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FAULKNER IN FRENCH

The translation of William Faulkner's works into French constitutes, on the whole, a happy story with a happy ending. In illustrating some of the advantages that can be gained for an original work by translation, the critic George Steiner specifically chooses the case of Faulkner as an example. Steiner finds that translation can, paradoxically, reveal the stature of a body of work which had been undervalued or ignored in its native guise: Faulkner returned to American awareness after he had been translated and critically acclaimed in France. [1] Translation provides, moreover, a privileged vantage point from which one can study a variety of practical and theoretical problems presented by the passage of a most original body of fiction – such as Faulkner's – from one culture to another. It is not our intention, however, within the limits of this article, to study the evolution of the style of all of Faulkner's French translations. We are going to consider the translation of one novel only, *The Sound and the Fury*,[2] because it is generally recognized in France as the author's masterpiece and also because the Preface to the French version, written by the translator, is in itself a very revealing document.[3]

Certainly Faulkner had good translator in the person of Maurice Edgar Coindreau. When he started translating Faulkner, Coindreau, whc was originally a Hispanicist, had lived since 1923 in the United States and had already translated other America novelists of the thirties: *Manhattan Transfer* in 1928, *A Farewell to Arms* in 1932, and *The Sun Also Rises* in 1933. His critical essays show that he had both a sympathetic understanding of the works he was translating and a typical French need for clarity and intelligibility.[4] He was thus an excellent intermediary

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[1] *After Babel (*London, Oxford, and New York; Oxford University Press 1975) 396

[2] The English language edition used is that first published in New York by Random House in 1929, subsequently reproduced photographically; all English language page references are to this version.

[3] Williams Faulkner, *Le Bruit et la fureur,* traduit de l'américain par Maurice Edgar Coindreau, nouvelle édition revue (Paris : Gallimard 1972). The Preface consists of ten pages (7-17) and is dated Princeton University 1937 (Coindreau was then teaching French Literature there). All page references will be to this edition, now the most common in France. It was originally published by Gallimard, in 1938. Coindreau had already translated *As I Lay Dying* (1934), with a preface by Valery Larbaud, and *Light in August (1935).*

[4] Most of Coindreau's essays have been translated into English in Coindreau, Maurice Edgar, *The Time of William Faulkner, a French View of Modern America Fiction,* essays edited and chiefly translated by George McMullan Reeves, with a foreword by Michel Gresset (Colu mbia: South Carolina University Press 1971). On Coindreau's role as an intermediary see also Thelma M. Smith and ward L. Miner, *Transatlantic Migration: The Contemporary America Novel in France* (Durham: Duke University Press 1955) ch. 9, pp. 122-45. The checklist on Faulkner (pp. 227-35) is still useful.

between two cultures; his contribution toward the diffusion of American fiction in France cannot be overestimated.

After the publication in 1931 of Coindreau's first essay on Faulkner in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*,[5] Faulkner's works were immediately hailed by important writers as major works. In his prefatory essay to *Sanctuary,* published first in the *N.R.F.* in November 1933, André Malraux concluded his brilliant analysis of the nature of Faulknerian fate with a formula which was to become famous: *Sanctuaire,* c'est l'intrusion de la tragédie greque dans la roman policier. [6] A few years later, Sartre's essays on *Sartoris* and on *the Sound and the Fury* were an occasion for the author of *Nausea* to define Faulkner's notion of time and its connection with the absurd: Man spends his life struggling against time and time, like an acid, eats away at man, eats him away from himself and prevents him from fulfilling his human character. Everything is absurd. "Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." [7] Those seminal essays were followed, shortly after the war, by longer critical studies, among which the penetrating remain those by Jean Pouillon in *Temps et Roman* (1946) and by Claude-Edmonde Magny in *L'âge du roman américain* (1948).

The assimilation of Faulkner's technical innovations, together with their systematic use and extension, accounts for much of what is new in the *nouveau roman*. It is impossible to read the novels of Claude Simon, or Robbe-Grillet, or even Nathalie Sarraute without recognizing some of Faulkner's original discoveries carried to their ultimate technical or philosophical conclusions. The immediate reception by the French novelists of Faulkner, indeed his lasting and fecund influence on two generations of French writers, may be partly accounted for by the fact that Faulkner himself had used and expanded, with a high degree of personal originality, the innovations made by the author of *Remembrance of Things Past.* Reading Faulkner helped the French understand Proust better and showed them one could go beyond him in the same direction. Thanks to Faulkner, they perceived more clearly both Proust's originality and his limitations. Thanks to Proust, Faulkner was adopted by the French as an American romantic uncle who had extended the French heritage. A passage from Sartre's essay on *The Sound and the Fury* is particularly illuminating in this respect:

To tell the truth, Proust's fictional technique *should have been* Faulkner's. It was the logical conclusion of his metaphysics. But Faulkner is a lost man, and it is because he feels lost that he takes risks and pursue his thought to its uttermost consequences. Proust is a Frenchman and a classicist. The French lose themselves only a little at a time and always manage to find themselves again. Eloquence,

[5] M.E. Coindreau, William Faulkner, *Nouvelle Revue Française* 36 (1931) 926-30
[6] A. Malraux, Préface à « Sanctuary » de W. Faulkner, *Nouvelle Revue Française* 41 (1933) 747
[7] As translated by Annette Michelson and quoted in *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Robert Penn Warren (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall 1966) 92

intellectuality, and a liking for clear ideas were responsible for Proust's retaining at least the semblance of chronology.[8]

Curiously enough, this characterization of Proust by Sartre is an equally accurate description of the limitations of Coindreau's translation *of The Sound and the Fury*: too much intellectuality, an excessive clarification of the original text, in a word, an incorporation of the American original into the confines of French fiction as it could be conservatively defined in the 1930s.

The text of the Preface clearly indicates what the translator believed to be his guiding principles. Coindreau's main preoccupation was to remain faith-ful to the riginal without adding any obscurity to an already difficult text. In fact, clarity and obscurity are the two categories he uses to judge the value of his translation. He makes the French language responsible for his own personal choices: The precison of the French language has often led me, in spite of myself, to clarify the text.[9] Furthermore, the entire Preface caters to the fears of the average French reader of the pre-war period of losing himself. Coindreau, anticipating the difficulties this hypothetical reader is going to encounter, gives him a carefully drawn map of the unexplored territory in the novel. This detailed guide on how to find one's way in the Faulknerian labyrinth is adroit and intelligent but very revealing of the prevalent timidity of the time toward innovations in narrative technique, such as the use of the same name for two different characters or the liberation from chronological narrative. Coindreau thus retells the story in chronological order, lists the major themes, explains the structure of the novel, comparing its four parts to the four movements of a symphony: moderato, adagio, allegro for the first three, the last one subdividing itself into an allegro furioso, an andante religioso, an allegro barbaro and, finally, a lento!

After a survey of the macrostructure of the novel, Coindreau undertakes a close analysis of Faulkner's stylistic devices, his use of symbolism and the boldness of his ellipses; he even takes the liberty of providing missing words in an elliptic sentence in the section on Quentin. Fearing that the French reader, even after all the translator's efforts to clarify Faulkner's text, might still be baffled by too many obscurities, Coindreau feels the need to reassure him that a certain amount of obscurity is an essential element and positive trait in the original:

Je ne crains pas, du reste, d'affirmer que la compréhension absolue de chaque phrase n'est nullement nécessaire pour goûter *Le Bruit et la fureur.* Je comparerais volontiers ce roman à ces paysages qui gagnent à êtrevus quand la brume les enveloppe. La beauté tragique s'en accroît, et le mystère en voile les horreurs qui perdraient en force sous des lumières trop crues. L'esprit assez réfléchi pour saisir, à une première lecture, le sens de tous les énigmes que nous propose M. Faulkner,

[8] Faulkner : *A Collection of Critical Essays,* 91
[9] Faulkner, *Le Bruit et la fureur*, Préface, 17 translated in *The Time of William Faulkner,* 50

n'éprouverait sans doute pas cette impression d'envoûtement qui donne à cet ouvrage unique son plus grand charme et sa réelle originalité.[10]

Coindreau discerns two main obstacles which limit absolute fidelity to the original text : the French language (la precision de la langue française) and the cultural habits of the French reading public. One might argue that the French reader is not as lazy or inattentive as Coindreau imagines him to be. The reaction, twenty years later, not only of the French public in general but of most French critics to the French new novelists (who, on the whole, gained earlier and wider recognition abroad rather than in France) seems on the contrary to justify fully the translator's timidity and all the precautions of this Preface. In it he expresses quite lucidly the dilemma of the honest translator who understands the original but does not find a way of restating it to those who share his native language, and even less, in a style to which they are accustomed. The temptation of freely adapting the original and of forcing it into a familiar mould is great. It is indeed quite probable that if Coindreau had lived in the eighteenth century or in any period of French cultural supremacy, he would have adapted Faulkner to the mythical genius of the French language and to the no less mythical taste of the ruling class of his own country. He would have written a twentieth-century version of what the "belles infidels" were in the eighteenth century, a crystal clear novel in the French psychological tradition of Stendhal or of Benjamin Constant with a touch of Racine if the "intrusion" of tragedy was really unavoidable: in modern terms, a mixture of Françoise Sagan and Françios Mauriac.

Coindreau must have experienced this temptation strongly, since he states: Bien que parfaitement conscient des imperfections inévitable dans la traduction d'un ouvrage aussi périlleux, je crois cependant pouvoir affirmer au public français que c'est bien une traduction que je lui offre et non une adaptation plus ou moins libre.[11] In 1937 Coindreau had no other choice. The time of French cultural supremacy was over; he was even one of the few people who were aware that French literature was entering a new era – l'âge du roman américain as Claude-Edmond Magny called it ten years later. Already in 1937 Sartre considered Dos Passos the greatest writer of our time, and his essays on Faulkner show that he admired greatly, as did Malraux, the American novelist's art (if nothis metaphysics).[12] Even though he sensed that French reader might not be ready for

[10] Faulkner, *Le Bruit et la fureur*, Préface, 15, translated in *The Time of William Faulkner, 49. Immediately afterwards*, Coindreau, yielding to a dangerous penchant of the French to explain style in terms of biography, indicates that *the Sound and the Fury* was written alors que l'auteur se débattait dans des difficultés d'ordre intime, and he points out in a footnote that les profondes secousses morales sont un facteur puissant dans l'inspiration de William Faulkner, giving as conclusive evidence that *Light in August* was written after the loss of a child and *Absalom, Absalmo!* After the accidental death of a brother (Préface, 16).

[11] Ibid., 16

[12] Je tiens Dos Passos pour le plus grand écrivain de notre temps « is the concluding sentence of an article, » A propos de John Dos Passos et de 1919, « N.R.F. 51 (1938) 301, it has been collected in

it, Coindreau translated as faithfully as possible this exotic product of another culture, conceived in a country whose economic power was already recognized and which appeared, a decade later, as the saviour of the Western world and the most powerful nation on earth. The mania for everything American acquired a very wide public in France after 1945, and the familiarity with American mores and American stereotypes (gained, for instance, from reading American detective stories or seeing American movies) indirectly facilitated the reading of Faulkner in French.

In 1937, however, Coidreau's task in translating a book as profoundly immersed in the American culture of the deep South as *The Sound and the Fury* still presented almost insurmountable difficulties. One example and a particularly crucial one for the understanding of the novel shows how much the American socio-cultural context was still too radically alien to the French to permit certain transpositions. Whereas Sartre in 1947 was able to present on the French stage an entire play concerned with the problem of the Negro in the American South (*La Putain respectueuse*), Coindreau, ten years earlier, did not even attempt to transpose into French the specific flavour of what he calls "the black dialect":

J'ai résolument écarté toute tentative de faire passer dans mon texte la saveur du dialecte noir. Il y a là, à mon avis, un problème aussi insoluble que le serait, pour un traducteur de langue anglaise, la reproduction du parler marseillais.[13]

The choice of the French analogue is surprising because the « parler nègre" in the novel is more than a technical problem and its structural and thematic functions transcent the mere picturesqueness of "le parler marseillais". There may be no solution to the problem in terms of what is commonly known as a "faithful" translation, but the result is unquestionably a betrayal of the original. This becomes apparent in what may be considered the climactic scene of the fourth section and perhaps of the whole book: the sermon of the visiting clergyman from St Louis on Easter Sunday. More than in any other part of the novel, the shortcomings of the translation emerge here. It would take a creative writer to find a French equivalent of the poetic and emotional flavour of the original, which is composed of three ingredients traditionally alien to the French but closely related in the English language: the poetry of the King James version of the Bible (primarily the New Testament), the poetry of Shakespeare, and the poetry of the Negro spiritual.

The sermon episode involves a segregated Negro congregation of listeners as if Faulkner meant that the promise of the resurrection was only for the oppressed (and chosen) black people just as the Passover had been for the enslaved Jews in Egypt, the only white person present rapt in his sweet blue gaze (p. 370) being the "innocent" Ben, under the protection of Dilsey. A sharp contrast

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Situations I (Paris : Gallimard 1947) 14-25. In the same volume are reprinted two essays on Faulkner : « Satoris » (7-13) and A propos de *Le Bruit et la fureur* (70-81).

[13] Faulkner, *Le Bruit et la fureur,* Préface, 17

is established by Faulkner between a white man's way of speaking (as first adopted by the preacher) with a voice level and cold, a manner so strange and imitative in a Negro that it sounds as if a monkey were talking, and the Negroid intonation and pronunciation which was as different as day and dark from his former tone, with a sad timbrous quality like an alto horn, sinking into their hearts and speaking there again when it had ceased in fading and cumulate echoes (p. 367). The communion between preacher and listerners is established by this voice until… they [the audience] were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words
(p. 367).

It is indeed hard for the French reader to understand the possibility of this communion which may end up in a state of ecstasy "beyond the need for words" but which is based on the use of a common idiom strong differentiated by Faulkner on the printed page. Coindreau makes his Negroes talk in the stiff language of seventeeth-century "moralists"; he make them utter the platitudinous generalities which at the same time Sartre was denouncing in all the phones ("les salauds") of a French provincial town (*La Nausée was* published in 1938). The dialogue among Negroes as rendered by Coindreau does not suggest even remotely the working-class vocabulary, syntax, and colour of the spoken French as it is so tactfully stylized in Céline's prose, for instance. (Coindreau may have read Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit of 1932*, but for a long time only other novelists, like Sartre himself, perceived the full significance of Céline's stylistic revolution.)

A short exchange between Frony and Dilsey before the preacher starts his sermon is enough to mark the difference of tone between the two versions: the insignificant looking man is first greeeted by the congregation with disappointment and even consternation. "En dey brung dat all de way fum Saint Looey," Front whispered. "I ve knowed de Lawd to use cuiser tools dan dat Dilsey said (p. 366). The French version, overlooking the grammatical irregularities and the phonetic spelling, misses also the rhythm and the word order, giving the two Negro women the same dull, flat, and formal language as the white characters:

> -Et ils ont été jusqu'à Saint-Louis pour nous rapporter ça! Murmura Frony.
> - J'ai vu le bon Dieu employer des instruments plus étranges encore, dit Dilsey.[14]

The substitution of « le bon Dieu » for « le Seigneur » is characteristic of the condescending attitude of the translator toward Dilsey : she may be a "coeur simple", but she is not childish. The addition of "encore" to "plus estranges" is not only a cliché of bad French poetry (its six syllables are reminiscent to a French ear

[14] Ibid., 349

of the expected hemistich of a classic alexandrime line), it also has the hollow ring of empty eloquence and it makes Dilsey sound like a French bourgeoise "parlant pour ne rien dire." Furthermiore, even the use of the adjective "étranges" identifies the Dilsey word "cuiser" as "curiouser, an interpretation which is far from being obvious to the average speaker of English.

The Dilsey and Fronty aside occurs even before the assembly at large falls under the incantatory spell induced by the power of the preacher's voice. The sermon must clearly be seen as a crucial test for any translator of Faulkner, not only because the author makes a distinct effort to characterize a socially separate and economically oppressed class, but most of all because, from a literary point of view, the passage is one of great beauty and emotion. Language, sounds, intonation, and the symbolic quality of the word as a unifying force "joining hearts" in mystical communion constitute the very heights of Faulknerian artistry. It is the religious "bringing into silence," beyond the need for words, which is described in these few pages by the very evocative force of words themselves.

At first glance, it would seem possible for a translator to be successful in rendering into French the principal image which occur in the descriptive narration of the passage, as well as in transposing that part of the narrative devoted to a description of the vocal artistry of the preacher. Thus the monkey metaphor, or the preacher as monkey, which is elaborated and repeated throughout the passage, could theoretically be carried out in French too. As we saw earlier, however, the monkey metaphor applies both to a manner of speaking, stiff and imitative, and to the very first physical description of the preacher. In English syntax, Faulkner can well string adjectives together in a very specific order, which suggests an order of identification in the reader's mind:

He [the preacher] had a wizened black face like a small, aged monkey. (p. 365)

The order of association for the English reader will thus be age – or the hard-earned wisdom of age – wizened), black (not white), size (small), old (age), then monkey (size, ridicule, compact features, manner of speech). With the French syntax, the force and compact, unpunctuated impression is lost:

une figure noire ratatinée, un air vieillot de petit singe.

Worse than the loss of a forceful expression, however, is the use of "un air vieillot," which tends to belittle and again to "embourgeoiser" the patently ugly small man.

As the force of the preacher's voice prevails over his initially repugnant appearance, so does the use of sound imagery supersede the visual. We follow very precisely the trajectory of this voice from "cette corde froide et monotone" to "la voix avec son timbre triste qui rappelait le son du cor" and finally to « il paraissait alimenter sa vie qui … y avait incrusté ses dents… » In this description

of speech, Coindreau does render the voice qualities quite accurately : in fact, he even preserves the increasing rhythmic intensity of the sermon by adapting, on one occasion at least, the same length of sentence as Faulkner's (And the congregation… "Yes, Jesus" pp. 367-8). Ironically it is at the very point in the sermon where Faulkner's preacher changes from the stiff white form of address "Brethren" to the black" Breddren en sistuhn that Coindreau admittedly cannot keep up. For Faulkner, black talk is not described in one word: "They [the congregation] did not mark just when his [the preacher's] intonation, his pronuncuation, became Negroid… (p. 368). For the Frenchman. It is merely a matter of intonation: Ils ne remarquèrent pad quand son intonation devint negroïde (p. 351) and it is at this point that translation and original part ways

The preacher begins his lengthy, hallucinatory remembrance of Christ's life, death, and resurrection by slowly drawing the listeners into his circle; the gradual switch from "Brethren" (the way a white preacher might address his parishioners) to "breddren en sistuhn" is subtly gauged to reach the entire audience, male and female, just as his frequent appeals to the present, real situation in terms of Christ in past history revitalize his subject: "Look at dem little chillen settin dar. Jesus wus like dat once" (p. 369). In French, the set, stilted apostrophe "O mes bien chers frères, o mes bien chères soeurs" maintains an extremely high level of prose style (not to mention the condescending tone) which is virtually the opposite of the original. Still another element of the sermon, the refrain, which captures in a single phrase the message of the talk –"I got the recollection and the blood of the Lamb" – undergoes a similar white-black transformation to "I got de ricklickshum en de blood of de Lamb" (p. 368). In English, moreover, the sense of the word recollection appears to be memory, for the preacher, as at the beginning of a trance, must first put himself in touch with the "dead" spririt in order to convey is message to the living. The French translation of this refrain "J'ai recueilli le sang de l'Agneau" interprets" re-collection literally as « re-cueillir » and does not suggest the quality of memory or summoning up of the past which pervades the original.

We noted earlier the three levels of poetry evident in the sermon: the Biblical, the Shakespearean, and the Negro spiritual. Coindreau, through his refusal to transpose the Negro speech into any French equivalent, loses the multi-dimensional aspect of these overlays. The preacher speaks of "swinging chariots" (p. 368) ("Swing Low Sweet Chariot"), of "de milk en de dew of de old salvation when de long, cold years rolls away" (p. 369) (Massa's in de cold cold ground). Of course, these spirituals themselves utilize Old and New Testament images (such as the chariot of death), but in the preacher's code of signs, shared by his audience, their repetition strikes a comforting,cultural chord. As the passage increases in intensity, following Christ's birth, "de glory en de pangs" (p. 369), to his imminent death, "We gwine to kill yo little Jesus" (P. 369), to his murder, "I hears de weepin en de cryin," and finally to his resurrection, "I sees de doom crak en hears de golden horns shoutin down de glory" (p. 370), a common thread of

appeal, especially to the congregation's sense of sound, can be detected. "Angels singin," "houtin," "weepin," "cryin" – these sounds provide the vehicle by which the emotional realism of the vision is conjured up. In translaton the sound effects of phonetic spellings remain untouched, as do some strong alliterative elements: "I hears de *boasting en de braggin*…" (p. 370). Syllabification in the English text also serves to characterize black intonation: "maybe she [Mary] look out de do" en see de Roman *po-lice* passin (p. 369; italics mine). Mary becomes shortened to Ma'y and door to do. In a less elevated French style, insertion of a slang term for police might well give more of the original's flavor.

There are two other linguistic components which are of interest in the sermon as problem areas for an accurate translation: grammatical deformation of English and the syntactical integration of the Biblical text into the black man's speech. Certainly the insistent "I sees," "I hears," and "Whut I see?" are the most obvious departures from "I see" and "I hear"; thus in French "Je vois and J'entends correct the ungrammatical English. In the above sentence about Mary seeing the Roman police, one can see how the marker of the past tense (maybe Mary looked…) or of the present (looks) is omitted–it is not clear which is intended. The syntactical incorporation of the King James version of the Bible into "le parler nègre" occurs on at least one occasion. Here are the three levels of imitation :

King James	Faulkner	Coindreau
For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)	I… sees de meek Jesus sayin Dey kilt Me dat ye shall live again; I died dat dem whut sees en believes shall never die. (p. 370)	Je vois le doux Jésus qui dit: Ils m'ont tué afin que vous puissiez reviver. Je suis mort pour que ceux qui voient et croient ne meurent jamais. (p. 353)

In his typically vivid fashion, Faulkner's man from St. Looey has put the pontifical Biblical verse spoken about Christ into the very words of Christ himself (indirect speech). He slurs *they* to *Dey* but preserves a capital M on Me; *that* becomes *dat* but the ancient form *ye* for *you* is preserved (for Biblical authenticity?); also maintained are the English subjunctive from the Bible *should* (not) *perish*, in ye shall live, and a close approximation of the Biblical syntax. In French, echoes of the King James verse together with the colloquial speech of Christ are simply not realized.

Much later, in 1960, Coindreau was to return to the question of translating dialect.[15] His solution to the problem, however, is still disappointingly superficial: "This is," he writes, a detail of slight importance. If the country people in

[15] In an article, " On Translating Faulkner," first published in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly (29 April 1960, pp. 3-4)* and reprinted in *The Time of William Faulkner (85-90).* All our quotes are taken from p. 89.

Faulkner's work speak a Mississipi dialect, they speak above all as country people do, and nothing else matters. The same reasoning may be applied to Negroes. His effort to give a French equivalent for Dilsey prevents Coindreau from seeing the complexity and the importance of the Negro problem in the United States which Faulkner himself perceived so strongly that he made of it one of the main themes of his work. Coindreau's view of Dilsey and of the Negroes in general is typical of the idealism of the French bourgeoisie in the 1930, refusing to see either the realities of the working class in French or of the racial impasse in the U.S.A. His is basically a sentimental view: "If Dilsey, the admirable "mammy" of the Compson family in *The Sound and the Fury*, retains our attention, it is not because of the colour of her skin. What makes her a great figure of fiction is the nobility of the character, her qualities of devotion, abnegation, and endurance, all of them qualities which can be rendered in any language without detracting in the least from Dilsey's greatness. Coindreau gives a final clue on the nature of his transposition of the "parler nègre" when he writes: All men of my generation in France have known in the homes of their parents and their grandparents white counterparts of Dilsey. We know how they spoke and this is the only thing that concerns us.

Born in Vendée (one of the politically most conservative regions in France) in 1892, Coindreau sees Dilsey, then, as a French servant of the mid-nineteeth century, and we understand better why he makes her utter such insipid "bondieuseries" instead of the powerful language of a Biblical prophet who has seen "the beginning and the end" (I seed de beginning en now I sees de endin). This example shows clearly how the translation ages faster than the original. It shows to what extent translation is interpretation; and it shows that this interpretation is determined by the prejudices and unspoken assumptions of the contemporaries of the translator (All men of my generation in France) and not by an artist's original vision. The more narrow the interpretation, the more reduced the meaning of the polysemic original. From this point of view the assumed existence of a fundamental French need for "clarity" and precision tends to become an insidious factor of distortion. In order to be understood by his contemporaries, the translator uses a sentence model which is familiar to them. A product of his times, Coindreau still utilizes the prevalent model of clear prose from the 1920, which is not, of course, characteristic of the avant-garde movement but rather more typical of the prestigious and limpid Anatole France (Nobel Prize winner of 1921), a prose that is in the great prose tradition of Voltaire. This explains why Coindreau fails to render the individual idiom of the three separate worlds of Benjy, Quentin, and Jason, and why the first three sections are written in the same clear language as the fourth and last one.

The translation of *The Sound and the Fury*, because it was so successful in making the original accessible to the French public of the late thirties, demonstrates why the notion of "contemporary translation" is erroneous; when Coindreau translates Faulkner he is necessarily using an "older" idiom. Only a

great artist in search of new forms to render a new reality can recognize immediately the originality of vision (and therefore of technique) in another artist. Only a creative writer, having read Faulkner, perhaps even in translation, can see the potentialities of the text and be able to create a French "equivalent". But the language and the form he uses have already been altered and modernized by the translation itself and /or by all those who have either noticed the change or undergone a change themselves because of the ambient change in style.

Coindreau certainly grew with the authors he was translating, and more particularly with Faulkner. When he translated *The Sound and the Fury* about 1937, his view of it must have been more enlightened than one he expressed in his 1931 article, the first piece on Faulkner to be published in France: *The Sound and the Fury*, histoire atroce d'une famille maudite, était une oeuvre difforme et monstrueuse, un amass de matière brute d'une grande richesse auquel manquait seul le travail d'une main habile et rigoureuse.[16] It is very much the tone of Voltaire writing about Shakespeare.

It is easy for us, average readers of 1980, to see the shortcomings of Coindreau's translation, now over forty years old. If it looks dated, it is because Faulkner's progeny has produced a mutation of the European novel.[17] We can afford to be critical because we can imagine how Claude Simon or Gérard Bessette would translate *The Sound and the Fury*. We can go even further and dream of an "ideal" translation in which each part of the novel would be assigned to a different novelist: Nathalie Sarraute and her fine sense of elementary "tropisms" might best render Benjy's section; Claude Simon would be admirably equipped to tackle Quentin's part; Michel Butor or Gérard Bessette (*L'Incubation)* would be well prepared to give an equivalent of Jason's stream of consciousness; Roble-Grillet or Le Clezio could write a sober and poetic fourth part.

If, however, these contemporary authors are likely to be better translators of Faulkner, it is because the language they use has been "stretched" in the meantime by other writers like Sartre, for instance, who not only imitated Faulkner and Dos Passos, but was also directly influenced by the stylistic revolution of Céline and his "style émotif". In this metamorphosis of French style and French fiction, Coindreau's translations have played a considerable role. Coindreau's own timidity coincides with an astute estimate of what the French reading public could tolerate in the thirties. One might even argue that by not attracting too much attention to the rich texture of the style, he allowed the readers to perceive other important innovations more clearly, such as the novel's unusual temporal structure, the brutality characteristic of American detective fiction, or the constant presence of a tragic fate.

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[16] Coindreau, William Faulkner, *La Nouvell Revue Française* 36 (1931) 926. This essay is translated (in such banal form that we prefer to quote it in the original) in *The Time of William Faulkner (25-30).*

[17] Many other agents besides Faulkner have contributed to this mutation: Joyce, Proust, Dostoevsky, and Kafka are among those whose influence is most often acknowledged by the French *nouveaux romanciers* in their theoretical essays.

Our conclusion then is that Coindreau's translations of Faulkner, which have been so highly praised, deserve indeed that praise.[18] They made available to French writers the works of one of the most original novelists of the century; they thereby contributed to the renewal of the French novel. This very renewal, however, makes the language in which the translations are written obsolete: they have done their work, fulfilled their function. It is time to make a new translation of Faulkner's works into French.

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Source : *Revue canadienne de littérature comparée*, printemps 1980, p. 223-235.

[18] This conclusion also applies to Faulkner's other translators, with the possible exception of André du Bouchet who translated in 1951 *Knight's Gambit.* It should be pointed out here that Coindreau – although the most prestigious translator of American fiction into French and the best known of Faulkner's translators – translated all in all only eight books by Faulkner between 1934 and 1969. See Coindreau's own checklist in *The Time of William Faulkner, 205-18.*