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ON ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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ACCORDING to a recent paragraph in the newspapers, translators who are members of the Institute of Linguists have decided to increase their charges. The present rate for translating French, German, Italian, and Spanish into English is £1. 18*s*. a thousand words, and the proposed new rate will be two guineas; and so on through the gamut of the languages until you reach the translation of English into Arabic, which will now cost £8. 15*s*. This institute is, I take it, the trade union of those useful people who compose for us the directions on medicine-bottles and the regulations at air-ports. Their highest skill is called into play when they act as interpreters at international conferences, for which they propose to charge anything between ten and sixteen guineas a day. All honour to them; but alas, their knell is sounded; a few years now, and they will be redundant. A process which they would be the first to describe as 'automation' will have provided us with electronic typewriters which translate as they go along, and head-phones through which we can listen, at first hand, to the political grievances of the world. Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and dwellers in Libya about Cyrene, we shall hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of Man.

These are the artisans, the demiurges, the manufacturers of equivalents. They correspond, let us say, to the jobbing carpenter who runs up, and varnishes, a couple of bookshelves in that niche in the dining-room. At the other end of the scale are the artists, the Grinling Gibbonses of translation, exquisite workmen in detail; a scholar here,

a poet there, who thinks it is time he produced the absolutely perfect rendering of *Persicos odi*, or of *Animula vagula, blandula*. He works neither for fame nor for reward; he has simply taken a bet with himself, as it were, that the thing can be done, and cannot sleep sound till he has done it. Between these two extremes lies the craftsman. Of such was Chippendale; nor is the race extinct—one died in Yorkshire the other day, and left the business to his sons. In translation as in carpentry the craftsman is concerned to produce something useful but not merely functional; it is to represent the original in a graceful, a genuine, a solid form; the rendering, like the original, is to be a literary production. It is of him, the craftsman, that I would speak. How far is it possible to achieve this ideal, and what rules should govern the process?

Mr. Savory in his recent book, *The Art of Translation*,[1] has given us a list of twelve propositions, arranged in the form of thesis and antithesis, which will help us to decide this question. I think, on closer analysis, you can reduce the issues to two:

(i) Should a translation be literal first, and literary afterwards? Or the other way round?

(ii) Has the translator done his job, if he expresses the sense of his original in any style or idiom he chooses to employ? Or is he bound, in some way, to represent the style and idiom of his original?

Of course if you are translating for the benefit of the student, who wants to hold the text in one hand and your rendering in the other, literal you needs must be. But in so far as you succeed, you have produced a crib. A translation is meant for the reader who, having no skill or

[1] Jonathan Cape, 1957.

perhaps no opportunity to consult the original, expects to read you with the same interest and enjoyment which a reading of the original would have afforded him. On that subject, surely, the last word was said by the business man who declared that he could read Jowett's Plato 'with his feet on the fender'.

It will be seen that I am taking sides in the controversy. Books are meant to be read, and the first quality of a book is that people shall read it and want to go on reading it. You have done a disservice to your original if the reader puts your translation down almost at once, saying to himself, 'I expect this stuff would be rather fine, *if one knew Greek.*' You have got to make him say 'This *is* fine', whatever sacrifice of literalness it may involve. I know well enough what stone will be cast up at me; I shall be told that the Authorized Version is an absolutely literal rendering, which is at the same time a fount of pure Jacobean English. It is, no doubt, painstakingly literal; though it does not quite come up to the standard of that American commentator who will give you, in the 80th Psalm, the rendering, 'Jahweh Sabaoth, why dost thou smoke during the prayer of thy people?'[1] But is it, in the strict sense, good English? The statement, often rashly made, that our greatest writers have modelled their style on it, has been devastatingly refuted by Professor C. S. Lewis. He points out that although English literature is encrusted with quotations and half-quotations from the Bible, English style has been quite unaffected by the Authorized Version —you have only got to read a paragraph of Bunyan to be convinced of it. And if it has not been a model for authors, why should it be a model for translators? The truth is that Bible English is a language of its own; a hieratic language,

[1] Briggs on Psalm 80 (79), verse 5.

deeply embedded in the English mind and perhaps indispensable to the ordinary Englishman's religion; but not a model to be imitated, because its idiom is foreign to us.

I say a foreign idiom, not in the sense that it is unintelligible, but in the sense that it is artificial. We know what is meant by 'the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob', but it is a Hebrew twist; if an Englishman speaks of the train to Bletchley and the train to Rugby and the train to Crewe, he means three separate trains, not one. And so it is all through the sacred text, from the first chapter of Genesis, where we read 'God saw the light, that it was good' down to the last chapter of the Apocalypse, where the phrase 'Without are dogs and sorcerers' has to carry the meaning 'Dogs and sorcerers are not allowed inside'. I do not say that you will be held up often, perhaps not more than five or six times in any given chapter, by these Hebraisms or Hellenisms, but you would not tolerate them anywhere else. Matthew Arnold actually gives us,[1] as an instance of 'good, straightforward English', St. Peter's protest to our Lord, 'Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.' But what Englishman ever said or wrote, 'This shall not be to you?' It is not even Greek; what peeps out at you is the ghost of an underlying Aramaic.

Upon my word, the only piece of translation I know which is modelled on the Authorized Version is Milton's rendering of the *Ode to Pyrrha*. This also I have heard recommended as a model to beginners. But what a model!

> Oh, how oft shall he
> On faith and changéd gods complain, and seas
> Rough with black winds and storms
> Unwonted shall admire,

[1] *On Translating Homer*, p. 90.

Who now enjoys thee credulous, all gold;
Who always vacant, always amiable,
Hopes thee, of flattering gales
Unmindful!

That is not English. Since our language has no terminations by which we can distinguish between nominative and accusative, masculine and feminine, only an inference from the context can determine which was credulous and which was all-gold, Pyrrha or the young man. Complain, if you will, that Sir Edward Marsh strays too far from the Latin when he renders *Cui flavam religas comam, simplex munditiis?* by 'wrought upon thy lovely head that easy miracle of curling gold'. But he has tried to catch some echo of Horace's magic, and of Horace's scorn. Milton's 'Plain in thy neatness' he rightly stigmatizes as 'word for word, but not grace for grace'.[1]

It may, of course, be suggested that whereas the Authorized Version does not serve as a perfect model for English syntax, it is the standard by which we can best judge English vocabulary. This claim is actually made by Arnold in his lectures on translating Homer; 'the translator,' he says,[2] 'cannot do better than take for a mechanical guide Cruden's Concordance'. He has just given us a specimen of how he would like to see Homer turned into English hexameters. He has appealed to Cruden, to Cruden he shall go. He has used the following words which are not to be found in the Authorized Version: coward, skulk, let (in the sense of 'allow'), future, warlike, foeman, transport, loom, pail (instead of 'bucket'), redouble, and mounded. In two dozen lines he has given us eleven words for which there is no warrant in Scripture. And that is not in the least surprising; the vocabulary of the Authorized Version is

[1] *The Odes of Horace*, i. 5. [2] *On Translating Homer*, p. 100.

extraordinarily limited. There are thirty-eight separate Hebrew verbs which are all represented, in the Old Testament, by the one verb, 'to destroy'. In the great literary efflorescence of the Elizabethan age, the revisers of 1611 were at pains to reduce, not to extend, the scope of Scriptural vocabulary.

I have called them revisers, and it is important to remember that they are properly so described. Very few English people realize how old, in its essential features, the English Bible is. Look at this passage from Coverdale:

> Though I spake with the tongues of men and angels, and yet had not love, I were even as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I could prophesy, and had all faith, so that I could move mountains out of their places, and yet had not love, I were nothing. And though I bestowed all my goods to feed the poor, and though I gave my body even that I burned, and yet had not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love is patient and courteous, love envieth not, love doth not frowardly; is not puffed up, dealeth not dishonestly; seeketh not her own, is not provoked unto anger, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not over iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, suffereth all things.[1]

One is struck by the differences: the word 'love' has been cut out, to be replaced in the Revised Version, and 'courteous', with its pleasant Chaucerian associations, has gone. But what I wish to insist on is the resemblance. The translation of 1611 is not a document of Jacobean English; essentially, it dates from nearly 100 years earlier.

The odd thing is that if King James had commandeered a document of Jacobean English, he would have found no difficulty in procuring a team of brilliant, if erratic, translators. There never was, I think, such good translation done

[1] 1 Corinthians xiii. 1–7.

as was done in England just before, during, and just after the seventeenth century. In 1611 North (of North's Plutarch) was dead; Urquhart and Motteux, the translators of Rabelais, L'Estrange, the translator of Josephus, were not yet available. But Florio (of Florio's Montaigne) was still alive; Philemon Holland was at the height of his amazing activity; Shelton was just preparing to start on *Don Quixote*. What a trio! Their version, I suspect, would not have lasted fifty years; it would have been diffuse, quaint, and not always accurate. But it would have been splendid English of the period. And it is to those seven authors, and others like them, that I would direct the attention of any young man who wanted models for the translator to imitate. I would have him imitate them, not in their vocabulary, much of which is obsolete, nor in their conceits, which sometimes impose themselves unseasonably; but in their determination to *write*, to produce a work of art, not a mere transcript of foreign phrases and foreign idioms, set out under the dastardly apology, 'Well, that's what it says!'

They have been accused, these people, of sitting too loose to their originals. Thus, Charles Whibley writes of Holland:

> His was not the ingenuity which would echo a foreign phrase in native English, and, tried by the standard of perfect consonance, his translations fail of their effect. He did not put Livy and Suetonius in an appropriate dress; rather, he took Suetonius or Livy, and tricked them out in the garb of his own time. So that he gives us . . . a quick vision of Livy or Suetonius had they been born in Elizabethan England.[1]

That criticism seems to me greatly exaggerated; and in so far as it is not exaggerated, I doubt whether it ought to be

[1] Introduction to Holland's Suetonius, in Tudor Translations, p. xx.

regarded as a criticism. Listen to Holland's rendering of the paragraph in Pliny's *Natural History*[1] which describes the river Jordan:

A pleasant river it is, and as the site of the country will permit and give leave, winding and turning in and out, seeking as it were for love and honour, and applying itself to please the neighbour inhabitants. Full against his will, as it were, he passeth to the Lake of Sodom, Asphaltitis, and is swallowed up of it, where amongst those pestilent and deadly waters, he loseth his own, that are so good and wholesome. And therefore, to keep himself out of it as long as he possibly could, upon the first opportunity of any valleys, he maketh a lake, which many call Genesara.

And the tradition persists. Roger L'Estrange was only a schoolboy when Holland died; yet here is another expert in making the classics readable. This is his account of the portents recorded by Josephus[2] as foreshadowing the fall of Jerusalem:

Some short time after the festival was over, on the twenty-first of the month Artemisius, there appeared a prodigy of a vision so extraordinary, that I should hardly venture to repeat it, if I could not produce several eyewitnesses that are yet living to confirm the truth of it. There were seen up and down in the air, before sunset, chariots and armed men all over the country, passing along with the clouds round about the city. Upon the feast of Pentecost, as the priests were a-going to officiate in the Temple according to custom, they heard at first a kind of confused murmur; and after that, a voice calling out earnestly in articulate words, *Let us be gone, let us be gone.*

You do not think either of Pliny or of Josephus as an inspired author, and yet how they come to life, these men of a silver age, under the translator's golden wand!

May I pursue the fortunes of English prose translation

[1] v. 15. [2] *Jewish War*, vii. 12.

before we consider the fate of verse? That will be, after all, to follow the order of our inquiry; it is chiefly in prose that we ask whether the rendering is sufficiently literal; chiefly in verse that we ask whether the translator has preserved the style and idiom of his original. I do not know any better description of the change introduced by the polite affectations of the eighteenth century than that given by George Wyndham in his introduction to North's Plutarch.[1] He is considering first North's translation—or rather, as we know, North's translation of Amyot's French translation; then the edition produced in 1683 by one of Dryden's ghosts, with a preface by Dryden himself; then the standard translation, issued by the Langhornes in 1770; and finally some version by a modern scholar who is left charitably anonymous. Here is his verdict:

> It was a colossal impertinence to put out *The Lives* among the Greeklings of Grub Street, . . . but it must be noted that this, after North's, is the only version that can be read without impatience. Dryden's hacks were not artists, but neither were they prigs; . . . and if they missed the rapture of sixteenth-century rhythm, they had not bleached the colour, carded the texture, and ironed the surface of their language to the well-glazed insignificance of the later eighteenth century. Their Plutarch is no longer arrayed in the royal robes of Amyot and North, but he is spared the cheap though formal tailoring of . . . the Langhornes. . . . In our own time, there have been translations by scholars; they are useful as cribs, but do not pretend to charm.

It died hard, the Elizabethan tradition; Melmoth, whom we only remember because Dr. Johnson in some dispute 'reduced him to a whistle',[2] was still translating Cicero's letters and Pliny's in the old, racy fashion. But the

[1] Preface to North's Plutarch in Tudor Translations, p. lxxx.

[2] Boswell's *Life*, letter of 1 May 1780.

Palladian curtain was descending on our literature: everywhere, Tudor brick was being refaced with Georgian ashlar. The new renderings were perhaps more accurate than the old, but terribly dead and stylized. Worse was to come in the nineteenth century: and, I am sorry to say, under the influence of religion. The Oxford Movement aroused, from the first, a fresh interest in the writings of the Fathers; in these times of acute controversy they must be made available even to minds which had little tincture of scholarship. As its influence grew it produced a demand for English editions of the great spiritual classics: St. John of the Cross, St. Theresa, St. Francis of Sales, and the rest of them. I would not be controversial; equal blame, I think, attaches to the men who went with Newman and to the men who stayed behind with Pusey; the fact, as I see it, is that where religion is concerned our standard of translation has been, and remains, miserably low. Literalness has been accepted as our rule, and dullness is the result.

I will not entertain you—I might easily—with choice specimens of really stuffed-owl renderings in this field; such as that famous translation from the Italian, about the medieval story of a woman who was turned into a horse: 'Her husband, distressed beyond measure at this melancholy event, the more so as the wretched creature refused all food, whether of men or animals', and so on. I will be content to read you a short passage from St. Cyril, in the Library of the Fathers:[1]

For who has now brought thee to this assembly? What soldiers? With what bonds hast thou been forced? What doom has driven thee here now? No, but the salutary trophy of Jesus, the Cross, has brought you all together. This has enslaved the Persians, and tamed the Scythians; this to the Egyptians has given, for cats

[1] *Catechetical Lectures*, xiii. 40.

and dogs and their manifold errors, the knowledge of God; this, to this day, heals diseases; this, to this day, drives away devils, and overthrows the juggleries of drugs and charms.

Now, this is not too bad; it is at least intelligible; but how it gives itself away, at every turn, as a translation! And yet it was Newman who edited the series, and the actual translator was a divine of that day who counts next to Newman as an English stylist, Dean Church. Why didn't he make a better job of it? I think he, and others like him, unconsciously assumed that all holy books ought to be translated literally, because the Bible was such a success when it was translated literally; it was a tribute we owed to the sacred character of the documents. And the result has been disastrous. They remain inaccessible to the ordinary Englishman, the chaste Latinity of St. Leo, the tireless rhetoric of St. Augustine, the splendid declamations of Bossuet and Lacordaire—and so much else!

In our own day the need for good, readable translations is greater than ever. On the one hand, only a tiny percentage of us is capable of reading the classics. On the other hand we have become, in these last fifty years, more European; we are more interested than our forefathers in the doings and sayings of foreigners. We must not underestimate the achievements of the present century; a century in which Gilbert Murray has put Euripides across our English footlights, and Charles Scott-Moncrieff has beguiled us into the impression that we have read Proust. But our general standard is still hopelessly pedestrian. There has been a vast output of classical translations by scholars, but was George Wyndham wrong in describing them as 'cribs'? A great scholar is not necessarily a great master of English; his ear is too much haunted by echoes of classical phrase and idiom to be in tune with the taste

of the common man. Or how is it that a humanist like John Phillimore could disfigure (for me) his edition of Propertius by continually rendering *mea puella* 'my girl'? And as for our translations from modern languages, you will light upon one here and there which has been competently done, but for the most part your publisher has fallen back on the assistance of maiden ladies who have travelled abroad, and have just learned not to split their infinitives. Thus, in what I take to be a standard edition of *The Three Musketeers* (translator anonymous), you will come across the phrase, 'The devil! What you say there is very sad'[1]—a formula which may be good Poirot, but is certainly not good English. For my own part, I do not see that anything can be done about it until we get rid of this false tradition, until we get back to the Jacobean instinct of putting literature first, and literalness second.

It is time we considered the other question under dispute—Can the translator rest content when he has expressed the meaning of his original? Or is he bound—especially when dealing with poetry—to convey something of the style and idiom of his original? Is the process involved merely like that of giving exchange for a sum of money in a foreign currency? Or is it like that of transposing a piece of music from one key to another? There are, of course, exceptional cases in which the form of your original has an importance not to be overlooked. As, for example, when you are translating a song or a hymn which is to be sung in English to the same tune; or when the point of the passage depends (for instance, where Daniel gives judgement in the Story of Susanna) on word-play. I would add, although I know I shall be charged with pernicketiness, that an abecedarian original like the Lamenta-

[1] Warne & Co., New York, ch. 26.

tions of Jeremiah deserves an abecedarian rendering. But these are special cases; what is the ordinary rule to be observed? Professor Newman, in the introduction to that version of Homer which was so mercilessly attacked by Matthew Arnold, announces his intention of retaining every peculiarity of the original, with the greater care the more foreign it may happen to be; so that it may never be forgotten that he is imitating, and imitating in a different material.[1] Dryden's principle is quite different: 'I have endeavoured to make Virgil speak such English as he himself would have spoken, if he had been born in England, and in this present age.'[2] If you take Newman's principle too seriously, you raise a doubt whether translation, in the strict sense, is possible at all. This is the argument of Sir Edward Cook:[3] 'Nothing is really fine poetry unless it will make sense when translated into prose.' (He was writing in 1919.) 'Nothing is really fine poetry unless the value of it disappears when translated unto prose.' And Professor Bradley[4] seems to have been of the same opinion; if he translates a line of Virgil, 'And were stretching forth their hands in longing for the further bank', the charm of the original, he tells us, has fled. 'Why has it fled?' (he continues). 'Because I have changed the *meaning* of Virgil's line. What that meaning is, I cannot say; Virgil has said it.'

Let us take up that point first—the possibility of adequate translation. There may be lines here and there, in Virgil especially, which defy a just rendering; that is only to say that the translator, here and there, has to throw up the sponge in a footnote. We must not despair of taking

[1] Arnold's lectures *On Translating Homer*, p. 2.
[2] Preface to the *Aeneid*.
[3] *More Literary Recreations*, p. 170.
[4] Quoted by J. Lewis May in the *Tablet*, 25 March 1957.

even Virgil at high tide, just because of that seventh wave that leaps curling over the sea-front. No, translation is possible, and translation without any loss. I am driven to prove that by an example; it is easiest to take an example known to all of you; yet I beg leave to quote it in full, lest I should seem to be deriving an unfair advantage from weak memories. It will serve my turn, William Johnson Cory's rendering of the Heraclitus epigram—[1]

They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead;
They brought me bitter news to hear, and bitter tears to shed;
I wept as I remembered how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking, and sent him down the sky.
And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,
A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;
For death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

I am not suggesting that that is a perfect piece of English poetry. But then, I don't think Callimachus' original is a perfect specimen of Greek poetry. If you like we will call it a good beta-double-plus version of a good beta-double-plus original. Cory has put in nothing which is not there, at least germinally, in the Greek. He has left nothing out except one rather disconcerting particle. The metre he uses is not anything like the elegiac metre; but he has contrived to give us an English substitute which produces the same nostalgic effect as Greek elegiacs. He is stirring at the back of our minds an unconscious echo of Hood's poem:

I remember, I remember, the house where I was born;
The little window where the sun came peeping in at morn.

That is translation. If you did not know your Greek anthology, you would willingly accept the result as an original poem by the author of *Mimnermus in Church*.

[1] See Johnson's *Ionica*; Call. *Ep.* 47.

Lord Woodhouselee, in his essay on the *Principles of Translation* (a valuable book, published near the end of the eighteenth century), is something of a precisian. 'Next in importance to a faithful transfusion of the sense and meaning of an author, is the assimilation of the style and manner of writing in the translation to that of the original.' And, after several chapters giving examples of failure and success in this particular, he adds, 'We may certainly, from the foregoing observations, conclude that it is impossible to do complete justice to any species of poetical composition in a prose translation; in other words, that none but a poet can translate a poet.'[1] Personally, whatever the truth about the principle he lays down, I should not admit the inference he draws from it. If we are right in insisting that a good translation should have the freshness of an original product, then surely, at this point in the argument, we should take the length and solidity of a given poem into account before we say that you cannot make prose of it. Mackail's renderings from the Greek Anthology are lovely renderings, but they are not the sort of stuff an Englishman would commit to paper. The same may be said of Horace's odes, so fugitive, often so rambling; may be said, I think, of most elegiac writing—the clandestine amours of first-century Rome become a sorry business when you write them down in cold blood; they do not stand on their own legs as a piece of essay-writing. On the other hand a play (though the Greek choruses provide an obvious difficulty) does not need the aid of poetry to carry it off. And where you are dealing with an epic, I would claim that you may make your choice freely. The *Iliad* might have been written in prose, like the *Morte d'Arthur*. The *Odyssey* might have been written in prose, like *Baron Munchhausen*. In recent times—

[1] Pages 63 and 111 in the Everyman edition.

perhaps the success of Butcher and Lang had something to do with it—the choice remains open. Two contemporaries of my own, T. E. Lawrence and Dr. Rieu, have given us a prose *Odyssey*; but Mr. Day Lewis found a rather loose metrical scheme appropriate to the *Aeneid*, and Miss Sayers is translating Dante in *terza rima*—the third such rendering published within thirty years.

The older translators gave us verse for verse. What incredible people they were, the men of Shakespeare's time! Sir John Harington was told by Queen Elizabeth to produce an English version of the *Orlando Furioso*, and he sat down and did it; though he admits, with the effrontery of his age, that he has cut down Ariosto's cantos 'by omitting many staves of them, and sometimes put the matter of two or three staves into one'.[1] And it is all astonishingly competent; pursue the drowsy narrative for a page or two, and you would swear you were reading Spenser. They are all competent, these people, except 'Leviathan' Hobbes, whose grey hairs were dishonoured by a villainous translation of Homer. Yet who, nowadays, reads Marlowe's Lucan? Only Chapman survives, through the accident of Keats writing a sonnet about him; and the effect on the modern reader is less than astronomical. For myself, I confess, Chapman hangs fire. All these early achievements were eclipsed by two translations which, be they what they may, are poetry of the first order, Dryden's Virgil and Pope's Homer.

Poetry of the first order; are they translations of the first order? Where they fail, it is precisely over the point we are discussing; instead of preserving, in any recognizable way, the idiom of the original, they force an idiom on the original. It is surely a suspicious circumstance that Homer, once he has passed through the mangle of the heroic couplet, comes out

[1] Last page but one in the preface (edition of 1607).

exactly like Virgil! If we had had three more such poets the whole of literature would have been digested into heroics. And not only classical or foreign literature; witness Dryden's up-to-date version of *The Knight's Tale*:

> He through a little window cast his sight,
> Through thick of bars, that gave a scanty light;
> But even that glimmering served him to descry
> The inevitable charms of Emily . . .[1]

Chaucer, beyond doubt, has suffered a sea-change; and has Virgil really fared better? The attempt to impose a single formula on all literature was bound to defeat itself. Nor is the heroic couplet, with its indispensable punch at the end of each second verse, an apt vehicle for the sprawling effects of the epic. For the modern reader it involves an additional embarrassment. Ever since Martinus Scriblerus we have been conscious how easy it is for the heroic couplet to fall, and how disastrous is the fall of it; we are ever anxious for the poet, and when Pope, innocently enough, gives you the couplet,[2]

> But when old age had dimmed Lycurgus' eyes,
> To Ereuthalion he consigned the prize,

it stirs a memory of *Rejected Addresses*,

> But when John Dwyer 'listed in the Blues
> Emmanuel Jennings polished Stubbs's shoes.[3]

We are like men watching a tight-rope performance; sure that the acrobat will not really stumble, yet consumed with apprehension that he *might*.

From the first, Pope and Dryden were criticized because they missed the feeling and force of the original. Pope's rendering of Sarpedon's speech to Glaucus[4] has justly been

[1] Lines 229–32.
[2] *Iliad* vii. 148.
[3] *The Theatre*, by the Revd. G. C.
[4] *Iliad* xii. 310–28.

quoted as a splendid piece of writing; but it does not culminate in the ἴομεν which Carteret immortalized on his death-bed. And so it is with most of the great lines in Virgil. 'Trust not their presents, nor admit the horse' will pass muster in the context, but you cannot quote it as a substitute for *timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*.[1] And there is much ingenuity in the lines:

> Even the mute walls relate the warrior's fame,
> And Trojan griefs the Tyrian's pity claim—

but it is not quite *sunt lacrimae rerum*.[2] Meanwhile, what dethroned Pope and Dryden was not a mere return to accuracy. It was that revolt against the Palladian and the classical which we call the Romantic Revival. New experiments were being tried in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, by way of presenting the classics in a form more English, and perhaps (as we say nowadays) more 'folk'. Matthew Arnold was already criticizing this tendency in the sixties; he had not yet been confronted with William Morris's *Odyssey*, in which the hero is no longer described as the destroyer of cities, but as the Burg-bane: in which Nausicaa, faced with the necessity of washing her brothers' evening shirts, is made to complain,

> And ever will they be having new-washen weed, forsooth,
> When to the dance they wend them.[3]

Evidently there was the danger that we should slip back into the eighteenth-century error of forcing our own idiom —a Nordic one, this time—on the authors of antiquity. The Victorian Age has left behind it some notable pieces of translation, such as Butcher and Lang's *Odyssey*, and Conington's *Aeneid*. But even in such writing the modern ear is quick to detect a hint of fustian. *Quisque suos patimur*

[1] *Aeneid* ii. 49. [2] *Aeneid* i. 462. [3] *Odyssey* vi. 64.

manes, Virgil may have written; but why should he be saddled with the *manes* of Sir Walter Scott?

In our own day, the tide of fashion has set in very differently. We are prepared to translate anything, the classics included, into current English speech. And this makes it more urgent than ever that we should find an answer to our second question, Is the translator bound to reproduce the style and idiom of his original? We ask ourselves whether it is possible to give a plausible rendering of (say) Herodotus in modern phrase without spoiling the effect of his *naïveté*. Can we be content merely to reproduce his meaning? If I may presume to dogmatize about this, I would suggest that in the long run the meaning is what matters—if under the word 'meaning' you include emphasis. There could be no better illustration of a false emphasis than the opening of Dryden's *Eclogues*:

> Beneath the shade which beechen boughs diffuse,
> You, Tityrus, entertain your silvan Muse;
> Round the wide world in banishment we roam,
> Forced from our pleasing fields, and native home.

The whole point of the sentence in Virgil is the contrast between the good luck Tityrus has had and the bad luck Meliboeus has had; a contrast which disappears completely in the translation. Meaning and emphasis must be preserved, but we are not bound to imitate tricks of manner. There is nothing really to be said for rendering the *Iliad* in English hexameters, as Matthew Arnold wanted to. There is no reason to use long sentences in your translation because your author (Cicero, for example) uses long sentences. There is no harm in subordinating your sentences where your author—the Book of Proverbs, for example—is content to coordinate them. You are under contract to give,

not an imitation, but the equivalent of your original; that is the point.

But when we have said that, we have not quite said everything. A good translation does not demand a mechanical reproduction of detail; but it does demand a certain identity of atmosphere. Mr. Day Lewis has said a wise word on this subject: 'To catch the tone of your original, there must be some sort of affinity between you and him.' Without this, 'you cannot reach through the words and thoughts of your original, and make contact with the man who wrote it'.[1] Woodhouselee puts it even more strongly when he tells us that the translator 'must adopt the very soul of his author, which must speak through his organs'.[2] He must, in fact, get inside somebody else's skin before he undertakes the rendering of a single sentence. This is not always easy; I myself am committed at the moment to the autobiography of St. Theresa of Lisieux. It is not a simple process to put yourself inside the skin of a young French female Saint. But you have got, somehow, to sink your own personality and wrap yourself round in a mood, whenever you sit down at your writing-table for such work as this. All translation is a kind of impersonation; make a success of that, and style and idiom will follow.

It is, I think, absence of that *rapport* between author and translator that has wrecked T. E. Lawrence's version of the *Odyssey*. He was brought up, as we were all brought up fifty years ago, to suppose that the *Odyssey* is of much later date than the *Iliad*, the work of an imitator. He announces, therefore, that he is going to give us a Wardour Street rendering of a Wardour Street original. But he does not really sustain this pose, and the result is patchy and unconvincing. He has not put himself inside Homer's skin.

[1] Introduction to the *Aeneid*, p. ix. [2] Op. cit., p. 114.

Whereas Dr. Rieu, who is modern enough to accept the unity of Homer, puts on no critical airs, does not waste time in dogmatizing about the sort of person Homer must have been; he just throws himself into the story. I picture him as a schoolmaster addressing a set of senior boys with the formula, 'Look here, let's pretend I'm Homer. I'm going to tell you some jolly good yarns.'

There may be fresh changes in public taste lying ahead of us. But, as things are, I would recommend the translator to write modern English, if he is concerned with a document of any length—as long, say, as the *Tome* of St. Leo or the *Pensées* of Pascal. The Victorians could take it; they could feel at home in Burton's *Arabian Nights* in spite of a sentence like 'Sore waxed my cark and my care, for I kenned that there remained to me of life but the morrow'. We are less patient of pastiche; one night is all very well, but we shrink from a thousand more of this kind of thing. And, if we are to write modern English, 'thou' has to go, with all the verbal forms appropriate to it, except in translation designed for liturgical use. Take the *Imitation of Christ*; I only know one edition, and that quite recent, which renders the second person singular by 'you' and 'yours'. And yet the *Imitation of Christ* is not essentially a late medieval document: the spiritual situations it deals with are those of our own day. If it is to have a direct impact on the conscience it must convey its message under the unlovely American formula, 'This means you!' The effect is lost, somehow, if we substitute the locution, 'This meaneth thee'.

To write modern English is not, believe me, a soft option; on the whole, it is much more difficult than writing pastiche. You need continual watchfulness and self-discipline, especially when you are aiming at an effect of great simplicity. Dr. Rieu sometimes nods in his excellent

rendering of the *Odyssey*; a phrase like 'with a liberal donation from my booty' has more than a hint of journalese; on the other hand, when he writes, 'laden with the pick of the Argive chivalry bringing doom and slaughter to the Trojans', he is slipping back, without noticing it, into Butcher and Lang.[1] But above all, we are faced with the question whether writing modern English involves the use of colloquialism, and what is the dividing line between colloquialism and *argot*. I confess that I have my hesitations about slang, except, of course, when you are dealing with an author like Aristophanes or Plautus. The trouble is its impermanence. Miss Sayers, in her introduction to the *Inferno*,[2] mentions a particular line in which she was faced with a choice between,

> Master, this prospect likes me not a whit,

and,

> Sir, I don't like the looks of this one bit.

Now, I quite agree with Miss Sayers that Dante himself writes at different levels; he is not, consistently, what Matthew Arnold would call 'noble'. But the locution 'one bit' is very modern indeed; have we any guarantee that in twenty or thirty years it will not be dated? So it is when Jowett makes Thrasymachus refer to Socrates and his friends as 'silly-billies',[3] a word unknown nowadays outside the nursery: or when Sir Edwards Marsh credits Horace with the sentiment,

> Now we'll go berserk—let the binge begin,[4]

a line which rings in my ears as nostalgically Edwardian. So, when Aeneas is tempted to kill Helen, on the last night

[1] See pages 215 and 138 (Penguin edition).

[2] p. 61, referring to xxi. 127 in the poem.

[3] *Republic*, 336 c.

[4] *Odes* iii. 19.

of Troy, Mr. Day Lewis has the phrase, 'Was she going to get away with it?' Admirable; it rings the bell. But was not this, too, perhaps a temptation? The translator must always look fifty years ahead.

Not that you can really do that. Current English is current in more senses than one, and nobody can possibly tell you what it will be like in A.D. 2007. Consider a phrase which appeared recently in *The Times* newspaper,[1] 'Staggering, in this sense of ironing out or levelling up or removing a bottle-neck'—what would John Ruskin have said to such an *obscurum per obscurius*? Nor do the idioms of the language remain fixed, any more than its vocabulary. How often have we been told that 'inversion'—putting a word out of its natural place in the sentence, by way of emphasizing it—is quite obsolete? Yet we have all grown accustomed to sentences like 'Prominent among the supporters of the bill is dark-haired, fifty-year-old Mr. Higgins'. Oh for a timeless English! The translator must do his best by using the speech that comes natural to him, fortified a little by those good old English words which are out of favour, but not obsolete. His style must be his own, his rhetoric and his emphasis must be that of his original. And always, at the back of his mind, he must imagine that he is the original.

Can he hope, in any case, that his version will live? At least, if he does his work well, he will have the comfort of being pirated by his successors. The standard edition of *Don Quixote*, published with the Doré illustrations in the late eighteen-sixties, was a cento of two earlier versions more than a century old—one of them, by Motteux, dating back to 1719. Only, he must be a craftsman. The publisher, having paid something (in the case of a modern foreign

[1] 20 March 1957.

book) to the author, wants the rendering done by a hack. But you cannot get craftsmanship for £200 down. How numerous, nowadays, are the retired men of distinction who would like to solace their declining years with the grateful labour of translation; the poets and novelists who have written themselves out, and would be better employed in such work than in turning out shallow volumes of criticism! But there is no inducement. If the inducement were there, and if the candidates were hand-picked after submitting specimens of their work, I believe we might hope, not unreasonably, to enter upon a second Elizabethan age of English translation.