on choisit un ami, d'un goût conforme au nbtre" (*Notebooks*, ed. Th. Besterman, I, 349; cf. M.xxxii, 555, in the so-called *Sottisier*). Pope, for instance: "On peut le traduire, parce qu'il est extrêmement clair, et que ses sujets, pour la plupart, sont generaux et du ressort de toutes les nations" (*Lettres philosophiques*, XXII). And Pope has scandalous and scatalogical passages—which Voltaire took delight in reproducing.

wrong. And finally—a series of epigrams from the *Greek Anthology,* often happily rendered. Other authors and works received less attention.

With regard to Italian literature, Voltaire recognized the importance but seems to have had no great appreciation of either Dante or Petrarch. Indeed, his 58-line excerpt from Canto XXVII of the *Inferno* is little more than a parody, and Voltaire himself does not take it seriously. One other translation from Dante and a version of the first strophe of Petrarch's "Chiare, fresche e dolci acque" are given only as examples of early Italian literature and serve to ornament and illustrate the *Essai sur les moeurs.* In the rest of his work he comes close to ridiculing Petrarch and ignoring Dante.

But if he gave these writers short shrift, it was quite otherwise with Ariosto, for whom his affection, slight at first, grew with the years and evolved into one of his great admirations. Although represented by fewer than 100 lines, all from the *Orlando,* Ariosto is the poet quoted and translated at greatest length in the ariticle "Epopee" of the *Dictionnaire philosophique.* And in *La Pucelle,* Voltaire tried to imitate the ironic smile and bantering tone of the Italian poet.

From other literatures: there is a translation of 16 lines from Lope de Vega's *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* (used on two occasions to show that Lope—like Shakespeare, perhaps, but who nowhere rhymed it—felt restricted by the barbarity of his Age) and a few other pieces, some in prose (Voltaire was not always up to his ideal, that poetry should be done into poetry).[5]

But the richest source of Voltairian translation is English—a total

[5] For examples of Voltairian translations of the Latin, Greek, Italian and Spanish poets named above, See *Questions de l'Encyclopédie* or the expanded *Dictionnaire philosophique* (M.xviii) under the following entries: "Boire a la sante" (Horace), "De Caton et du suicide" (Vergil), "Curiosité" (Lucretius), "Figure" (Ovid), "Epopee" and "Scoliaste" (Homer), "Ange" and "Epopée" (Hesiod), "Eclogue" (Theocritus), "Epigramme" *(Greek Anthology),* "Dante" (Dante), "Epopee," "Auguste" and "Droit" (Ariosto), "Art dramatique" (Lope de Vega). For other verse translations, see M.xxvii, 419 (Horace), M.xxii, 551 (Ovid), M.x, 617 (Homer), M.xxv, 180-181 *(Greek Anthology),* and *Essai sur les moeurs,* chap. LXXXII (Dante and Petrarch). For examples of verse done into prose, see the translations of Calderon's *En esta vida todo es verdad y toda mentim* (M.vii, 491ss.) and Camoens' *Lusiads, I (Essai sur la poésie épique,* chap. VI). For a prose imitation, rather than translation, from the *Bible,* see the *Précis du Cantique des Cantiques* (M.ix, 495-506). "Pour les poemes en prose," writes Voltaire in the *Dictionnaire philosophique* ("Epopee"), "je ne sais ce que c'est que ce monstre. Je n'y vois que l'impuissance de faire des vers. J'aimerais autant qu'on me proposât un concert sans instruments." "On confond toutes les idees, on transpose les limites des arts, quand on donne le nom de poeme a la prose" *(Essai sur la poésie épique,* "Conclusion").

of more than 400 rhymed verses. Some of these translations were motivated by a real desire to communicate the beauty or power of the original to a French audience. This is notably true of his versions of Addison (a speech from *Cato,* in which he found an "elegance mâle et energique" reminiscent of Corneille), the Earl of Rochester (25 lines from the *Satire agaznst Mankind)* and Pope (a passage from whose *Rape of the Lock* is compared favorably with Boileau's *Lutrin).* Other works are presented as objects of curiosity, out of Voltaire's eagerness to inform his compatriots of what was being or had been written *outre-Manche.* In this category we find Butler's *Hudibras* and Waller's *Panegyric of Cromwell.* Some translations — like the *précis* of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* or the selections from Middleton — serve as commentaries or illustrations in the discussion of topics not necessarily literary.[6] Others were composed to exhibit Voltaire's pre-eminent gifts as translator (had he but chosen). In this class, the oft-reprinted and ever-expanding version of *Paradise Lost,* IV, 32-41, must be singled out.' Juxtaposing it to a translation of the same lines by Racine *fils,* Voltaire — discreetly veiled by a pseudonym — makes this modest comment: "I1 est aise de voir pourquoi les vers cites les derniers sont au-dessus des autres: c'est qu'ils sont plus remplis d'enthousiasme, de chaleur, et de vie; qu'ils ont plus de nombre et de force; qu'en un mot, ils sont d'un poete; et ils ont surtout le mérite d'être une traduction plus fidèle."[8]

Still others proceeded from a more complicated motive, combining immediate and long-term critical and polemical concerns with attraction and repulsion, curiosity and vanity, not to mention the

[6] For Voltaire's verse translations from Addison, the Earl of Rochester, Pope, Butler and Waller, as well as Dryden, Prior and Lord Hervey, see *Lettresphilosophiques* (Lanson edition), XVIII, XX, XXI and XXII. In the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (M.xviii) appear translations from Dryden ("Blaspheme"), Garth ("Bouffon" and "Caractere"), Prior ("Bouffon" and "Ame"), Mandeville ("Abeilles"), Addison ("Art dramatique"), Mordaunt ("De Caton et du suicide") and Pope, as well as Shakespeare and Milton. For Middleton, see M.xxiii, 528 and M.xxvi, 160. For early versions of several of these translations (notably those of Dryden, Rochester, Hervey and Pope), see the 'Cambridge Notebook" in Besterman's edition of the *Notebooks,* I, 70-111 (vol. 81 of *The Complete Works of Voltaire).*

'See *Essai sur la poésie épique,* chap. IX (11 lines); M.xxiii, 420, *Connaissance des beautés et des défauts* . . . (12 lines); and *Dictzonnaire philosophique,* "Epopee" (22 lines).

[8] *Connaissance des beautés et des défauts de la poésie et de l'iloquence* (M.xxiii, 421). Voltaire's authorship of this work has been contested; see Besterman, "Note on the authorship of Connaissance des beautes . . .," in *Studies on Voltaire and the 18th Century,* vol. *4,* 291-294. The real author, as Besterman persuasively argues, was David Durand, a French protestant minister in London.

desire to shock, to scandalize French opinion and taste: these were the Shakespeare translations.[9]

Most of Voltaire's versions from the English first appeared in the *Lettres philosophiques* (or *anglaises)* and were thus the product of his sojourn in England and his youthful Anglophilia. At no later period--except as from time to time it served his purpose in attacking literary enemies—did he show such enthusiasm, and often perceptive enthusiasm, for English letters.

An example from this period—and typical of his work as a translator taken as a whole—is his interpretation of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech (III,i, 56-83):

To be or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and, by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,

[9] Among works which in the last century have studied, in more or less detail, Voltaire's Shakespeare translations—theory, practice and significance, the following are representative: Albert Lacroix, *Histoire de l'influence de Shakespeare sur le théâtre français jusqu'à nos jours* (1856); Jusserand, *Shakespeare en France sous l'ancien régime* (1898); Thomas R. Lounsbury, *Shakespeare and Voltaire* (1902); F. C. Green, *Minuet* (1935; revised and reissued as *Literary* Ideas *in 18th Century France and England,* 1966); Raymond Naves, *Le Goût de Voltaire* (1938); Theodore Besterman, *Voltaire on Shakespeare* (1967); *T*. E. Lawrenson, *Papers mainly Shakespearian;* and David Williams, critical edition of the *Commentaires sur Corneille* (1974; vol. 53 of *The Complete Works of Voltaire),* vol. *I,* Introduction.

But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all . . .

So far, Shakespeare; thus, Voltaire *(Lettres philosophiques,* XVIII):

Demeure; il faut choisir, et passer a l'instant
De la vie a la mort, ou de l'être au neant.
Dieux cruels! s'il en est, eclairez mon courage.
Faut-il vieillir courbe sous la main qui m'outrage,
Supporter ou finir mon malheur et mon sort?
Qui suis-je? qui m'arrête? et qu'est-ce que la mort?
C'est la fin de nos maux, c'est mon unique asile;
Apres de longs transports, c'est un sommeil tranquille.
On s'endort, et tout meurt. Mais un affreux réveil
Doit succeder peut-être aux douceurs du sommeil.
On nous menace, on dit que cette courte vie
De tourments eternels est aussitôt suivie.
O mort! moment fatal! affreuse eternite.
Tout coeur a ton seul nom se glace, epouvante.
Eh! qui pourrait sans toi supporter cette vie,
De nos Prêtres menteurs benir l'hypocrisie,
D'une indigne maitresse encenser les erreurs,
Ramper sous un Ministre, adorer ses hauteurs,
Et montrer les langueurs de son âme abattue
A des amis ingrats qui detournent la vue?
La mort serait trop douce en ces extremites;
Mais le scrupule parle, et nous crie: Arrêtez.
Il defend a nos mains cet heureux homicide,
Et d'un Heros guerrier fait un chretien timide.

Voltaire sometimes called his version a translation, sometimes an imitation. It is, in reality, a paraphrase, "tres-fidele au sens" (?), but characterized by his "liberte ordinaire."[10] Voltaire's good opinion of it is attested to by the fact that he included it in three different works (only two other verse translations were published as often). Twice he contrasted it with a line for line prose translation — through which he

[10] *Lettres philosophiques, XXII.* Elsewhere Voltaire observes: "C'est un des progres de la raison humaine dans ce siecle qu'un traducteur ne soit plus idolâtre de son auteur, et qu'il sache lui rendre justice comme a un contemporain" (M.xxiii, 207, *Discours à l'Academie, 1746).*

hoped his readers might see "le genie de la langue anglaise; son nature1 qui ne craint pas les idees les plus basses, ni les plus gigantesques."[11]

What can 18th-century French, and a translator like Voltaire, convey of such language and such an author? True to one of the touchstones of French *goût* ("il ne faut qu'on prononce en public un mot qu'une honnête femme ne puisse repe'ter" *Lettres phil.,* XIX) and to the most timid French classical literary tradition, Voltaire suppresses every *mot bas*, omits, blurs, distorts or changes every forceful metaphor and image, for "la gêne de notre versification et les bienseances delicates de notre langue ne peuvent donner l'equivalent de la licence impetueuse du style anglais" *(Lettres phil.,* XXI).

Thus, the opening loses its pressing immediacy—despite "il faut" and "a l'instant." The question, or the choice, put off until the second line and entrusted to nouns, is given abstract expression. "De la vie a la mort, ou de l'être au neant," with its neatly parallel construction, is just slightly tautological. Voltaire undoubtedly felt these weaknesses, for he later revised as follows:"

Demeure, il faut choisir de l'être et du neant.
Ou souffrir ou perir, c'est là ce qui m'attend.

This advances the naming of the choice to the first line, without, however, making it any less abstract. Not only abstract, but vague—needing the clarification of line two. "Ou souffrir ou perir" is clear and concise, perhaps excessively so, for the rest of the verse is mere padding. In either case, Voltaire seems intent on maintaining his "être" and "néant"—and the rhyme they serve. In the original, the question is posed in the first six words; in the translation two lines do not suffice.

The first half of line three, with its classical "Dieux cruels" (variant reading: "justes") and its note of philosophical scepticism ("s'il en est") is toned down, in revision, to the more anodyne, if no less rhetorical, "Ciel, qui voyez mon trouble."

The language of the entire text is marked by an abstract character: nothing of "slings and arrows," no "arms," no "sea of troubles;" only an attentuated French *trouble,* only

[11] M.xxiv, 203, *Appel* a *toutes les nations de l'Europe.* Voltaire's version of Hamlet's soliloquy appears in the *Lettres philosophiques* (XVIII) and the *Appel* a *toutes les nations* juxtaposed to a prose translation and, in slightly revised form, in the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (or *Questions de l'Encyclopédie),* "Art dramatique."

Faut-il vieillir courbe sous la main qui m'outrage,
Supporter ou finir mon malheur et mon sort?

The first hemistich of line six ("Qui suis-je? qui m'arrête?") is supplied by the translator, *gratis*. And what "de longs transports" (8) may stand for, either in the original or in the translation, is hard to say (the "heart-ache"? the "thousand natural shocks"?) Voltaire reverses the Shakespearian order of things: "To die: to sleep" becomes "On s'endort, et tout meurt" (9). And it is not dreams in "that sleep of death" that must give us pause, but an "affreux réveil;" the sleep itself will have "douceurs" (10).

At this point is introduced a sequence of thought and image which (however much they may figure in other passages of Hamlet, e.g., III,iii, 73-95) is hardly suggested by this text, and which constitutes perhaps the most serious betrayal of the author by the translator. Voltaire gives the whole soliloquy an overtly Christian emphasis and frame of reference (with direct allusions to the servants of the Church): "On nous menace" (11), "tourments eternels" (12). "The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely" is converted into "De nos Prêtres menteurs . . . l'hypocrisie" (16) — although, on revision, the "Prêtres menteurs" became "fourbes puissants," thus allowing Voltaire to hit two of his favorite targets, and effectively modernizing the play for the 18th-century French reader. We see a Hamlet translated to Paris and surrounded not only by hypocritical priests, but by an unworthy mistress, a haughty minister and ingrate friends. Finally, "le scrupule" makes of the "Heros guerrier" (was this Hamlet? — or Rodrigue) "un chretien timide:" "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all."

With his grandiloquent apostrophe to death (13ss.), Voltaire all but refutes Shakespeare's argument, i.e., 'Who would bear this life but for the dread of something after death?' He offers an, as it turns out, ambiguous 'Who without thee (O death) could bear this life?' — i.e., without the threat of death (and subsequent eternal punishment) or without the hope of death (and deliverance from present indignities). But the 18th-century philosophe-Hamlet is simply underlining, by a paradoxical antithesis, how little he believes in these threats of eternal torment, how much more disagreeable are the ills of this world: "La mort serait trop douce en ces extremites" (21). His hand is stopped from an "heureux homicide," not by any real "dread of something after death," but by "le scrupule." A conventional Christian "scrupule" at something more than a stone's throw from Shakespeare's "conscience."

Although most of the bold outlines of imagery, language, and meaning have been blurred or effaced, Voltaire has yet managed to keep echoes of the original. Even the gratuitous "Qui suis-je? qui m'arrête?" and the reversed "on s'endort, et tout meurt" (with its air of finality), along with the binary constructions of the intervening lines, serve to imitate the repetitions of words (forbidden to French, although Voltaire does repeat, at close interval, "sommeil" and, rather more awkwardly—at the rhyme, "vie"), the pauses and stops, and hesitations, of the more elliptical English: "To die: to sleep; / No more;" "To die, to sleep; / To sleep: perchance to dream." The insistent confrontation of impossible alternatives is communicated by the translation as by the original. The movement and the fullness of lines 15-20, if not the sense, is right.

These instances of successful imitation, together with a certain elevation of tone proper to poetry, make even this treacherous version superior to most prose renderings. For one may agree with Voltaire that poetry is best rendered by poetry.

Still, one must regret that, although "mortal coil," "whips and scorns," "grunt and swear," etc. could not be reproduced by any self-respecting, tradition-formed, reader-conscious ("ay, there's the rub") translator of the time, Voltaire should have made no effort to find an equivalent for

> The undiscovered country from whose bourn
> No traveller returns,

which is surely noble enough in thought and expression to admit of an almost literal translation. But Voltaire was fettered by the very freedom he arrogated to himself; and perhaps, in the intoxicating urban atmosphere of *prêtres,* ministres, and *maîtresses,* had no desire to explore that country.

Of his capacity, however, for appreciating this piece at its just value, there can be no doubt. In it, he says, one will discover truth, profundity, and "je ne sais quoi qui attache, et qui remue beaucoup plus que ne ferait l'elegance . . . C'est un diamant brut qui a des taches: si on le polissait, il perdrait de son poids" (M.xxiv, 203, *Appel a toutes les nations de l'Europe).* Precisely. Voltaire has tried to cut and polish Shakespeare's raw diamond; it has all but disappeared in the process.

Voltaire was always of two minds about the English playwrights. When they were unknown, he introduced them; when they were attacked, he defended them; when they were mistranslated, he

protested;[12] when they were praised indiscriminately and held up as models (by Le Tourneur and others), he condemned them out of hand. "Leurs pieces," he declares in the eighteenth of the *Lettres philosophiques*, "presque toutes barbares, depourvues de bienseances, d'ordre, de vraisemblance, ont des lueurs étonnantes au milieu de cette nuit. Le style est trop ampoule, trop hors de la nature, trop copie des ecrivains hebreux, si rempli de l'enflure asiatique." Of Shakespeare he writes, in a letter to Horace Walpole (Best. 14179, 15 July 1768): "C'est une belle nature, mais sauvage; nulle régularité, nulle bienseance, nul art; de la bassesse avec de la grandeur, de la bouffonerie avec du terrible; c'est le chaos de la Tragédie dans lequel il y a cent traits de lumiere." He excuses him as the wonderful child of a barbarous age;[13] he protests that Shakespeare's critics have emphasized his "erreurs," but that no one has translated the remarkable passages "qui demandent grâce pour toutes ses fautes" *(Lettres phil.,* XVIII).

For Voltaire, it can hardly be a question of presenting Shakespeare intact: "Nous avons vu en français des imitations, des esquisses, des extraits de Shakespeare, mais aucune traduction" (M.vii, 436). And he dares anyone to make this (exact) translation, for he believed, as did his contemporaries, that "des traductions completes ou des extraits fideles de ses meilleures pieces feraient beaucoup de tort en France a sa réputation."[14]

Voltaire's manner of translating was fixed early in his career, modeled, more than he sometimes cared to admit, on the precepts and practice of Houdar de la Motte.

Antoine Houdar de la Motte (1672-1731), playwright, poet, trans-

[12] See Voltaire's letter of 13 Oct. 1759 to Mme du Deffand (Best.D8533): "Nous traduisons les Anglais aussi mal que nous nous battons contre eux sur mer." (The example of Admiral Byng had apparently encouraged the others . . .)

[13] M.vii, 486. Cf. La Place *(Théâtre anglais,* I, cxliii), who--after Pope—excuses Shakespeare on yet another ground—the supposed gross inaccuracies of the 1623 In-folio edition: "Si I'on faisait l'enumeration des fautes grossieres que ces anciennes editions renferment, j'ose dire que si les ouvrages d'Aristote, et de Ciceron, avaient eu le même sort, nous les regarderions peut-être comme plus vides de sens, et plus ridicules encore que ceux de Shakespeare." Indeed, Pope (in his edition of Shakespeare) is the source and authority for much of Voltaire's criticism of the English poet: "Of all the English Poets Shakespear must be confessed to be the fairest and fullest subject for criticism, and to afford the most numerous as well as most conspicuous instances of both beauties and faults of all sorts" (quoted by Lanson, *Lettres philosophiques,* vol. II, p. 90; Lanson notes: "Voltaire interprete avec son goût français ces jugements des Anglais sur Shakespeare").

[14] J. Leblanc, *Lettre d'un Français,* II, 73, quoted by Naves, *op. cit.,* 441.

lator, and *chefde file* for the *Modernes* in the second generation of the famous "Querelle," sought to extend Cartesian method to literature, believing that art might be perfected, like science and philosophy, by the application of rational principles. Geometer of the arts, he held that "l'art poetique même a ses axiomes, ses theoremes, ses corollaires, ses démonstrations" *(Réflexions sur la critique,* II, 165)—for which the Ancients were an inadequate source. He therefore undertook, in his *abrégé* of the *Iliad* (1714), to correct and improve upon Homer, in the name of Progress and a rational *art poétique.* He cut and cropped and trimmed, removing epithets and other forms of repetition, rearranging speeches, supplying metaphors more *à* la *Motte:* "J'ai tâché de rendre la narration plus rapide, les descriptions moins chargées de minuties, les comparaisons plus exactes et moins frequentes" *(Discours sur Homère,* CLXIV). He attached little importance to the sounds of words (for the most part, arbitrary) or the harmony of verses; from the dense foreign growth, only the essential meaning needed to be extracted.

In this spirit, with this recipe, La Motte concocted a work stale, dull, and unpalatable—although seasoned with *pointes* and antitheses, and redolent of a *préciosité* alien to the spirit of Homer ("Je ravis une esclave, et je perds un héros"). Everywhere vivid details (of' descriptions and actions) are replaced by abstract resumes, as Voltaire, who was divided in his judgment of La Motte but capable of distinguishing good and bad poetry, did not fail to point out and condemn, offering his own versions for comparison.[15] As always, Voltaire had the last word: "La Motte a ôté beaucoup de defauts a Homère, mais il n'a conserve aucune de ses beautes" *(Essai sur la poésie épique,* "Homere").

And yet the 18th century, and Voltaire with it, followed, by and large, the example of La Motte. There evolved a curious conception and code of translation, setting *a priori* limits to the translator's

[15] *Dictionnaire philosophique,* "Epopee:" "On doit répéter ici que ce fut une etrange entreprise dans La Motte, de degrader Homère (in the course of the "Querelle"), et de le traduire; mais il fut encore plus etrange de l'abreger pour le corriger. Au lieu d'echauffer son genie en tâchant de copier les sublimes peintures d'Homère, il voulut lui donner de l'esprit: c'est la manie de la plupart des Français; une espece de pointe qu'ils appellent un *trait,* une petite antithese, un leger contraste de mots leur suffit. C'est un defaut dans lequel Racine et Boileau (true Classicists) ne sont presque jamais tombes." It should be noted that Voltaire's own knowledge of Homer was probably largely dependent on translations. It is doubtful whether he—or many of his great contemporaries (as Sainte-Beuve points out)—read or could read and appreciate, with any facility, the original Homer.

freedom in rendering content and form. This conception and code had a certain self-evident logic. Art is Imitation ("presque tout est imitation," said Voltaire, *Lettres phil.,* XXII). The 17th century had known Latin and Greek literatures and had imitated them. Now, as other literatures became known, they too would be imitated. But they might not prove such sterling models as the first two. There was danger of French literature being debased, French taste corrupted. Therefore, it was imperative that the foreign work be judged by the severe tenets of French Classicism (made more severe by the rational strictures of La Motte's *géomètres)* and only so much be admitted as would not shock French literary sensibilities. Faithfulness to the text was not sought or desired: "Rien n'est plus aise qu'une fidelite scrupuleuse," wrote Fréron.[16] *Conuenance, bienséance,* decorum, elegance, and order (so often lacking in the foreign product) were to inform every aspect of the new work in French. Only so might the national *Goût* be defended and maintained. Le Tourneur (who, in changed mind, was later to make the first would-be exact translations, on a grand scale, from Shakespeare) put it succinctly (more so than when he converted the nine English *Nights* of Young into 24 French ones!):

> Mon intention a ete de tirer de l'Young anglais un Young français, qui pût plaire a ma nation, et qu'on pût lire avec intérêt, sans songer s'il est original ou copie. Il me semble que c'est la methode qu'on devrait suivre en traduisant les auteurs des langues étrangeres, qui avec un mérite supérieur, ne sont pas des modeles de goût. Par là, tout ce qu'il y a de bon chez nos voisins nous deviendrait propre, et nous laisserions le mauvais que nous n'avons aucun besoin de lire ni de connaître.[17]

Small loss, perhaps, in the case of Young. But when the same method was applied to Shakespeare or to Milton (as it was—*a fortiori,* for the "modeles de goût" were all French), the resulting versions were often false to a fault. Listen to La Place in the preface to the first volume of his *Théâtre anglais* (p. CIX):

> La difference du genie de la langue anglaise, et de la langue

[16] *Annie littéraire,* 1756, VI, 243, quoted by Paul Van Tieghem, *L'Année littéraire (1754-1790) comme interme'diaire en France des littiratures étrangères* (Paris: Rieder, 1917), p. 17.

[17] Quoted by Constance B. West, "La Theorie de la traduction au 18e siècle," *Revue de littérature compare'e* (1932), p. 330. (Quotations from this article referred to in text as "West.")

> française, était un obstacle moins difficile a surmonter, que la difference du goat des deux Nations. Ce qui ne paraît que noble, simple, nature1 aux Anglais, sera aux yeux des Français dur, plat, indecent. En me permettant plus de licence, etc.

—A "licence" that condones every liberty and accords every freedom except that of producing a true copy. Commenting on La Place's translations, Figuet du Boccage wrote: "J'admire la prudence et le discernement avec lesquels il a choisi ce qu'il y avait de presentable dans une chose pour laquelle le public avait de la curiosite, mais dont il aurait ete bientôt rebute si on la lui avait montree telle qu'elle est effectivement" *(Lettre sur le théâtre anglais* (1752), quoted by West, 332).

More than merely conceal defects—passed over in silence—the translator was to embellish and perfect his original (La Motte had shown the way): "etablir l'ordre, retrancher les superfluités, corriger les traits, et ne laisser voir enfin que ce qui mérite effectivement l'admiration" *(Annie littéraire,* 1775, VIII, 137, quoted by Van Tieghem, 17)—which was to render "de grands et eminents services a son auteur." Or as the English poet (and inveterate translator of poets ancient and modern), Dryden, had observed already in 1685: "(Am I not) bound when I translate an Author, to do him all the right I can, and to Translate him to the best advantage?" (Preface to *Sylvae).*

This approach led directly to the "Theory of Compensation"—a sort of gentleman's agreement between author and translator, with the author giving his, necessarily, tacit assent. Delille, translator of Vergil and Milton, put it this way: "(le traducteur) prevoit-il qu'il doive affaiblir son auteur dans un endroit? Qu'il le fortifie dans un autre; qu'il lui restitue plus bas ce qu'il lui a derobe plus haut; en sorte qu'il etablisse partout une juste compensation."[18] Thus far, Delille is but echoing La Motte ("rendre, par des compensations, plutôt le genie et l'agrement general, que le detail scrupuleux"); however, he goes on to say: "mais toujours en s'eloignant le moins qu'il sera possible du caractere de l'ouvrage et de chaque morceau."

Delille's reservation defers to the arguments advanced by a rival school of translators. Already at the beginning of the century, Mme Anne (Lefèvre) Dacier (1654-1720)—partisan of the *Anciens* and dis-

[18] Quoted by West, p. 345. Cf. Dryden, in his Preface to *Fables, Ancient and Modern:* "What Beauties I lose in some Places, I give to others which had them not originally."

ciple of a still older Humanism—had sought in her translations of the Iliad (1699) and the Odyssey (1708) to convey something of Homer's directness and simplicity, concreteness and naturalness, in a word, his poetry; and to avoid affected periphrases and insipid abstractions. A careful Greek scholar with an admirable sensitivity to the real beauties of Homer and an understanding of the conventions of his art, Mme Dacier put in first place faithfulness to the spirit (le caractire)—if not always to the letter—of the text.[19]

Her translations are in prose—in which she departed from the practice of her time and prefigured the more "scientific" translators of the 19th century (cf., in English, Dryden and Pope versus Lang, Leaf and Myers). Only a small coterie, persuaded perhaps by the gentle eloquence of Fenelon's *Télémaque,* opted, in theory at least, for adaptations in poetic prose. Most protested against this infringement of poetry's prerogative and held French verse more than equal to the challenge of rendering the most difficult foreign work. "Qui n'a lu que Mme Dacier," said Voltaire, "n'a point lu Homère" (Essai sur la *poésie épique).*

Prose should permit greater literal exactness. Mme Dacier, however, defended herself against the charge, by the abbe' Terrasson, that she had made "une Traduction simple et nue:"

> Je n'ai jamais fait de Traduction simple et litterale de l'*Iliade* et j'ai ete si eloignee de concevoir un si monstrueux dessein, que j'ai ete longtemps a balancer sur mon entreprise, parce que je ne me sentais pas assez de force pour kgaler par mes expressions la majeste des idees et des expressions d'Homère, qu'il était impossible de rendre en s'assujetissant aux mots.

She emphasizes "la difference infinie qu'il y a entre une Traduction servile et une Traduction gknereuse et noble" and concludes: "je ne me suis jamais assujetie aux mots que quand le genie de notre langue l'a permis" *(Odyssée,* Preface, cxv ss.).

But elsewhere she recognized an essential truth not understood by La Motte's *géomètres:* "jamais poete ne paraitra excellent poete indépendamment de l'expression" *(Des causes de la corruption du goût,* 242). She had identified some of the loci of poetry ("L'oreille seduira

[19] "A force de savoir et de bonne foi, (Madame Dacier) atteint dans l'ensemble a un certain effet homerique; il y a une certaine naivete et *magniloquence* qui se retrouve dans sa langue naturelle plus qu'elegante . . . (Elle est) encore aujourd'hui peut-être, pour l'ensemble, le traducteur qui donne le plus d'idee de son Homère" (Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi,* 6 mars *1854,* article on Mme Dacier).

souvent l'esprit, mais il arrivera rarement que l'esprit seduise l'oreille"); and, if not literal, her *Iliade* (from which La Motte, unversed in Greek, extracted his) is nevertheless faithful in spirit and in detail—gives, to borrow an image from Voltaire, a black-and-white, rather than color, reproduction of the original.

Mme Dacier stood more or less alone. But as the century moved towards its close, the position she had reconnoitred attracted increasing critical support. In 1776, the *Annie littéraire* reversed itself, to chide—somewhat haughtily, considering its own previous stance: "Qu'ils (les traducteurs) se persuadent donc, une bonne fois, que ce n'est pas *leur* esprit que nous cherchons dans une version, mais celui des ecrivains originaux dont ils se donnent pour interpretes" (V, 7, quoted by Van Tieghem, 19). Criticism of adaptations and imitations became increasingly sharp: "Traduire cinq vers par onze, il me semble que c'est faire bien peu de cas de son original" (Quenneville, *Virgile* a *Jacques Delille,* quoted by West, 347). "Toute imitation, quelque belle qu'elle puisse être, n'estjamais qu'un aveu authentique de l'impuissance de traduire" (Saint-Ange, quoted by West, 348). " 'Franciser' (i.e., paraphrase and adapt to French taste) ne veut pas dire 'perfectionner' . . . c'est plutôt . . . 'mutiler' " (West, 351).

And there were even those willing to adopt the "monstrueux dessein" rejected by Mme Dacier. Maximilien-Henri, marquis de Saint-Simon, translator of Pope and Ossian, stated the extreme position in his *Essai de traduction littérale et énergique* (1771, Preface, quoted by West, 349), adapting to his purposes an analogy often used by Voltaire:

> I1 n'est pas permis au peintre (i.e., copyist) d'altérer les traits de son original, ni de changer ses couleurs, ou de s'écarter de ses moindres details: de même un traducteur doit rendre avec fidélite les images, les phrases, et jusques a la ponctuation de son auteur. Les points sont au discours ce que sont aux tableaux les contours qui fixent les formes.

The blemishes also must be copied. The word *goût* itself is invoked to justify such a procedure: "Offrir un auteur étranger sans ses imperfections, c'est priver l'homme de talent d'une leçon utile, et l'homme de goût d'un examen piquant" (Selis, *Satires de Perse,* 1776, Preface, quoted by West, 347). For the purpose of translation is not so much to please as to instruct, to furnish a reliable copy (even of verbal details), which the reader may then judge for himself.

The time was approaching when a double (or multiple) standard

in taste could be accepted, and defended, by the *honnête* homme — now within hailing distance of the foreign work. Even Le Tourneur, whom we have seen theorizing over his mutilations of Young, boasted when he came to publish his translations (in prose) of Shakespeare — and marked thereby the distance traversed since La Place, thirty years earlier: "C'est Shakespeare lui-même avec ses imperfections, mais dans sa grandeur naturelle." But he went farther, trampling on French complacency and giving free rein to an admiration unfettered by the restraints of traditional French taste: "Jamais homme de genie ne penetra plus avant dans l'abime du coeur humain, et ne fit mieux parler aux passions le langage de la Nature" (quoted by Naves, *op. cit.*, 449).

Voltaire himself, at a certain moment (1764), found it tactically advantageous to pass over into this other, enemy, camp. The occasion was his edition of the *Théâtre de* P. *Corneille.* Here, to exhibit Corneille's *Cinna* in the most favorable light[20] and the English bard in the least, he produced, for comparison, what he claimed to be a scrupulously exact translation of another conspiracy play, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Acts *I* and II, and part of the first scene of Act III).[21]

Not that he despised or rejected Shakespeare's play: far from it. All his ambivalence, as man and as artist, is apparent in the following recollection from the *Discours sur la tragédie, a Milord Bolingbroke* (M.ii, 312):

> Avec quel plaisir n'ai-je point vu a Londres votre tragedie de *Jules César,* qui, depuis cent cinquante annees, fait les delices de votre nation! Je ne pretends pas assurement approuver les irregularites barbares dont elle est remplie; il est seulement etonnant qu'il ne s'en trouve pas davantage dans un ouvrage compose dans un siècle d'ignorance, par un homme qui même ne savait pas le latin, et qui n'eut de maître que son genie. Mais, au milieu de tant de

[20] That is, greater as art, more polished and elegant in expression and construction, more universal in appeal. "Pourquoi des scenes entieres du *Pastor Fido* sont-elles sues par coeur aujourd'hui a Stockholm et a Petersbourg? et pourquoi aucune piece de Shakespeare n'a-t-elle pu passer la mer?" *(Essai sur les moeurs,* chap. CXXI).—Ironie du sort!

[21] Besterman suggests in his Introduction to *Voltaire on Shakespeare* (vol. *LIV* of *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 1967)* that "a comparison of the two texts (Shakespeare's and Voltaire's) line by line would be a liberal education it itself' (p.35). The present more limited confrontation attempts to draw only a few lessons, for as Besterman goes on to say, such a study "unfortunately . . . would also be a lengthy business."

> fautes grossieres, avec quel ravissement je voyais Brutus, tenant encore un poignard teint du sang de Cesar, assembler le peuple romain, et lui parler . . . du haut de la tribune aux harangues.

"Je sentis," he says elsewhere, "que la piece m'attachait" (M.vii, 485). Rapture or attachment (depending on whether he was addressing Bolingbroke or the French reading public), we do know that Voltaire was sufficiently attracted to attempt his own imitation, La Mort de Char.[22]

Thus, despite his *parti pris* to prefer Corneille, he gives the impression of not being quite sure he can make Shakespeare come off second-best—even in translation.

How did he conceive his task—this once and for this purpose only (although, afterwards, he would always vaunt the exploit)? First and foremost, he forswore his "liberte ordinaire:"

> On peut traduire un poete en exprimant seulement le fond de ses pensées; mais pour le bien faire connaître, pour donner une idee juste de sa langue, il faut traduire non seulement ses pensées, mais tous les accessoires. Si le poete a employe une metaphore, il ne faut pas lui substituer une autre metaphore; s'il se sert d'un mot qui soit bas dans sa langue, on doit le rendre par un mot qui soit bas dans la nôtre. C'est un tableau dont il faut copier exactement l'ordonnance, les attitudes, le coloris, les defauts et les beautes, sans quoi vous donnez votre ouvrage pour le sien (M.vii, 435, Jules *César,* Avertissement du traducteur).

"Les defauts et les beautes:" how new this sounds on Voltaire's lips! Yet he had always wanted to see at least the beauties in more detail.

What did he, in fact, attempt in this translation, "la plus fidèle qu'on ait jamais faite en notre langue d'un poete ancien ou etranger"?

> On a mis en prose ce qui est en prose dans la tragedie de Shakespeare; on a rendu en vers blancs ce qui est en vers blancs, et presque toujours vers pour vers; ce qui est familier et bas est traduit avec familiarite et avec bassesse. On a tâché de s'elever avec l'auteur quand il s'eleve; et lorsqu'il est enfle et guinde, on a eu soin de ne l'être ni plus ni moins que lui (M.vii, 435).[23]

[22] See Besterman, *Voltaire on Shakespeare,* Introduction, pp. *29-34,* for an interesting discussion of the essential differences between the Shakespearian and the Voltairian (and, by extension, Classical French) conceptions of tragedy, as illustrated by *La Mort de César* and *Julius Caesar.*

[23] Note that by content and formulation (prose in a tragedy!, the use of blankverse, the presence of material "familier et bas," "enflé et guinde," the intentionally over-

How well did he succeed?

Certain difficulties of language were found to be insurmountable; Voltaire usually explains these at the bottom of the page. Puns, for instance. A "mender of bad soles" (I,i,15) is rendered as "raccommodeur d'âmes;"[24] "with awl" ('withal') passes unnoticed (I,i,23). In Cassius' lines (I, ii, 155-156),

> Now is it Rome indeed and room enough,
> When there is in it but one only man,

"Rome"-"room" is transliterated "Roume"-"roum:" "Ah, c'est aujourd'hui que Roume existe en effet; car il n'y a de roum (de place) que pour Cesar" (*J.C.* I, iii).[25] In so doing, and by relegating the disdained passage to prose, Voltaire grossly misrepresents the tone of his text—and underlines his interpretation with a note: "I1 y a ici une plaisante pointe; Rome en anglais se prononce *roum,* et *roum* signifie aussi place. Cela n'est pas tout-a-fait dans le style de Cinna: mais chaque peuple et chaque siecle ont leur style et leur sorte d'eloquence." Ironic relativist.

He admits a whole menagerie of animals (I,iii, 104-106):

> I know he would not be a wolf

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zealous "on a eu soin") this seemingly factual statement is already an act of criticism. For an account of Alembert's initial misgivings about the faithfulness of Voltaire's translation, see David Williams, Commentaires sur Corneille, pp. 287-288. Alembert writes, in his letter of 8 Sept. 1762: "j'ai peine a croire qu'en certains endroits l'original soit aussi mauvais qu'il le paraît dans cette traduction." He questions Voltaire on specific expressions and concludes: "je n'ai point l'original sous les yeux . . . mais comme l'anglais et le français sont deux langues vivantes, et dans lesquelles par consequent on connaît parfaitement ce qui est bas ou noble, propre ou impropre, serieux ou familier, il est tres important que dans votre traduction vous ayez conserve partout le caractere de l'original dans chaque phrase, afin que les Anglais ne vous reprochent pas ou d'ignorer la valeur des expressions dans leur langue, ou d'avoir defigure leur idole, pour ne pas dire leur magot."

[24] Here, Voltaire does little better than Le Tourneur, whom he criticized in his 1776 *Discours* a *l'Académie:* "Il ne traduit pas la charmante equivoque sur le mot qui signifie *âme,* et sur le mot qui veut diresemelle de soulier." An ironical "charmante," for in his note to his translation, Voltaire comments: "Il faut savoir que Shakespeare avait eu peu d'education, qu'il avait le malheur d'être reduit a être comedien, qu'il fallait plaire au peuple, que le peuple plus riche en Angleterre qu'ailleurs frequente les spectacles, et que Shakespeare le servait selon son goût."

[25] Quotations from Voltaire's translation are identified by the letters *J.C.,* with act and scene as given in Besterman, Voltaire on Shakespeare (text reproduced from the first edition of Voltaire's *Théâtre* de Pierre Corneille (Geneva, 1764), II, 325-407). Voltaire renumbers Shakespeare's scenes to conform with French theatrical convention: new character, new scene. Pope, in his edition, also renumbers scenes.

But that he sees the Romans are but sheep;
He were no lion were not Romans hinds.

Il ne serait pas loup, s'il n'etait des moutons.
Il nous trouva chevreuils, quand il s'est fait lion.

But he feels constrained to reassure his readers: "Le loup et les moutons ne gâtent point les beautes de ce morceau, parce que les Anglais n'attachent point a ces mots une idee basse; ils n'ont point le proverbe, qui se *fait* brebis *le loup* le mange" (J.C. I,viii). "Brutus' harlot" (II,i,287) is, however, upgraded to "concubine" (her original status in Plutarch), while Voltaire leers and falsely advertises in a note: "Il y a dans l'original 'whore' putain" (*J.C.* II,iii).

This is not the only occasion he abuses the reader with a footnote. At the end of Act II, scene ii, Caesar speaks to Brutus, Casca, Cinna, and the rest (126-127):

Good friends, go in, and taste some wine with me;
And we, like friends, will straightway go together.

Voltaire translates (*J.C.* II,vii):

Allons tous au logis, buvons bouteille ensemble,
Et puis en bons amis nous irons au sénat.

And he shamelessly affirms: "Toujours la plus grande fidélité dans la traduction." In fact, wherever he claims his translation is accurate, it almost certainly is not. Nor were his contemporaries deceived. The Annie litte'raire (ever a jealous guardian of the truth — where Voltaire was involved) correctly translated Shakespeare's lines, then added, ironically, "ou comme traduit M. de Voltaire, 'buvons bouteille ensemble' " (1776, IV, 87).

Indeed, the Annie *littéraire*—always ready to attack the wily Patriarch in his unwary moments ("quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus") — fired its usual broadside at hisJules *César,* calling it "un veritable galimatias fait a coup de dictionnaire," and quipping: "Il est fâcheux pour le traducteur qu'il n'ait pas eu un meilleur dictionnaire" (car) "il n'entend pas l'auteur qu'il traduit et qu'il critique" (1777, VI, 243 and 246; 1769, IV, 12).

The Annie litte'rairesingles out for special attention a short passage from the beginning of Act II, scene i, 21-27 (J.C. II,i):

But 'tis a common proof,
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;

But when he once attains the upmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend.

N'importe, on sait assez quelle est l'ambition.
L'echelle des grandeurs a ses yeux se presente;
Elle y monte en cachant son front aux spectateurs;
Et quand elle est au haut, alors elle se montre;
Alors jusques au ciel elevant ses regards,
D'un coup d'oeil meprisant sa vanite dedaigne
Les premiers echelons qui firent sa grandeur.

Voltaire has changed the figure from 'lowliness (or feigned humility) as ambition's ladder (or means)' to 'ambition on the "echelle des grandeurs" (i.e., the degrees of "grandeur"—or the ladder leading to "grandeurs"):' from "turns his face"—"turns his back" to "cachant son front"—"alors elle se montre;" from masculine ("he") to feminine ("elle:" "l'ambition"). He has suppressed the "climber-upward," which, in Shakespeare, tends to upstage and replace the personification ("ambition"), he has supplied "spectateurs"—and named ambition's moral defect: "vanite."

The *Année littéraire* objects (1777, ***VI***, 245-246):

> Dans l'original, l'humilite est l'echelle de l'ambitieux; c'est-a-dire, qu'il s'eleve par des moyens bas qu'il dedaigne ensuite quand il est parvenu au faîte de la puissance. Dans la traduction, au contraire, c'est l'echelle des grandeurs a laquelle monte l'ambition, et lorsqu'elle est au haut, elle dedaigne les premiers echelons, lesquels sont les grandeurs; ainsi il resulte de cet amphigouri que l'ambition dedaigne les grandeurs, idee directement contraire a celle de l'original.[26]

As much as on Voltaire's choice not to translate Shakespeare's paradoxical figure of "lowliness" as "ladder," the objection seems to turn on the definition of "*échelle* des grandeurs" and "premiers *échelons*" and a failure to differentiate between them (ladder X rungs). It is regrettable that the critics of the *Année* ***litte'raire*** did not have a better dictionary.

[26] The *Année littéraire*, here is reviewing and paraphrasing Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, ***An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear, compared with the Greek and French Dramatu Poets, with some Remarks upon the Misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire*** (London: 1769), pp. 214-216.

But Jules *César,* upon close inspection, presents worse distortions than the one imputed above, and, here and there, actual mistranslations, e.g., I,ii, 125-126 (*J.C.* I,iii):

Ay, and that tongue of his that bade the Romans
Mark him and write his speeches in their books . . .

Cette terrible voix, remarque bien, Brutus,
Remarque, et que ces mots soient ecrits dans tes livres . . .

Most of this is padding; the rest is wrong.

Mrs. Montagu long ago excoriated Voltaire for his failure to grasp the most obvious primary meaning of "course" in "Our course will seem too bloody" (II,i, 162).[27] He suggests, in a note, "course des lupercales" (unlikely) and "service de plats sur table" (exact for the pun) and leaves the word in italics in the text (*J.C.* II,ii).

There are numerous omissions and abridgments (and a few additions by Voltaire).[28] For example, I,ii, 268-271 (the words immediately following "he plucked me ope his doublet and offered them his throat to cut"): "An I had been a man of any occupation, if I would not have taken him at a word, I would I might go to hell among the rogues. And so he fell." Either this was offensive to Voltaire, or it seemed irrelevant. Possibly, he could make no sense of it. In any case, he was honest enough to supply suspension points—if not one of his famous notes (*J.C.* I,v). Again, at the beginning of Act I, scene iii (I,vii in Voltaire's version), the French Casca neglects to address Cicero by name. This would make poor theater, if the translation were to be staged—leaving the audience as much in the dark as the two characters on this eve of the Ides of March.

Worse, there are cases of seemingly intentional misrepresentation. Voltaire states, of Act I, scene i (*J.C.* I,i, note): "Cette premiere scene est en prose"—and so translates the first half of it, making no distinction between the commoners and the tribunes. He has Caesar speak prose at the beginning of Act I, scene ii, When Brutus, Casca, and Cassius converse at the end of this same scene, Voltaire notes (*J.C.* I,v): "cette scene est continuee en prose." These assertions are, simply, not true. What is more, they give the unsuspecting reader

[27] Mrs. Montagu, *op.cit.*, p. 213: "It is very extraordinary that a man should set up for a translator, with so little acquaintance in the language as not to be able to distinguish whether a word in a certain period signifies a race, a service of dishes, or a mode of conduct."

[28] Besterman, in his ***Voltaire on Shakespeare,*** spots many of these.

the impression that the mixture of poetry and prose in this play is capricious, if not chaotic. It is hard not to believe that Voltaire did this with malicious intent.[29] He cannot have failed to notice that the level of discourse is made to fit the person and the situation. Persons of low condition or in familiar situations speak prose—even Casca when it pleases him to play the vulgar role ("What a blunt fellow is this grown to be," says Brutus); but Brutus and Cassius address him in verse. The significant contrast is lost in Voltaire's translation.

Whether intentionally or through a mere lapse of esthetic discernment, Voltaire occasionally lowers the tone of an entire passage—as we saw earlier in the case of the isolated expression "buvons bouteille ensemble." An example in point is this nobly-worded meditation of Caesar (II,ii, 32-37):

> Cowards die many times before their deaths;
> The valiant never taste of death but once.
> Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
> It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
> Seeing that death, a necessary end,
> Will come when it will come.

Voltaire (*J.C.* II,v):

> Un poltron meurt cent fois avant de mourir une;
> Et le brave ne meurt qu'au moment du trepas.
> Rien n'est plus etonnant, rien ne me surprend plus,
> Que lorsque l'on me dit qu'il est des gens qui craignent.
> Que craignent-ils? la mort est un but necessaire.
> Mourons quand il faudra.

The second of these verses is the only one that does any justice at all to the original. Even it does not render the full sense: the sense of experiencing—of "tasting"—death. And read with the wrong em-

[29] On the basis of my readings, I cannot wholly agree with T. E. Lawrenson's contention, in his article, "Voltaire, translator of Shakespeare, Western Canadian Studies in Modern Languages and Literature (1970), vol. II, pp. 31-32, that there is no indication of "ulterior motive," no example of "deliberate misrepresentation by translation," "never any suspect infidelity of rendering." Voltaire's contemporaries, as we have seen (e.g., Alembert, the *Année littéraire)* were quite aware of what he was doing to the Shakespeare text (in the context of the incipient *Querelle).* As David Williams *(op.cit.,* p. 290) observes: "in the case of the Julius Caesar translation. . . more was at stake . . . Voltaire sought to highlight the barbarism of Shakespeare's work through a bland rendering of his verse." Williams goes on to suggest that "the whole question of the hiddenpolemzcs (my emphasis) in Voltaire's Shakespearian translations needs a more thorough re-examination."

phasis, it may sound banal or humorous, a *vérité de* la *Palice.* "Un poltron," in the first line, is certainly not an adequate equivalent for "Cowards," at least not in this context, and, at the very start, strikes a false note. The expression "avant de mourir une" is awkward, to say the least. Line three is tautological; line four is a dump for subordinating conjunctions; line six has little of the resigned finality of the English, suggests a different sort of shrug. But, above all, it is the movement of the last three lines which is wrong. Measured and straightforward in the original, pausing only for the appositional "a necessary end," it is finally cut short like life itself: "Will come when it will come." In the translation, it bogs down in a morass of que's and qui's, is interrupted by a rhetorical question and forced to four full stops. This translation gives almost all the sense but none of the beauties of the original.

But often—and perhaps more often than not—Voltaire is inspired by the greatness of his text to fashion verses—and whole speeches—that ring true. Such is Cassius' speech from Act I, scene ii (134-154):

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus; and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.
Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.
Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that 'Caesar?'
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
Write them together, yours is as fair a name;
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well;
Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with 'em,
'Brutus' will start a spirit as soon as 'Caesar.'
Now, in the names of all the gods at once,
Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed,
That he is grown so great? Age, thou art sham'd!
Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!
When went there by an age, since the great flood,
But it was fam'd with more than with one man?
When could they say, till now, that talk'd of Rome,
That her wide walls encompass'd but one man?

Voltaire translates (*J.C.* I,iii):

Quel homme! quel prodige! il enjambe ce monde

Comme un vaste colosse; et nous petits humains,
Rampant entre ses pieds, nous sortons notre tête,
Pour chercher en tremblant des tombeaux sans honneur.
Ah! l'homme est quelquefois le maître de son sort:
La faute est dans son coeur, et non dans les etoiles;
Qu'il s'en prenne a lui seul s'il rampe dans les fers.
César! Brutus! eh bien! quel est donc ce César?
Son nom sonne-t-il mieux que le mien ou le vôtre?
Ecrivez votre nom, sans doute il vaut le sien:
Prononcez-les, tous deux sont egaux dans la bouche:
Pesez-les, tous les deux ont un poids bien egal.
Conjurez en ces noms les demons du tartare,
Les demons évoqués viendront également.
Je voudrais bien savoir ce que ce Cesar mange,
Pour s'être fait si grand! O siecle! 6 jours honteux!
O Rome! c'en est fait, tes enfants ne sont plus.
Tu formes des heros, et depuis le deluge
Aucun temps ne te vit sans mortels généreux;
Mais tes murs aujourd'hui contiennent un seul homme.

Prodige, indeed! Here, in blank verse (despite its limitations in French), Voltaire has achieved what he could not in rhymed couplets: an accurate, clear, forceful, often eloquent rendition.

To be sure, Cassius' vanity is not so carefully concealed as in the original: "Son nom sonne-t-il mieux que *le mien* ou le vôtre?" The failure to find an equivalent for the exclamation "Now, in the names of all the gods at once" (transposed, in changed form, to the preceding sentence) and the impossibility of translating "meat" weaken an effective passage. The incantatory verses,

Conjurez en ces noms les demons du tartare,
Les demons évoqués viendront egalement,

raise spirits too many to life too intense. "Brutus" and "Caesar" are the opposing poles and commanding presences in this passage:

'Brutus' will start a spirit as soon as 'Caesar.'

"Start a spirit" loses some of its visibility by being a pun (apparently unnoticed by the translator). But as Voltaire's little footnote about sorcerers and superstitions shows, he was more interested in underlining, explaining and correcting Shakespeare's supposed anachronism, and proclaiming the progress of the *human* spirit. Finally, part of the effect of the last verses is lost with the suppression of the two rhetorical questions.

But *ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis offendar maculis.* And it cannot be denied that Voltaire's version is remarkably close to the original—in the impressions produced by sound and movement, rhetoric and image—and even close in a literal sense. This was perhaps easier to achieve in a translation of what Yves Bonnefoy has called the most French of Shakespeare's plays, or, as Reuben Brower suggests, the most "Corneillian"[30] (was it not this Corneillian air and tone, as much as the conspiracy theme, that dictated Voltaire's choice?) Nothing essential has been changed. One finds, to quote Raymond Naves (*op.cit.*, 258), "ce melange tres shakespearien de noble meditation ('The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves'—'La faute est dans son coeur, et non dans les etoiles') et de simplicité familiere ('we petty men / . . . peep about'—'nous petits humains, / . . . nous sortons notre tête'), de formules morales et de reflexions personnelles entrecoupees." And perhaps, after all, "le vers blanc, a la fois rythme et sans echo, est la seule enveloppe qui convienne, en français comme en anglais, a cette matière complexe." Voltaire comes close to proving what he did not wish: that blank verse, properly handled (with occasional assonance), is a viable form in French.[31]

Thus, near the end, and not for the noblest of motives,[32] Voltaire espoused the most advanced ideas of his younger colleagues—in fact, writing in 1764, was a decade ahead of most of them. He had

[30] *Mirror* on *Mirror* (Harvard, 1974), p. 155, in a discussion of Bonnefoy's translation of Julius Caesar.

[31] A few observations on Voltaire's blank verse, as illustrated by this passage: Whether consciously or by force of habit, Voltaire gives alternating "masculine" and "feminine" (mute e) endings to his verses, with no more than two masculine or two feminine end-words in succession. Naves to the contrary notwithstanding (v. above, "sans echo"), he makes use of assonance ("plus-deluge," "egal-tartare," "également-mange"), consonance ("honneur-sort-fers-Cesar") and even a rimepauvre ("honteux-genereux"), not to mention internal rhyme ("en ces noms les demons"). He resorts to some of the devices common in English blank verse: internal echoes and harmonies ("enjambe-rampant-tremblant"), alliteration—albeit sparingly ("rampant-pieds," "tremblant-tombeaux"), close repetition of the same word ("son nom—votre nom—ces noms"). The verse, "Conjurez en ces noms les demons du tartare'—with its answering echo, "Les demons evoques viendront également"—combines all these devices to produce something like the effect of a conjurer's formula. But, most importantly, Voltaire reproduces, with remarkable fidelity, the stops and starts, the highs and lows (and silences)—in a word, the music, the rhythms, the life-giving breath and breathing of the original.

[32] Or perhaps indeed noble, in the sense that he was seeking to defend, by means fair and foul, traditional French values and French Classical theatre (as incarnated, however imperfectly, by Corneille's Cinna).

always looked for translations more nearly attuned to the *spirit* of their originals; he undertook to show, however hypocritically, in his longest verse translation, that the spirit might perhaps best be conveyed by closer attention to the *word.*

He had written of one of his earlier translations: "ceux qui me reprochent d'avoir supprimé les choses hardies n'ont pas fait assez d'attention au temps present; et ceux qui me reprochent d'avoir fidelement exprimé les autres n'ont aucune connaissance des temps passés" (M.ix, 500, *Lettre de* M. *Eratou a M. Clocpitre).* Torn between loyalty to his author and regard for his reader and contemporary *goût,* he more often than not favored the latter (though far less than did the *géomètres):* "on ne reussira jamais si on ne connait bien le goût de son siecle et le génie de sa langue" *(Dict. phil.,* "Scoliaste")—in translation and, one might add, in original composition. In 1772, eight years after his *Jules César,* he would say, with special reference to translation: "Il faut ecrire pour son temps, et non pour les temps passes."

But the other position was never abandoned and at certain moments ably defended—as in the early *Lettres philosophiques* (written under the impact of his foreign experience): "heureux celui qui sait sentir leurs differents mérites (Italian, English, French literatures), et qui n'a pas fait la sottise de n'aimer que ce qui vient de son pays!" (XXII). He was only extending an old line of thought when, in 1764, he wrote of Shakespeare: "on ne peut deviner quel est le genie de cet auteur, celui de son temps, celui de sa langue, par les imitations qu'on nous a donnees sous le nom de traduction" (M.vii, 436).

Out of this much tormented question of Translation—and here is its great importance—comes a whole new conception of and approach to literature. The basic Classical notion of a universal *goût,* "independant des siecles, du soleil ou des brumes" is seen for what it is: "une chimère philosophique."[33] The literary and critical climate is changing, to permit a Mme de Stael, a Sainte-Beuve, a Taine to flourish—and, in the mists of the future, the natural heirs of this new conception, the Comparatists of the 20th century.

Voltaire was not 25 years in his uneasy grave when Mme de Stael was finding in Translation not the source of pleasurable distraction sought a century earlier (nor the cesspool of possible contamina-

[33] Daniel Mornet, "La Question des règles au XVIII[e] siecle," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire* (1914), *p. 258.*

tion), but a well-spring of knowledge and new ideas. Acquaintance with a foreign literature "n'entraine pas du tout la necessite d'imiter: au contraire, plus l'esprit acquiert de la force par l'étude, plus il devient capable d'une originalite transcendante."[34] After Mme de Stael, *le déluge.* For more than a century and a half, a storm of translations has been replenishing all the wells of Europe, and the world.[35]

But the first drops fell during the 18th century. And Voltaire, in France, was one of the rain-makers — not only with his *Jules César* but with other shorter versions, which revealed, in distillation, the foreign sea from which they came.

The way was opened to a great enrichment of French literary and cultural tradition, but Voltaire (and many with him) would not or could not take it. Although he was among the first to introduce into France certain important English writers — including Shakespeare (and he knew it), his judgment remained, in the end, largely adverse. He took his stand on the *Grand Sibcle* (especially Racine), on Vergil and Horace, on Ariosto and Tasso—not to forget Voltaire himself! These — despite their imperfections, which he did not hesitate to censure — represented *goût:* one, indivisible, universal, eternal, immutable, ideal.

Voltaire's interest in translation stems, finally, not from a wide-ranging cosmopolitanism, but from a passionate pursuit of the absolute criteria of taste, a belief in the validity of classical models and a recognition of the contribution to be made by certain modern works, judiciously chosen and set into the structure, or at least the niches, of his ideal "Temple du Goût." Unlike the *géomètres* (with their strictures, formulas, rules) and the more narrow-minded of the *Anciens,* he remained flexible, *disponible.* He sought not a recipe for literary success but sure touchstones of taste taken from various literatures (Latin, Greek, Italian — and even English). To defend the sanctity of his "Temple," he felt compelled to exclude certain elements, to disguise or convert others, which were then admitted.[36] He recog-

[34] "Lettera di Madama la baronessa de Stael Holstein ai Signori compilatori della Biblioteca italiana," Biblioteca italiana (June 1816), quoted by West, p. 355.

[35] As Rene Wellek points out, in a somewhat different context: "the great poets and writers — Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky — have exercised enormous influence often in poor and loose translations" ("Stylistics, Poetics and Criticism," in Discriminations (New Haven: 1970), p. 126).

[36] Raymond Naves' *Le Goût* de Voltaire remains the fullest and most lucid discussion of Voltaire's ideal *goût.*

nized the importance of foreign models, for the new life they could bring to a literature which, without them, risked becoming moribund.[37] But his vision of a possible attainable absolute *goût* never deserted him, and he was never blinded by the infatuation, infecting some of his younger contemporaries, for certain obviously contaminated foreign imports (accepted lock, stock and barrel). We know, pertinently, how fierce was his condemnation of Shakespeare in 1776-1778, in the heat of the *Querelle,* when France, after spurning the Bard for so long, finally embraced him passionately and, in Voltaire's view, without discernment.

But in a century that, taking its pass-word from the *géomètres,* slighted and misunderstood poetry,[38] Voltaire had the great virtue of holding it in high esteem. "La poesie (ktait) une de ses vénérations, sa seule veneration peut-être" (Naves, 239)—the sacred art of Vergil and Horace, in the temple of which he, too, was an acolyte. "I1 y a plus a profiter dans douze vers d'Homère et de Virgile que dans toutes les critiques qu'on a faites de ces deux grands hommes" *(Lettres phil.,* XVIII). He knew that to understand another people—even a people as difficult to understand as the English of the late 16th, early 17th centuries—one must begin with its poetry: "L'eloquence et la poesie marquent le caractere des nations" (M.xxiv, 30). And that is why, when we speak of Versions by Voltaire, we mean translations or imitations not of prose but poetry. When he wished to reveal a foreign literature, it was to its poetry he turned his heart and hand.

Finally, through long experience, he realized how hard it is to translate at all well: "il est bien aisé de rapporter en prose les sottises d'un poete (how especially easy for Voltaire!), mais tres difficile de traduire ses beaux vers" *(Lettres phil.,* XVIII). He knew how few there are who (to quote Dryden) "have all the Talents which are requisite." More than this, he was well aware that translation is really impossible—is, at best, a *pis-aller,* a last resource: "les poetes ne se traduisent point. Peut-on traduire de la musique?" he wrote to Mme du Deffand (Best.D5822, 19 May 1754). Whether one seeks to render the word--or the spirit only: call it Metaphrase, Paraphrase

[37] He wrote in a moment of discouragement: "Rien n'est neuf, par consequent tout languit et la multitude des auteurs a fait la decadence" ***(Notebooks,*** II, 690).

[38] "Plus les facultes critiques se perfectionnent, plus l'imagination s'emousse; et . . . autant les moeurs des anciens etaient poetiques, autant les moeurs presentes resistent a la poesie" (M.xxv, 161, ***Articles extraits de la Gazette littéraire***).

or Imitation;[39] whether one wishes to give pleasure or serve a moral, intellectual or esthetic purpose, the result is equally approximate and tentative. "En un mot, on ne traduit point le genie" (M.xxv, 174).

And yet Voltaire never stopped trying. If we accept the tale told by La Harpe (M.x, 611), one of Voltaire's last literary efforts was a translation—or rather two translations (one literal and one free—summing up a lifelong ambivalence)—from the beginning of Book 16 of the *Iliad*, submitted under a pseudonym to the French Academy for the *Concours* of 1778. It took fifth place. Judged "très-faible, quoique facile," it would not have obtained even a *mention* without the support of La Harpe, who was in on the secret!

Thus, a career and an age had opened and closed on almost the same note. But not quite. The century that had decided in favor of paraphrase and imitation was changing its mind, if not its ways. Even Voltaire sometimes had second thoughts, "et ce n'est pas ce qui nous etonne le moins." The Academy's judgment might be applied to many of the century's translations, most of which would need to be redone. But there were exceptions—even in the work of Voltaire; and, all in all, it was a time that had much "Praise and Encouragement" for what Dryden called "so considerable a part of Learning."

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[39] *As did* Dryden *(Preface to Ovid's Epistles). Metaphrase: literal translation, "word by word, and Line by* Line." *Paraphrase: "translation with Latitude," conveying the sense, but not necessarily in the same words nor with the same "ornaments" nor in the same order, Imitation: a new composition forsaking both "words and sense, . . . taking* only *some* general *hints from the Original."*