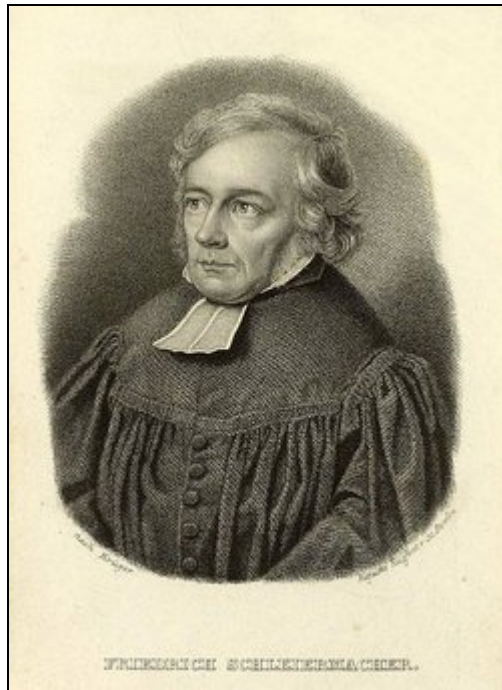


Friedrich Schleiermacher

ON THE DIFFERENT METHODS OF TRANSLATING

(Translated by Waltraud Bartscht)



(1768-1834)

THE FACT THAT SPEECH IS TRANSLATED from one language into another confronts us everywhere in a variety of forms. On the one hand, this enables people who perhaps were originally separated from one another by the whole breadth of the earth to come into contact or perhaps to assimilate into one language the products of another language that has been extinct for many centuries. On the other hand, we need not even go outside the boundaries of one single language to find the same phenomenon. For the different tribal dialects of one nation and the different developments of the same language or dialect in different centuries are, in the strict sense of the word, different languages, which frequently require a complete translation. Even contemporaries who are not separated by dialects but who come from different social classes that have very little contact and who are far apart in their education can often communicate with each other only through a similar process of translation. Are we not often compelled, after all, to translate for ourselves the words of another person who is quite like us, but of a different temperament and mind? For when we feel that in our mouth the same words would have an entirely different meaning, or here a

stronger or there a weaker weight than in his, and that we would use quite different words and phrases if we wanted to express in our way the same things he meant to say, then it seems, as we define this feeling for ourselves more closely, and as it becomes a thought in us, that we translate. Occasionally we must translate even our own words, when we want to make them our very own again. And this skill is practiced not only for the purpose of transplanting into foreign soil what a language has created in the fields of scholarship and the rhetorical arts, thereby expanding the horizon of the power of the mind, but it is also practiced in business transactions between individuals of different nations, and in diplomatic exchanges of independent governments, in which each is accustomed to speak in its own language to the other to ensure strict equality without making use of a dead language.

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Of course, we do not mean to incorporate into our present discussion everything that falls within the large boundaries of this subject. That necessity to translate even within one's own language and dialect—which is more or less a temporary, emotional need—is just too much a thing of the moment in its impact to require any guidance other than that of the emotions; if rules were to be issued about this, they could only be rules that create a purely moral attitude for man in order to keep his mind open to things that are less closely related. If, however, we set this aside and deal with translations from a foreign language into our own, then we will be able to distinguish two different fields as well—not totally distinct, for this is seldom the case, but rather separated by boundaries that overlap—yet fields still distinctly different if one considers their final goals. The interpreter's job is in the business world and that of the true translator in the areas of scholarship and the arts. Those who find these definitions arbitrary—considering that interpreting is usually understood to mean oral transferral and translating the transplantation of written works—will forgive me for using them, since they respond quite well to the present need and since the two definitions are not particularly far removed from each other. Writing is appropriate for the fields of scholarship and the arts because writing gives their works permanence. To transfer scholarly and artistic works orally would be as useless as it seems impossible. For business transactions, on the other hand, writing is only a mechanical device. In this case, oral exchanges are the most appropriate ones, and written interpreting should basically be considered only a transcript of oral interpreting ...

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The activity of translating is radically different from mere interpreting. Wherever the word is not totally bound by obvious objects or by external facts (which it is merely supposed to express), wherever the speaker is thinking more or less independently and therefore wants to express himself, he stands in an ambiguous relationship to language; and his speech will be understood correctly only insofar as this relationship is comprehended correctly. Every human being is, on the one hand, in the power of the language he speaks; he and his whole thinking are a product of it. He cannot, with complete certainty, think anything that lies outside the limits of language. The form of his concepts, the way and means of connecting them, is outlined for him through the language in which he is born and educated; intellect and imagination are bound by it. On the other hand, however, every freethinking and intellectually spontaneous human being also forms the language himself. For how else, but through these influences, would it have come to be and to grow from its first raw state to its more perfect formation in scholarship and art? In this sense, therefore, it is the living power of the individual that produces new forms in the malleable material of the language, originally only for the momentary purpose of communicating a transitory awareness; these forms, however, remain, now more, now less, in the language and taken up by others continue to spread. One can even say that only to the extent to which a person influences language does he deserve to be heard beyond his immediate environment.

By necessity, every utterance soon dies away, if, through a thousand voices, it can always be reproduced in the same way; only such an utterance that creates a new impulse in the life of the language itself can and may last longer. For this reason every free and higher discourse wants to be perceived in a twofold way: on the one hand, out of the spirit of the language of whose elements it is composed, a language that is bound and defined by that spirit and vividly conceived in the speaker; on the other hand, out of the speaker's emotions, as his own action, which can only be produced and explained by his nature. Indeed, every discourse of this kind is only understood, in the higher sense of the word, when both these aspects are perceived together in their true relationship to each other, so that one knows which of the two dominates in the whole or in individual parts. The spoken word can be understood as an act of the speaker only if it is felt, at the same time, where and how the power of language has taken hold of him, where thoughts have traveled down its lightning rod, where and how the roaming imagination has been captured in its forms. Also, speech as a product of language, and as an utterance of its spirit, can only be understood if, for example, the reader feels that only a Greek could think and speak in this way; that only this particular language could function in a human mind in this way; and that only this man could think and speak Greek in this way, that only he could comprehend and shape the language in this way, that only in this way is his living possession of the language's richness

revealed: an alert sense for meter and euphony, the ability to think and create that belongs only to him. If understanding is already difficult within the same language, and presupposes a precise and profound penetration into the spirit of the language and into the characteristic traits of the writer, how much more will it not be a highly developed art when it deals with the products of a foreign and distant language!

Of course, whoever has acquired this art of understanding, through the most diligent treatment of language, through exact knowledge of the whole historical life of a nation, and through the most rigorous interpretation of individual works and their authors—he, of course, but only *he*—can desire to open up to his compatriots and contemporaries that same understanding of the masterworks of art and scholarship. However, doubts must arise when he comes closer to the task, when he wants to define his purposes more clearly and begins to assess his own means. Should he try to bring two people together who are so totally separated from each other—as his fellow man, who is completely ignorant of the author’s language, and the author himself are—into such an immediate relationship as that of author and reader? Or, even if he wants to open up to his readers only the same relationship and the same pleasure that he enjoys, marked by traces of hard work and imbued with a sense of the foreign, how can he achieve all this with the means at his disposal? If his readers are supposed to understand, then they must comprehend the spirit of the language that was native to the writer, and they must be able to see his peculiar way of thinking and feeling. In order to reach these two goals, the translator can offer them nothing but his language, which nowhere quite corresponds to the other, and himself, whose interpretive understanding of his writer is now more and now less clear, and whose appreciation and admiration of the writer is now greater, now less. Does not translation, considered in this way, appear a foolish undertaking?

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In despair, therefore, of ever reaching this goal or, rather, before one could get to the point of clearly realizing it, two other ways have been invented for establishing acquaintance with the works of foreign languages (not for the actual sense of art or of language, but for the intellectual necessity on the one hand and for the intellectual art on the other) whereby some of these difficulties are forcibly cleared away, others wisely circumvented, but the idea of translation, as it is specified here, is completely relinquished. These two inventions are paraphrase and imitation.

Paraphrase seeks to overcome the irrationality of languages, but only in a mechanical way. It says to itself, “Even if I do not find a word in my language

that corresponds to that in the original language, I still want to retain its value by the addition of limiting or expanding definitions.” Thus paraphrase labors its way through an accumulation of loosely defined details, vacillating between a cumbersome “too much” and a tormenting “too little.” In this way it can perhaps render the content with limited precision, but it completely abandons the impression made by the original. Because the living speech has been irretrievably killed, everyone feels that it could not have come originally and in this way from the emotions of a human being. The paraphraser deals with the elements of both languages as if they were mathematical symbols that can be reduced to the same value by increasing or decreasing them, but neither the spirit of the transformed language nor that of the original can be revealed by such a procedure. If, moreover, paraphrase seeks to mark the traces of the connection of thoughts psychologically—where they are vague and tend to lose themselves—by means of subclauses, then it strives at the same time, especially in difficult works, to take the place of a commentary, and bears even less relationship to the concept of translation.

Imitation, on the other hand, submits to the irrationality of languages. It concedes that no replica of a verbal work of art can be produced in another language that would correspond exactly in its individual parts to the individual parts of the original. Therefore, with the difference of languages (to which so many other differences are essentially connected), there remains nothing else to be done but to prepare an imitation, a whole composed from parts noticeably different from the parts of the original, but which nevertheless comes as close in its effect to that original whole as the difference in material permits. Such a recreation is no longer the work itself. It is also by no means intended to represent and render effectively the spirit of the original language; rather the foreignness created in the original undergoes a substantial transformation. A work of this kind, taking into account the difference of language, morals, and education, is supposed to be, as much as possible, the same thing for its readers as the original was for its own readers; by trying to maintain this sameness of reaction, one sacrifices the identity of the work. Thus, the imitator has not the slightest intention of bringing the two together—the writer of the original and the reader of the imitation—because he does not believe that an immediate relationship between them is possible; he only wants to give to the latter an impression similar to that which the contemporaries of the original received from it.

Paraphrase is applied more in the field of scholarship, imitation more in that of the arts; and just as everyone admits that a work of art loses its tone, its splendor, its whole artistic content by paraphrasing, so no one has probably ever been foolish enough to prepare an imitation of a scholarly masterpiece that treats its content freely. Both procedures, however, cannot satisfy that person who, inspired by the value of a foreign masterpiece, wants to communicate its power to those who speak his own language, and who has the stricter concept of translation in mind. Paraphrase and imitation cannot therefore be more closely evaluated here,

because they deviate from this concept; they are mentioned only to outline the boundaries of the field with which we are concerned.

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But now the true translator, who really wants to bring together these two entirely separate persons, his author and his reader, and to assist the latter in obtaining the most correct and complete understanding and enjoyment possible of the former without, however, forcing him out of the sphere of his mother tongue—what paths are open to the translator for that purpose? In my opinion, there are only two. Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader! Both paths are so completely different from one another that one of them must definitely be adhered to as strictly as possible, since a highly unreliable result would emerge from mixing them, and it is likely that author and reader would not come together at all. The difference between the two methods, and the fact that they are in this kind of relationship, must be immediately obvious. For in the first case, the translator takes pains, by means of his work, to compensate for the reader's lack of understanding of the original language. He seeks to communicate to his readers the same image, the same impression that he himself has gained—through his knowledge of the original language—of the work as it stands, and therefore to move the readers to his viewpoint, which is actually foreign to them. If, however, the translation seeks to let its Roman author, for example, speak as he would have spoken and written as a German to Germans, it does not move the author to where the translator stands because the author does not speak German to him but Latin; on the contrary, it moves the author immediately into the world of the German readers and transforms him into one of them—and that is precisely the other case. The first translation will be perfect in its way if one can say that had the author learned German as well as the translator Latin, he would not have translated his work, originally composed in Latin, any differently than the translator has done. But the second translation, which does not show the author how he would have translated himself but how he originally, as a German, would have written German, can have no other standard of perfection than the assurance that, if all the German readers could be transformed into experts and contemporaries of the author, then the original work would become for them exactly the same as the translation, since the author has transformed himself into a German.

This method, obviously, is on the mind of all those who use the formula that an author should be translated as if he himself had written in German. From this juxtaposition, it should become immediately evident how different the procedure

must be in every detail, and how everything would turn out to be unintelligible and unsuccessful if one were to switch methods within the same project. Furthermore, I wish to assert that there could be, besides these two methods, no third one that would have a definite goal in mind. Actually, no other methods are possible. The two separate parties must either meet in the middle at a certain point, which will always be that of the translator, or one party must completely link up with the other. Of these two possibilities, only one falls into the area of translation; the other would take place if, in our case, the German readers were to grasp the Latin language completely, or rather if the language were to take hold of the readers completely to the point of actually transforming them. Therefore, whatever has been said about translations that follow the letter and translations that follow the meaning, about faithful and free translations (and whatever other expressions may have been advanced), even if they claim to be different methods they must always be reduced to those two mentioned earlier. But if mistakes or virtues are to be discussed in this context, then the translation that faithfully reproduces the meaning, or the translation that is too literal or too free according to one method, must be different from the other. It is therefore my intention—setting aside all individual questions about this subject that have already been treated by the experts—to examine only the most general features of both these methods, and to do this in order to show what the disadvantages (as well as the limits of their applicability) of each are, and to what extent each best achieves the goals of translation. From the perspective of such a general survey, two things would remain to be done, to which this discussion is only the introduction. For each of the two methods, rules could be designed—taking into consideration the different genres of speech—and the best attempts that have been made according to either method could be compared and evaluated; in this way one could elucidate the matter even more. However, I must leave both projects to others, or at least for another occasion.

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The method that aims, by means of translation, to give the reader the same impression that he as a German would receive from reading the work in the original language must of course first determine what kind of understanding of the original language it wants to imitate. For there is one kind it should not imitate, and one it cannot imitate.

The former is a schoolboy-like understanding that laboriously and almost repulsively stumbles through and botches the details, and yet nowhere attains to a clear view of the whole, to a vivid and firm comprehension of the context. So long as the educated part of a nation, as a whole, still has no experience of a more intimate penetration into foreign languages, then those who have progressed

beyond this level should be prevented by their good judgment from undertaking this kind of translation. If they took their own understanding as a yardstick, they themselves would hardly be understood, and would accomplish little; but should their translation represent common understanding, then their clumsy work would rapidly disappear from the stage. In such a time, free imitations should first awaken and sharpen the delight in what is foreign, and paraphrases may prepare a more general understanding, in order to pave the way for future translations ...

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Translating therefore refers to a situation that lies midway between the two, and the translator's goal must be to provide his reader with the same image and the same pleasure as reading the work in the original language offers to the man educated in this way, whom we usually call, in the better sense of the word, the amateur or the connoisseur. To him the foreign language is familiar, but yet always remains foreign; he no longer, like students, has to think of every detail in the native language before he can grasp the whole, but he always remains conscious of the differences of that language from his mother tongue, even where he most consistently enjoys the beauty of a work. To be sure, the activity and the definition of this way of translating still remain disturbing enough for us, even after we have ascertained these points. We see that, just as the inclination to translate can only come into being when a certain ability to use foreign languages is widespread among the educated of the public, so the art will increase in the same manner as well, and the goal will be set higher and higher; but this can occur only when a taste for and knowledge of foreign intellectual works spread and increase among those in the nation who have exercised and educated their ear without, however, making the knowledge of language their actual business. But at the same time, we cannot conceal the fact that the more readers are receptive to such translations, the more the difficulties of the venture also increase, especially if one looks at the most characteristic products of the arts and scholarship of a nation, which, after all, are the most important objects for the translator. That is, just as language is a historical fact, so there is no proper sense for it without a sense of its history. Languages are not invented, but they are gradually discovered, and all arbitrary work on them and in them is stupid; scholarship and art are the powers by means of which this discovery is promoted and accomplished.

Every excellent mind, in which a part of a nation's perceptions acquire a particular form by one of these two methods, becomes active in his language, and his works must therefore contain a part of its history as well. This causes great, indeed often insurmountable, difficulties for the translator of scholarly works because whoever endowed with sufficient knowledge reads an excellent work of

this kind in the original language will not miss the influence of it on language: He notices which words, which combinations, appear to him in the first splendor of newness; he sees how they infiltrate the language through the special needs of the author's mind and his power of expression; and this observation essentially determines the impression he receives. It is therefore a part of the task of translation to communicate this very impression to the readers; otherwise an extremely significant part of that which is intended for them often gets lost.

But how can this be achieved? To be specific, how often will an old, worn-out word in our language be the only one to correspond to a new word in the original, so that the translator, if he wanted to show the quality of the work as something that forms language, would have to put a foreign content in its place, and would therefore have to escape into the field of imitation! Even when he can render something new with something new, the word that is closest in etymology and derivation will not reproduce the meaning completely, and he will have to create other word associations if he does not want to violate the immediate context! He will have to console himself with the fact that in other places, where the author has used old and well-known words, he makes up for his shortcomings, and therefore he will achieve results in the work as a whole that he is not able to attain in every individual case. But if one looks at a master's word formations in their totality, at his use of related words and word-roots in a multitude of interrelated writings, how can the translator succeed here, since the system of concepts and their signs in the translator's language is entirely different from that in the original language, and the word-roots, instead of being synchronically identical, cut across each other in the strangest directions. It is impossible, therefore, for the translator's use of language to be as coherent as that of his author. Here he will have to be content to attain in single parts what he cannot achieve in the total work. He will ask his readers to understand that they cannot think of the other writings as rigorously as the readers of the original could, but rather that they must consider each one on its own. His readers should even be willing to praise the translator, if he succeeds in maintaining similarity with respect to the more important objects in specific writings (or even in individual parts of them only), so that no single word gets a multiplicity of quite different replacements, or so that a colorful variety does not prevail in the translation where in the original a clear relationship of expressions is presented without discontinuities. . .

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Still other difficulties become apparent when the translator considers his relationship to the language in which he writes and the relationship of his translation to his other works. If we exclude those marvelous masters to whom

several languages feel as one, or to whom an acquired language is even more natural than their mother tongue (for whom, as we said before, one simply cannot translate), then all other people, no matter how fluently they read a foreign language, still retain the feeling of foreignness. How should the translator go about transmitting this feeling of foreignness to his readers, to whom he is presenting a translation in their mother tongue?

Of course, one will say that the answer to this riddle was found long ago, and that the riddle has often been solved more than adequately, for the more closely the translation follows the phrases of the original, the more foreign it will strike the reader. This might be true, and it is easy enough to laugh at this in general. But if one does not want to attain this joy too cheaply, if one does not want to throw out the most masterful and the worst schoolboyish translation with the same bathwater, then one must concede that an essential requirement of this method of translation is an attitude toward language that is not only not trivial, but that also lets us know that it has not grown completely freely, but rather has been bent toward an alien likeness. One must admit that to do this skillfully and with moderation, without disadvantage to one's own language and to oneself, is perhaps the greatest difficulty a translator has to overcome. The attempt seems to be the most extraordinary form of humiliation that a writer, who is not a bad writer, could inflict upon himself. Who would not like to have his native tongue appear everywhere in its most enticing beauty, of which every literary genre is capable? Who would not rather beget children who are in their parent's image rather than bastards? Who would like to show himself in less attractive and less graceful movements than he is capable of, and at least sometimes appear harsh and stiff, and shock the reader as much as is necessary to keep him aware of what he is doing? Who would gladly consent to be considered inept by studiously keeping as close to the foreign language as his own language permits, and to be blamed, like those parents who place their children in the hands of acrobats, for putting his mother tongue through foreign and unnatural contortions instead of exercising it skillfully in the gymnastics of his own language? Who, finally, likes to be smiled at with pity by the greatest experts and masters, suggesting that they would not understand his laborious and hasty German if they were not to support it with their knowledge of Greek and Latin!

These are the sacrifices that every translator must make; these are the dangers to which he exposes himself, if he does not observe the finest line in the endeavor to keep the tone of the language foreign, dangers from which he cannot escape entirely since everyone draws this line in a slightly different way each time. Moreover, if he takes into consideration the unavoidable influence of habit, he has to worry that something new will creep into his own free and original production through the act of translation, and that his gentle sense for the native well-being of the language might be somewhat dulled. And should he think of the vast army of imitators, and of the lethargy and mediocrity that prevail in the literary-writing public, then he must be shocked to see that he is responsible for so much

looseness and lawlessness, for so much true clumsiness and stiffness, so much corruption of language; for almost only the best and the worst will not strive to gain a false advantage from his endeavors.

Complaints have often been heard that such translation must necessarily be detrimental to the purity of the language and to its smooth, continuous internal growth. Even if we want to put them aside for the time being, consoling ourselves that advantages cannot be placed next to these disadvantages, and that, since everything good also contains something bad, wisdom consists in obtaining as much as possible of the former and removing as little as possible from the latter, this much can certainly be ascertained from the difficult task of having to represent what is foreign in one's native language. ...

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These are the difficulties that stand in the way of this method of translation and the imperfections that are essentially inherent in it. But, granted that they exist, one still must acknowledge the venture itself, and its merit cannot be denied. It rests upon two conditions: that the understanding of foreign works be a well-known and desirable situation, and that a certain flexibility be attributed to the native language. Where these conditions are met, this type of translation becomes a natural phenomenon; since it influences the entire intellectual evolution and contains a certain value, it also creates definite enjoyment.

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But what needs to be said about the opposite method, which requires no effort and no exertion from its reader, which wants to conjure the foreign author into his immediate presence and to show the work as it would have been if the author himself had written it originally in the reader's language? This requirement has not seldom been expressed as one that the true translator had to fulfill and as one that is far higher and more nearly perfect when compared to the former; individual attempts have also been made, perhaps even masterpieces, which all aimed at reaching this goal. Let us now evaluate this matter, and see whether it would not perhaps be appropriate if this method, which until now has certainly been used less frequently, could be used more often and could replace the other, which is of a dubious nature and in many ways ineffective.

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We see immediately that the language of the translator has absolutely nothing to fear from this method. It must be his first rule not to allow himself anything—with respect to the relationship that exists between his work and a foreign language—which is not also permissible in an original work of the same genre in his native language. Indeed, as much as anyone else, he has the duty to observe at least the same scrupulous attention to the purity and perfection of language, to strive for the same grace and naturalness of style, for which his writer is praised in the original language. It is also certain, if we want to demonstrate to our compatriots very vividly what a writer meant for his language, that we can establish no better formula than to introduce him speaking in such a way as we imagine he would have spoken in our own language; this approach is all the more appropriate if the level of development at which he found his language has some resemblance to the level that our language has presently reached. We can imagine in a certain sense how Tacitus would have spoken if he had been a German or, expressed more precisely, how a German would speak who was for our language what Tacitus was for his; and happy is he who imagines this so vividly that he can really let Tacitus speak! But whether this could happen now, by letting this German Tacitus say the same things that the Roman Tacitus said in the Latin language, is another question that cannot easily be answered in the affirmative. For it is an entirely different matter to comprehend correctly the influence that a man has exerted upon his language and somehow to represent it, and again quite another matter to guess how his thoughts and their expression would have emerged if originally he had been accustomed to think and express himself in another language!

Whoever is convinced that thoughts and their expressions have the same internal and essential quality—and, after all, the whole art of understanding a discourse (and therefore all translation as well) is based on that conviction—can such a person separate a man from his native language and believe that he, or even only his chain of thoughts, could be one and the same in two languages? And if the thoughts are different in certain ways, can this person presume to deconstruct the discourse to its very core, to exclude the part that language itself contributes and by a chemical process, as it were, to combine these innermost parts with the essence and the power of another language? Evidently, in order to solve this problem, it would be necessary to remove completely from a man's written work everything that is, even in the remotest way, the effect of anything that he has said and heard in his mother tongue from childhood on. After that, one would have to feed into this man's naked and peculiar way of thinking—as it is directed toward a certain subject—everything that would have been the effect of all that which he said and heard in the foreign language, from the beginning of his

life, or from his first acquaintance with the language, until he had become capable of original thinking and writing in it. This will only be possible the day organic products can successfully be combined by means of an artificial chemical process. Indeed, the goal of translating in such a way as the author would have written originally in the language of the translation is not only unattainable but is also futile and empty in itself. For whoever recognizes the creative power of language, as it is one with the character of the nation, must also concede that for each of the greatest authors his whole knowledge, and also the possibility of expressing it, is formed in and through language, and that therefore no one adheres to his language only mechanically, as if it were something externally attached to him. As one can easily exchange a team of horses, everyone can likewise choose to harness another language for his thoughts; but every writer can produce original work only in his mother tongue, and therefore the question cannot even be raised how he would have written his works in another language. . . .

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To what extent the applicability of this method is limited—indeed in the field of translation it is almost equal to zero—is best perceived when we consider the insurmountable difficulties it has to face in the individual branches of art and scholarship. It must be said that even in everyday usage there are only a few words in one language to which a word in another language corresponds completely, so that the word could be used in all instances in which the other is used and always produce in the same context the same effect; this is even more true for all concepts (the more they are imbued with a philosophical content), and it is most true of the entire field of philosophy. Here more than anywhere else, every language—in spite of the diverse views held simultaneously and successively—still contains within itself a system of concepts which, because they touch, connect with, and complement each other in the same language, are one whole whose individual parts, however, do not correspond to any of the systems of other languages, perhaps not even with the exception of God and Being, the primal noun and the primal verb. For even that which is universal, although situated outside the sphere of specific characteristic traits, is still illuminated and colored by language.

Everyone's wisdom must be realized in this system of language. Everyone draws from what is there. Everyone helps to bring to light what is not yet there but latently present. Only in this way is the wisdom of the individual alive and can really govern his existence, which, indeed, he integrates completely into his language. If, therefore, the translator of a philosophical writer hesitates to bend the language of the translation, as much as it can be done, toward the original

language, in order to give an idea of the system of concepts that was developed in it, and if he would have his writer speak as if he had originally formed thoughts and speech in another language, what can he do in view of the dissimilarity of elements in both languages, except to paraphrase—whereby, however, he does not attain his purpose, because a paraphrase will not and can never look like something that was originally produced in the author’s language—or to transform the whole wisdom and learning of his author into the conceptual system of the translator’s language, and in that way alter all the individual parts? By doing so, the translator has no way of telling how the wildest arbitrariness can be kept within limits. Indeed we have to say that a person who has only the slightest respect for philosophical endeavors and developments cannot begin to engage in such a loose game.

May Plato forgive my going from the philosopher to the writer of comedies. This genre is, as far as language is concerned, closest to the field of social conversation. The entire representation lives in the morals of the time and of the people, which in turn are vividly and perfectly reflected in the language. Gracefulness and naturalness are its foremost virtues, and that is exactly the reason why the difficulties of translating according to the method mentioned above are so enormous. For any approximation of a foreign language does damage to those virtues of presentation. Now if the translation wants to let the author of a play speak as if he had originally written in the language of the translation, then there are many things it cannot make him say, because they are not native to its people and therefore have no symbol in their language. In this case, the translator must either cut some parts out completely and thereby destroy the form and the power of the whole, or he must put something else in their place. In this field, the formula that is faithfully followed evidently leads to mere imitation, or to a still more repulsively conspicuous and confusing mixture of translation and imitation that throws the reader mercilessly back and forth like a ball between his world and the foreign one, between the author’s and the translator’s invention and wit, from which he can draw no pleasure, but will in the end certainly suffer dizziness and frustration enough. On the other hand, the translator who adheres to the other method has no incentive at all to implement such arbitrary changes, since his reader should always keep in mind that the author has lived in another world and written in another language. He is bound only by the admittedly difficult art of supplying the awareness of this foreign world in the shortest and most suitable way, and of letting the greater ease and naturalness of the original shine through everywhere.

These two examples, taken from the opposite ends of art and scholarship, show clearly how little the actual purpose of all translating—an enjoyment of foreign works as unadulterated as possible—can be attained by a method that wants to breathe into the translated work the total spirit of a language that is alien to it. Moreover, every language has its peculiarity of rhythm for prose as well as for poetry, and, if for once the assumption were to be adopted that the author could

have written in the language of the translator, one would have to let him appear in the rhythm of that language. In that way his work is even more distorted, and the insight into his characteristic style, which the translation provides, will be even more limited.

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Indeed, this fiction, on which alone rests the theory of the translator discussed here, goes far beyond the purpose of this enterprise. Seen from the first point of view, translating is a matter of necessity for a nation of which only a small part can acquire sufficient knowledge of foreign languages, and of which a larger part has a disposition toward the enjoyment of foreign works. If the latter could merge completely with the former, then this form of translation would be useless, and hardly anyone would take on this thankless task.

It is different with the second point of view, which has nothing to do with necessity, but is rather the work of concupiscence and wantonness. The knowledge of foreign languages could be as widespread as possible, and the access to their loftiest works could be open to anyone who is competent, and translation would still remain a curious enterprise, which would gather around itself more and more eager listeners if someone were to promise to represent to us a work of Cicero or Plato in the same way as these men would have written it directly in German today. And if someone were to go so far as to do this not only in his own native tongue, but even in another, foreign one, he would appear to us as the greatest master in the difficult and almost impossible art of merging the spirits of the languages into one another. One can see that this would, strictly speaking, not be translation, and the result would not be the truest possible enjoyment of the works themselves; it would become more and more an imitation, and only the person who already knows these writers from somewhere else could actually enjoy such an artifact or work of art. And the actual goal could only be, in particular, to illustrate a similar relationship between certain expressions and combinations, and specific features in different languages and, in general, to illuminate the language with the characteristic spirit of a foreign master, but one who is completely separated and detached from his own language ...

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Where do we go from here? Should we share this view and follow this advice? The ancients evidently translated little in that sense, and most modern peoples,

discouraged by the difficulties of true translation, are content with imitation or paraphrase. Who would claim that anything has ever been *translated* into French from either the classical or the Germanic languages? But as much as we Germans might like to listen to this advice, we still would not follow it. An inner necessity, in which a peculiar mission of our nation is expressed clearly enough, has driven us in large numbers to translation; we cannot go back, and must go on. Just as our soil itself has probably become richer and more fertile, and our climate more lovely and mild after much transplanting of foreign plants, so do we feel that our language, which we practice less because of our Nordic lethargy, can only flourish and develop its own perfect power through the most varied contacts with what is foreign. And at the same time our nation seems to be destined, because of its respect for things foreign, and because of its disposition toward mediation, to carry all the treasures of foreign art and scholarship, together with its own, in its language, to unite them into a great historical whole, as it were, which would be kept safe in the center and heart of Europe; so that now, with the help of our language, everyone can enjoy, as purely and perfectly as it is possible for the foreigner, that which the most varied ages have brought forth. This seems indeed the true historical goal of translation on a large scale, as it is now indigenous to us...

Reference: Rainier Schulte and John Biguenet, *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, 1992, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, p.36-54.